

# Ranch horses recognized for skills

## Five events test a horse's versatility and ability to perform ranch tasks

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Contributor

**SALIDA, Colo.** — All-around or versatile are two words that really mean something in a new way of training and competing with horses. For riders of all ages and experience levels, the Versatility Ranch Horse program offers education and competition opportunities to all horse owners. The Rocky Mountain Quarter Horse Association has organized the program that centers on two-day 'Roundup' events held around Colorado and in Northern New Mexico. A roundup consists of one day of training followed by a day where participants put to use the skills they learned in competition.

Horse and rider compete in five events: Working ranch horse, ranch riding, ranch trail, ranch cutting and ranch conformation. (see related story which explains each class on page 4)

A round up was recently held in Salida, Colo., on May 21 and 22.

In the ranch horse halter class, horses were judged on their conformation and physical structure for the ability to be a working ranch horse. The arena classes demonstrated horsemanship and riding skills while showing the hors-

es' gaits and levels of training. Trail competition showed how the horse and rider could navigate through obstacles that might be found in ranch work such as crossing a bridge, unbridling and bridling, backing through an L-shaped obstacle and opening and closing gates.

Without the pressure and expense of "show attire" riders are able to compete in a friendly and supportive atmosphere that encourages learning. The tasks are common ones that working ranch horses need to be able to do in order to work cattle. Because the horses and riders have a wide range of experience and abilities, the clinicians need to address each team individually as well as teach the group as a whole. Whether the horse or rider has more experience, they both can benefit from the one day clinic offered at the weekend roundups.

Unlike typical shows where horses and riders are judged against one another, the judging is based on a standard scale, so that riders can understand where they need to improve. If the rider can't perform one certain task in an event, yet does well or excels in the other tasks, he can still earn a good score.

The score sheets that are given to the riders after the competition are roadmaps to

future success. The riders can go home and work on the tasks they are weak in and succeed in the next competition.

The Salida roundup offered a clinic on Saturday for 12 riders. The youngest cowboy was 14 years old and came from the San Luis Valley. The oldest participant was a 73 year old veteran of Paint Horse Shows. Both acknowledged they learned a lot at the clinic and their horsemanship improved. Although the roundup was sponsored by the Rocky Mountain Quarter Horse Association, all breeds of horses, registered or grade are welcome to attend and compete.

Riders of all abilities can participate although for safety reasons, riders should be able to control their horses at all

working ranch horse gaits. Awards for "most improved rider" went to Hayden Christensen and Paula Sue Smith. This attitude of rewarding not only top performers, but also those who progress in their riding skills encourages riders of all skill levels to participate in the versatility ranch horse roundups.

On Sunday, the second day of the roundup, riders participated in a schooling competition where they competed in the five events that they had learned and practiced. There were no divisions or prize money in this competition; all riders competed against one another.

The oldest competitor, Dick Hilbert of Calhan, earned first place on his paint gelding, "Scotchman Doc." Hilbert, 73,

has years of experience showing paint horses and attended his first versatility ranch horse roundup last year. He does it for "the challenge and because this is the first horse competition that allows me to show an all-around horse."

Coming in second was Gene Patterson of Gunnison. Third place was earned by Tim Rose of Colorado Springs. All the contestants improved their skills while teaching their mounts some new moves. From one who had never handled a rope before to those with years of experience, the Versatility Ranch Horse Roundup was a fun and positive experience.

To find out more about the RMQHA Versatility Ranch Horse roundups go to [www.rmqa.com](http://www.rmqa.com).



**This rider demonstrates his horse's ability in the ranch cutting competition at the RMQHA Versatility Ranch Horse Roundup in Salida, Colo., June 12, 2005.**

Photo by Jan Murawski Evans