

WHOOOP-E-E-E-E-E!

Juvenile Performers of the Southwest Cattle Country Show Their Elders How Riding, Roping and Bulldogging Really Should Be Done

By Oren Arnold

THEY say it's an age when youth is in the saddle, anyway, so maybe it's just as well for youngsters to begin doing all the hard riding.

In any event, they're doing it out in the Wild West this season. For the first time in years, a brand-new wrinkle has crept into that spectacular cowboy carnival known as the rodeo. After one or two experiments, Coolidge, Ariz., recently threw tradition to the coyotes and staged a bang-up range festival in which all the oldsters hung on the fence and the participants were all under 16 years.

They believe it is the first official junior rodeo ever held, exclusively "junior," that is. But it won't be the last, for other towns are planning them already. The range kids took to the idea like ticks to a steer and many a 30-year-old erstwhile "star" performer went away feeling that he was a decrepit old man. Children are essentially imitators—but, brother, how they can imitate!

THE Coolidgeans advertised their show at exactly face value—"Rip-Roaring Range Ruckus for Romping Rolyering Riders." When Charlie Lamson, who is 34 and who aspires to be world's champion cowboy, came to headquarters to enter the bulldogging event, the officials almost kicked him out.

"Whatta you don't here?" they demanded. "Yore daughter might git in, but not you, you old worn-out, wrinkled-up patriarch. This here rodeo is for kids; ain't you heard?"

Charlie hadn't heard. But he slunk away. Pretty soon, sure enough, up rode Miss Letty Lamson and announced that she expected to win the first prize for running her horse, jumping from him on to a young steer's head and throwing the same in a pell mell smash. When the clerk of the arena asked, "Age, please?" Letty said, "Fourteen."

It turned out that Letty didn't do so extra good, though. The young steer they gave her was pretty heavy, for all his youth, and Letty is slender and graceful like the desert ocotillo, for all her country tan. In the end, the steer bulldogged Letty.

When the judges finally called "Time" the steer was standing in ankle-deep, powdery dust with his head holding Letty almost buried. It took half an hour for Letty's mother to scrape the dirt off her when they finally got the girl's arms untangled from the steer's head.

On the other hand, a sassy little gal named Thelma Sneed—cute as pie, by George—took such honors as the junior rodeo awarded.

Thelma rode in from the cow town of Florence on a great big mountainous horse named Nellie. Thelma registered as age 14, too, but the parents on the sidelines all agreed that she looked nearer 10. Anyhow, when she gets to be 18 or 20, Dad Sneed is going to have plenty of boys hanging around his front porch—she's that good looking.

Well, Thelma took Nellie down to the beginning of the horse racetrack, and when the starter shot his pistol Nellie seemed to jump out of a cannon. Thelma scrooched down behind the saddle horn to where you could hardly see her and at the end of the course she had to stop and wait for competitors to come in. The crowd yelled and howled for Thelma and Nellie.

They had several more races for various distances, all ending in front of the crowd around the main arena. Some were for males only, but a lot of them admitted girls. A few were for boys and girls both. It didn't seem to matter to Thelma and Nellie.

It hadn't rained in Coolidge since Calvin Coolidge—for whom the town is named—was President, so it seemed. The wind was cantankerous that day, too. Every time a horse race was under way you would know it by a heavy cloud of dust rolling down the track toward you. That's all you could see at first, but as it neared the finish line out of it would shoot a sudden streak which turned out to be Thelma and Nellie, mostly Nellie.

NELLIE and Thelma lost one race that day—and thereby hangs a tale. Fact is, it came near being a tragedy.

It seems that the town of Florence, which is a right snappy town—what with having the State Penitentiary and all—came to be very proud of Thelma Sneed on Junior Rodeo Day. Some of the town boys around the track and arena were saying so, after the manner of males. On the other hand, the

equally proud town of Casa Grande, which is situated nearby, but which wasn't winning in the rodeo contests, doesn't admit that Coolidge amounts to much.

Well, you know how it is—along toward 4 P. M. the respective boosters had about exhausted their vocabularies and their good natures, too. It had simmered down to a personal matter between two young men, self-appointed champions of their respective towns. The Florence man up and offered to bet

anybody \$25 that Thelma Sneed, of Florence, would win every event she entered, and he'd personally lick the tar out of anybody who said she couldn't, or words to that effect. Right away the bet was covered.

Now Thelma never heard anything about all that, probably hasn't heard it even yet. If she had, no doubt she would have pitched in and won every event. She's loyal to her town.

But fate does things to men who argue and gamble, especially to men who bet on pretty girls. The exact reason for Thelma's action isn't clear—it seldom is where a girl is concerned—but it seems to be about like this:

Thelma and Nellie were entered in the half-mile special. The starting gun was about to shoot, when whom did Thelma spy on the sidelines nearby but her Aunt Margaret from Phoenix?

Thelma hadn't seen Aunt Margaret for several months, hadn't known she was coming to the big rodeo. She rode over to the fence, dropped off the mountainous Nellie and kissed Aunt Margaret hello just as the gun said



Ray Griswold, Jr., can pull a six-shooter as fast as many of his elders. Yes, and he also knows how to use it, if necessary, as he demonstrated before the rodeo crowd.

"bang!" The other racers went on down their dusty way, while Thelma and Aunt Margaret talked woman talk.

That was the story which was told later, and it's all right, of course. But over back of the crowd on the south sideline, the two male boosters made an issue of it. The Florence boy felt he had been royally rooked and wouldn't pay the \$25. Words began to fly, followed quickly by fists. Somebody snatched out a pistol and shot it at somebody else, and that brought the deputy sheriff a-running.

When the deputy got there, though, all the boys from both towns—including the two combatants—swore it had been a car backfire. He couldn't pin anything on anybody to arrest, so they all went on back to the arena in pretty

Dallas Waddell shows rodeo fans how to "bust" a full-sized mustang pony



good fellowship, to see how the trick-roping contest was coming along.

Well, sir, there wasn't much contest to the trick roping.

There isn't likely to be much contest in any rodeo hereafter if young Mister Glen Henry, also of Florence, happens to be entered. Many an adult rope artist eyed Glen's performance at Coolidge with frank envy.

Glen didn't pay much attention to such simple things as dropping a rope around any running calf's leg at will—any leg he wanted. That's elemental, as Sherlock Holmes said to Watson; even if Glen hasn't had to do any shoving to speak of yet. In no time at all, Glen had all his would-be competitors frozen out and he was in the arena doing a solo act by way of exhibition.

AT THIS point the arena director broke the rules and permitted an adult "instructor" to come before the crowd and give the youngsters a few pointers in handling ropes. The instructor reached his peak when—like Will Rogers used to do—he was twirling a big loop, jumping in and out of it, running around it and generally playing tag with it, never letting it fall. The spectators cheered.

Then Glen stepped out to try it. In thirty seconds he was doing all of that—and for good measure was twirling a second loop in his free hand. Just keeping two going at once, one inside the other or anywhere he pleased. The spectators howled in glee.

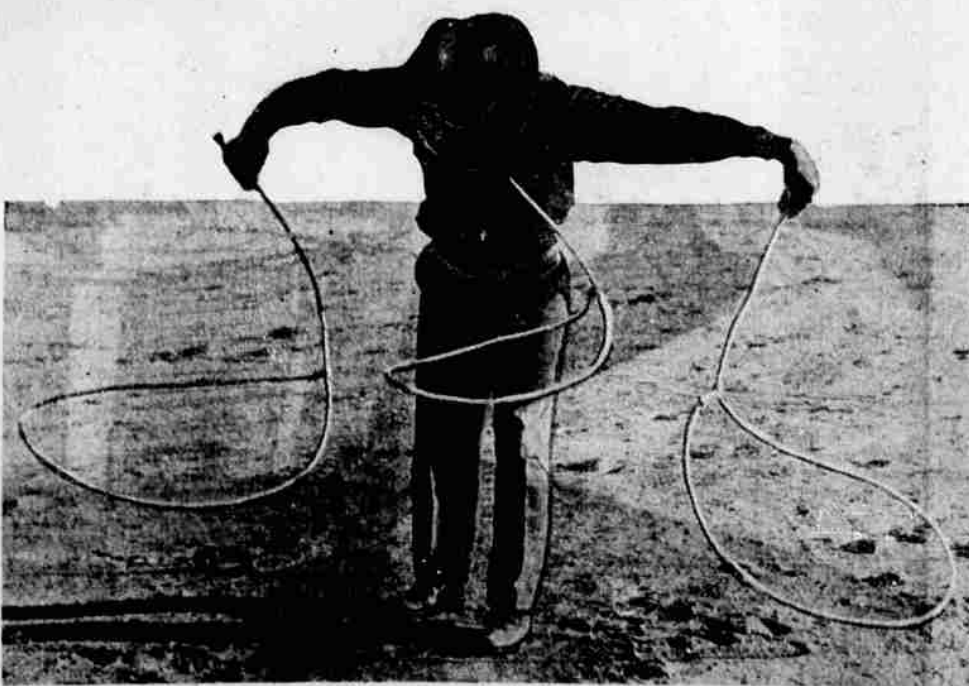
But that still wasn't all. Glen Henry, from Florence, stuck the end of one rope in his mouth, kept the loop twirling with that and then made two more loops and kept them twirling with his hands.

Three loops at once, by an entrant in a junior rodeo. The adult instructor slipped away and hasn't been seen since.

Among the male entrants, Mister Gilbert Nichols, going on 15 years, from the town of Gilbert, incidentally, won most of the racing honors. Thelma Sneed on Nellie could deal him some misery, but he avoided her most of the time, gallant like.

He came roaring in ahead of every other boy in the big racing event—half a mile for all comers. He won the wild cow riding event and that was plenty of fun.

Have you ever ridden a wild cow? Why, brother, you ought to visit Gil-



Master Glen Henry proved by far to be the king of juvenile rope spinners. He outclassed a professional who had been called upon to give a demonstration. Here we see Glen with three ropes going at the same time.



Thelma Sneed, right, on her horse Nellie, won nearly every race in which she was entered. With her is Annie Nichols, mounted on Buck. She was runner-up to Thelma in the horse races.

bert Nichols some day and have him round up a wild-range bovine or two for your elucidation. It's a simple matter, really, and more exciting than a dollar-per-point game of contract bridge. You just tie a rope around the wild cow's belly, jump straddle of the animal, holler "WHOOOP-E-E-E-E!" and let 'er go.

If that's still a little tame for your excitement-loving nature, just omit the rope. In either case, the game is to see how long you can stay put. It won't be long.

Well, anyhow, Gilbert Nichols could stick a ter than anybody else. He won first in the roping contests, too, after they disqualified Glen Henry by making him an "exhibition artist." So Gilbert and Thelma were high point winners for the day.

The rodeo had much snappy calf-roping and racing, even some dust-bedraggled races for bicycle riders. There were a lot of good performers who couldn't win any prizes. Dallas Waddell, 12-year-old Phoenix lad, is an expert at busting pee wee broncos, for instance. But a junior bronco—that is, a Shetland pony—is plenty energetic and don't you forget it.

NINE-YEAR-OLD Ray Griswold is likely to be nationally known as a pistoleer some day, even if he is too "junior" for competition yet. He handles a pistol with more skill than most adults, even now.

Doc Bryce, the starter and general factotum of the rodeo, declared that "as soon as the devil made rattlesnakes, them kids could put it all over half the grown cowboys in Arizona." He believes the junior rodeo idea is bound to spread. Calinas, Calif., and Las Cruces, N. M., already are planning to follow the lead of Coolidge.

Parents are as enthusiastic as their sons and daughters. One good Arizona mother, dressed in a buckskin coat with Indian beadwork on it, plus blue overall pants and boots with spurs, galloped up to her young offspring just before one race. She spat, then spoke.

"This is yore race, son!" she shrieked, still dangling her cigarette from her lips. "Git yore hoss in there and run hell out of him, son, or I'll beat it out of you when we git home!"

Emily Post might shudder at that. But you gotta remember, Mrs. Post, that this here junior rodeo was away out in the open Southwest, where there aren't many cute tea parties, but where boys and girls and mothers all love each other and all can stand on their own feet.

Copyright