

NOVEMBER 2011

VOL.25 NO.2

# CASCADE HORSEMAN



LEARN ABOUT THE FASTEST GROWING EQUINE SPORT IN AMERICA

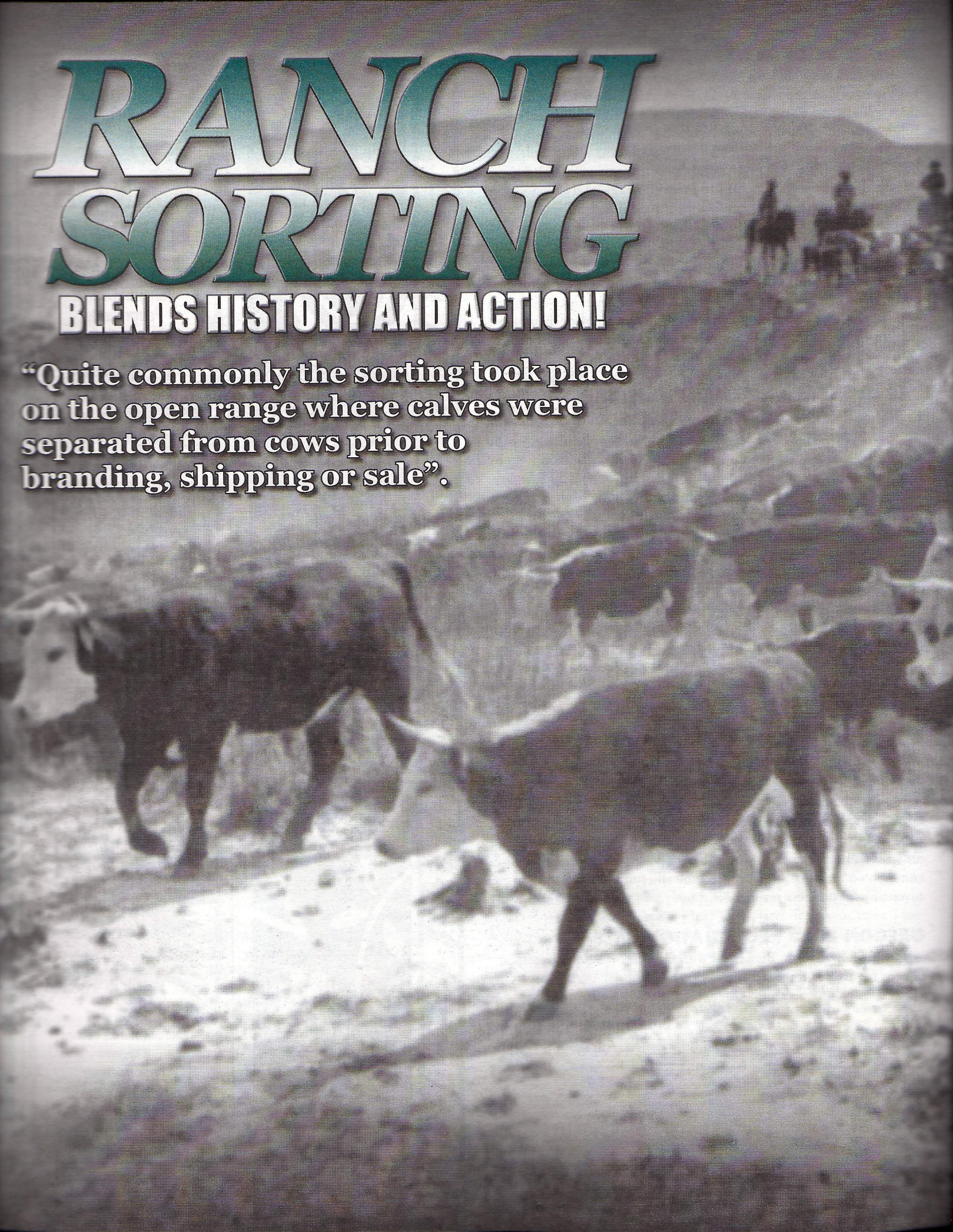




# RANCH SORTING

**BLENDS HISTORY AND ACTION!**

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BY GEORGE G. JOHNSON, JR.

Ranch sorting is emerging as a popular and affordable blend of long-time cowboy skills with cowhorse action. Historically, sorting was an important task frequently done at ranches across the West. "Sorting" simply means separating cattle based on sex, age, or condition. Quite commonly the sorting took place on the open range where calves were separated from cows prior to branding, shipping or sale. Using many of the techniques of cutting, cowboys would separate the desired class of cattle in a rather slower style to avoid scattering the herd. Sorting required a mixture of good horsemanship and "cow sense." Recognizing the demand by horse owners for activities that were fun, exciting and affordable, organizers started holding sorting contests that added the element of a time limit to enhance the appeal and pace of the event.

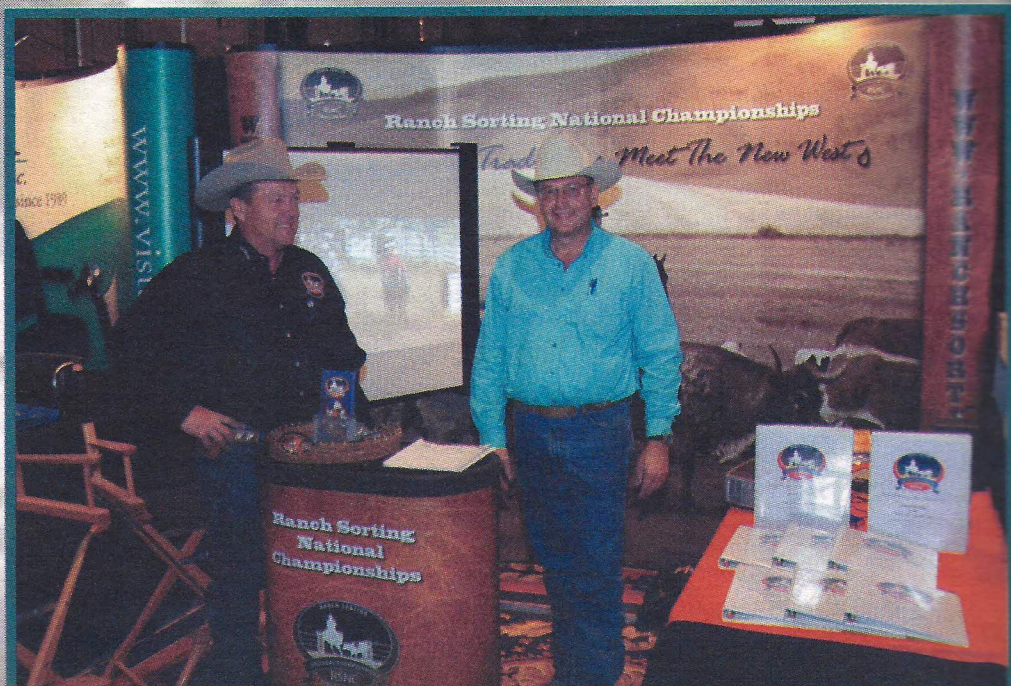
The preeminent association for ranch sorting is the Ranch Sorting National Championship (RSNC) based in Wellington, Colorado. This organization was the result of an alliance of two horsemen, Dave Wolfe, President of RSNC, and AQHA Judge and trainer, and Van Gemmill, a former cowhorse competitor. In 2007, RSNC was launched with the goals of promoting the sport of ranch sorting along with becoming the largest horse sport membership in the country. The success of RSNC in growing its membership is seen in the fact that it now has over 13,000 members. In addition, there are now over 400 approved shows featuring ranch sorting. RSNC has very creatively promoted the sport both by media exposure on RFD-TV and on Horse TV as well as in equine publications. However, the very best promotion of ranch sorting is conducting instructional clinics featuring actual participation in the sport. Clinic participants discover that just about anyone of any age and level of riding experience can compete and have fun without pressure and at a reasonable cost. As a further incentive to getting people involved in ranch sorting, the first year of membership in RSNC is free. Additionally, each year they bring a new member they are given another free year membership.

The ranch sorting is conducted in a pen containing two pens that are about 50 feet in diameter and are configured in a figure 8 manner with a 12 to 16 foot opening between them. The pens are either round pens or have the corners cut at 45-degree angles to have the same effect as a true round pen. In one of the pens there are 11 head of cattle (referred to in the sport as "cows" regardless of sex or age)



with the numbers 0-9 on their sides for identification. The team of two sorters must move the cows one at a time in numerical order from the original pen to the other in the order called out by the judge when the first rider crosses the opening into the pens containing the cattle. For example, when the first rider crosses the "line" which is the opening, the judge might call out, "Your cow is number 2." This tells the rider that he/she must sort number 2 from the herd and move it into the other pen. While the rider doing the sorting is working on moving cow number 2 through the opening into the

other pen, the second rider is trying to prevent any other cow other than number 2 from entering the pen. Given the herd propensities of cattle that are determined to stay together, this is where sorting gets interesting and full of action. Often the riders switch duties after each cow is successfully sorted with the "gate keeping" rider switching to the role of the sorter. The cows are sorted in numerical order within a one minute time limit. If a cow gets either into the second pen out of order or escapes during the run, the team of sorters is disqualified. The winning team is the one that



RSNC President, Dave Wolfe, and the Marketing Director, Don Goddard, promoting RSNC at one of the many shows across the United States.





properly sorts the most cows within the time limit.

The judging of ranch sorting is simply keeping track of the numerical order the cows are sorted, announcing the designated cow to be first sorted and keeping time. Unlike many other equestrian events there are no subjective decisions by judges that often lead to suspicions of favoritism or unfairness. The judging of sorting is objective, fair and unbiased.

A popular part of ranch sorting is the level playing field created by the way ranch sorting competitors are rated based on their ability level. Beginners are Number 1, Rookies are number 2, Novices are numbers 3 and 4, Amateurs are numbers 5 and 6, with numbers 7, 8 and 9 being Open or Professionals. This rating system is based on statistical performance and not on opinion or any other criteria. There is a handicapping system available so that riders of various ratings can pair up and compete as

a team.

Ranch sorting is truly a sport that can be enjoyed by riders of any age and level of riding skill. Commonly, entire families compete in a friendly and supportive atmosphere. There are no special types of horses, tack or attire required to compete in sorting. Both cash prizes and merchandise are awarded to successful sorters. The organizers of RSNC were very aware of the need to keep the event affordable so that high entry fees and cattle costs would not prevent participation. They have been very successful in keeping the cost of competing down while offering contestants a quality event. As RSNC President, Dave Wolfe said in a recent interview, "It's so easy anyone who can throw a leg over a horse can have fun and compete. This is the only equine sport in the nation that allows everyone in the family to compete, win and get the recognition and rewards that in most equine sports only the very

top competitors receive."

The sport of ranch sorting is growing in popularity and is approaching the goal of the RSNC founders in making it the number 1 equine sport. Evidence of the event's success was the 2011 RSNC National Finals held this past summer in Ardmore, Oklahoma, where 4,000 teams competed for the National Finals Championship title and over \$400,000 in cash and prizes. In addition to being fun and affordable, sorting can be profitable!

By blending the history of sorting cattle on ranches with the action and thrill of competition the RSNC is well on its way to achieving its goal of becoming the #1 family equine sport that can be enjoyed by all ages. ★

