

For Lancaster's Jim Charles family

Team roping, rodeoing is exciting event

BY SALLY BAIR
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IRONVILLE — Team roping is a rodeo event which is alive in the East and thriving in Lancaster County. Members of the Boots and Saddles 4-H Club had the thrill of seeing a demonstration of this fast-paced event when they met last week at the home of the Jim Charles family, R3 Columbia.

Melissa Charles, 11, explained the concept of team roping to the club and the requirements of the sport. Her brother Michael, 10, and her father gave the demonstration.

Before 4-H members arrived, Charles explained the event stems from the days when it was necessary to "team rope" steers in order to brand, castrate or in other ways treat the animals. In actuality, it took three men to do the job — two to rope and one to perform the necessary work.

In today's rodeo competition, two people work together to accomplish the feat. Charles explained you need a "header," the person who ropes the horns, and a "heeler," the person who ropes the rear legs of the steer.

As Melissa reported, neither rider leaves his horse during the event and the idea is to outmaneuver the steer.

The object is to rope the steer, front and back, and have both riders facing the steer in the least amount of time.

The sport obviously requires a lot of talent as a horseback rider and roper, but it also requires cooperation between team members, concentration and good reaction time.

The steer, which should weigh between 550 and 700 pounds is given a five foot jump out of the box, then the "header" rides furiously until he ropes the horns. He then wraps the rope around the horn of his saddle, turns the steer and heads back in the direction from which they both came.

At this point, the "heeler," who has been riding with the action, comes in from behind and ropes the back legs of the steer. This is no small job because the steer is running on those legs.

Once the heeler has roped the legs, he also wraps his lasso around his saddle horn and pulls the rope taut. The header turns his horse, holding his rope taut and both riders are facing the steer. This concludes the event and the steer is turned loose.

Charles explained that, in competition, the time begins when the steer leaves the chute and is

stopped when the header and heeler are facing each other with the roped steer between them. Sixty seconds are allowed to complete the roping.

But Charles comments, "Anything under 10 seconds is usually in the money. Fifteen seconds is good." If only one heel is caught, a five second penalty is given that team.

Competitors enter the event as teams — each can enter twice, by riding in a different position.

While there is a lot of intense activity in the sport, there is no danger or cruelty to the animal.

"We've roped many, many steers and haven't had one go lame," Charles says. He adds that roughness can get riders disqualified in rodeos. He said further that riders must use common sense in handling the steers.

One danger to participants is losing a finger due to a slip of the rope. Charles said rubber is put on the saddle horns to protect fingers during the event.

Charles says Holstein steers are the preferred animal to rope, but they have one drawback — no horns. To compensate, there is an artificial set of horns which can be strapped on the animal's head. If they use steers with real horns, they use heavy leather wraps on the horns so the ropes don't burn the hides.

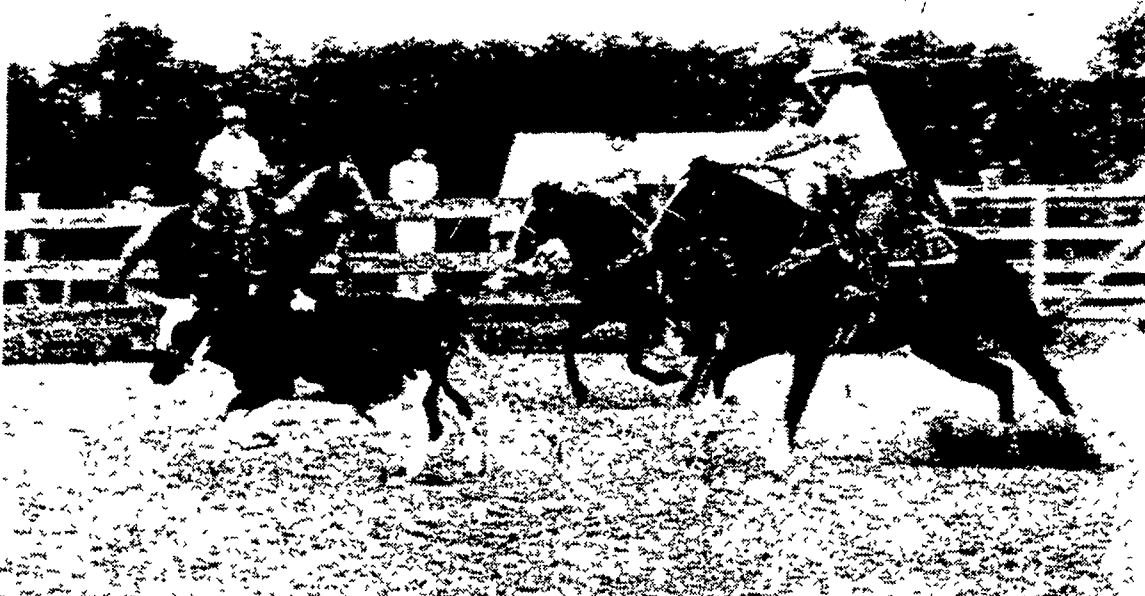
Rodeo riding has become a true family activity for the Charleses. A frequent partner for Jim is his son Charles says Mike got his first lasso at Christmas when he was five, and was soon adept at roping the neighbor girls. From girls, he moved on to roping steers from a moving horse, and now he competes with the professionals, and very capably, too.

During practice and competition, Charlotte films the action with a movie camera, enabling Charles and Mike to study the film to improve their technique. Charlotte and Melissa are now at work perfecting their barrel racing skills. Even five-year-old Matt enjoys riding.

Last summer Charles and son Mike competed in three rodeos, but they hope to make it to one every other week this year.

For Charles riding a horse is a natural, because he grew up in South America with his missionary

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Ten-year-old Michael Charles and his father, Jim, of R3 Columbia team up to practice exciting rodeo event gaining in popularity here in Lancaster County. roping this Holstein steer. Team roping is an



As the "header" keeps the steer's attention in front, the "heeler" moves in from behind to rope the hind legs. This sporting event was formerly the only method cowboys had for catching and holding range cattle for branding, castrating, and other chores.



Running full tilt makes draping this swirling lasso over the steer's elusive horns a real challenge for Jim, who loses his hat but not his determination.



Once the steer's horns and heels are lassoed, both riders sit astride with their ropes wrapped taut around the saddle horn. Rubber is put on the saddle horns to protect the

ropers' fingers, and heavy leather is wrapped around the steer's horns to protect it from rope burns.