

RANCH HORSES

Q&A Dave Wolfe

THE FOUNDER OF the National Team Penning Championships and president of the Ranch Sorting National Championships discusses ranch sorting's meteoric rise as a competitive event.

INTERVIEW BY KYLE PARTAIN

Q Why do ranch sorters need their own association?

A I saw an opportunity to offer ranch sorting as a sport of its own, but it was predicated on the fact AQHA was going to offer ranch sorting as a point-earning event. When AQHA sees the value in an event and offers it, that event experiences rapid growth. It worked with team penning and with versatility ranch horse, and now AQHA is having the same effect on ranch sorting.

We were in the right spot at the right time. We started RSNC in July 2006, and in January 2007 AQHA added it as a point-earning event. And it has exploded. AQHA offered ranch sorting this year at their 2007 world championships, and it paid out \$134,000 between the open and amateur classes. When you put that kind of money out there as a carrot, everybody wants to get involved in the game.

Q Are there other reasons the sport is growing?

A There's a lot less overhead involved in putting on a ranch sorting compared to a team penning. Sorting takes a fourth of the cattle of team penning, so local producers with 30 head of cattle can promote the sport. Facility requirements are also pretty minimal. All you need is two round pens. Because of that, entry fees can be kept lower.

Q How is the organization set up?

A We promote RSNC across the United States, but at the state level. We have a saddle race and a point race in each state. Up to the national finals, you're only competing against contestants within your state. We have 140 sanctioned events across the United States, and there are 40 state fairs offering ranch sorting. Cheyenne Frontier Days is also offering ranch sorting.

Q Do you use a rating system for contestants?

A We started with a seven-point rating system, but we created two divisions at the bottom for brand new people. One is the beginner class, for riders who've won less than three checks. Once you win three, you move into the rookie



class, for riders who've won less than \$1,000. Then you automatically move up from there. Now, we have a nine-point rating system, with a No. 9 being a professional who travels the country competing.

Q What's the plan for your second national finals?

A It'll be the second week in October in Ponca City, Oklahoma. Last year, we had more than 900 teams at our first national finals. We expect close to 3,000 teams this year.

We have an open finals—anyone with a membership can enter. If you attend three sanctioned events during the year, at the national finals you get to ride for an additional 10 percent in your payback.

Q Can you handle 3,000 teams in Ponca City?

A It's going to be challenging. The Playpen Arena is a great facility. It's set up so we can put two double-sort pens inside and two more double-sort pens outside. We're going to run a lot of teams in a short amount of time.

Q Is there such a thing as a "typical" contestant?

A The sport is competitive enough for the rancher who wants to show off his skills, and yet controlled enough for the novice who wants to learn how to compete on cattle. The traditional rancher who doesn't like to have his cattle run hard up and down the arena can accept this event as one that has some similarity to what happens on the ranch every day.

Q Where do you hope to take RSNC?

A There's no reason we can't have ranch sorting at the majority of state fairs across the United States. And, it can be at the majority of county fairs, as well. The goal is to offer enough events that no matter where you live, you can go to a ranch sorting within 100 miles of your home, every weekend of the month.

To learn more about RSNC, call (970) 897-2901, or visit rsnc.us.