

The Rhineers and rodeos go hand-in-hand

**BY LAURA ENGLAND
WILLOW STREET** — When the American Rodeo Association (ARA) comes to the Buck Tractor Pull Stadium next Saturday, the competition will have a double meaning for the Mike Rhineer family.

First of all, the contest is the last one before the ARA finals, Nov. 12 and 13, at the Farm Show Building in Harrisburg. A strong showing in this rodeo could mean a berth in the finals for the Willow Street family.

Second, the competition will be stiff and for the Rhineers, the pressure is on since the contest is "close to home." Despite these two factors, Mike says practice and drawing a good calf and steer will help determine the outcome of this event.

The rodeo at the "Buck" is just one of 30 the Rhineers will have participated in during 1983. This year alone, the family has traveled up and down the East Coast, from Massachusetts to Florida, to compete in ARA-sponsored rodeos.

For the Rhineers, rodeo competition is a family event, and all are involved one way or another. Mike and son, Mike Jr., compete in team roping and calf roping events. Daughter Tammy Shearer, now living in York, competes in barrel racing, team roping and goat tying. Wife and mother Darlene doesn't compete in events, but she has a significant role in outfitting her family and manning the video camera to record the competitions.

Just how does a family get involved in a sport most people

associate with the cowboys and cowgirls of the western plains?

"I've always liked horses," says Mike who's rodeoed for 22 years. "I liked the idea of calf roping and team roping."

Mike adds that he enjoys traveling and meeting people, but more importantly is his love of horses. "I enjoy horses the most," he says. "I like to have a horse that works a little better than anyone's at the rodeo."

For rodeo competition, Mike says he prefers registered Quarter horses which weigh between 1000 to 1100 pounds and are not much over 15 hands. The seven horses at the Rhineer farm are housed in box stalls to control feed intake and nutrition. They are exercised daily in addition to receiving special training for show competition.

Because of the keen competition, Mike says the horses are trained for a specialty, such as team or calf roping. They are not used much for competition before four years of age, Mike explains. This allows time for finishing and getting a solid, dependable animal.

Team roping training takes about a year while calf roping involves two years of training. "In calf roping," Mike says, "a horse has to work on its own when the competitor gets off its back. There is more to perfect."

As long as it stays sound, a horse can compete for several years. The Rhineers have a 19-year-old horse that is "as sound as can be and as good as any young horse." This particular animal has been hauled about a million miles, and during

some years went to 60 rodeos, Mike adds.

Although having a sound horse in the rodeo circles is essential, the competitor needs a conditioning program also. The Rhineers, along with 10 other rodeo enthusiasts, practice every Tuesday and Thursday night at the Rhineer's ring. Besides the horses, steers are also used for team roping practices.

The long hours of practice and traveling to rodeo contests has paid off for the Rhineers. In 1979 and 1980, Mike was the ARA calf roping champion. Mike Jr. was the 1980, 1981 and 1982 team roping champion, and Tammy was honored as the all-around cowgirl for 1980-1981.

To receive these honors, the ARA has established a points and monetary system that runs throughout the year's competition. The points are added up and this determines who goes to the final. Only the top 10 get to the finals, and a competitor needs between 4000 to 5000 points.

"You nearly need to go to every rodeo to get to the finals," Mike adds.

The American Rodeo Association, which is based in Washington, D.C., sanctions the rodeos and writes the rules and regulations. The rules are very stringent, Mike says, and are geared to protecting the rodeo animals.

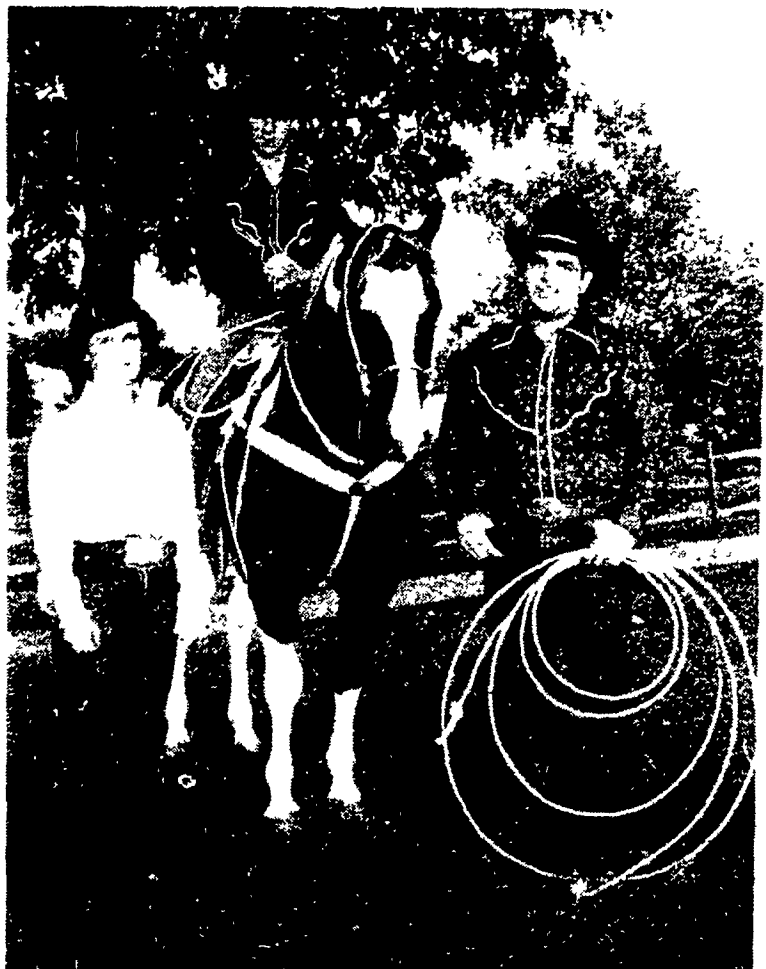
The animals used in the shows are provided by stock contractors selected by the rodeo committees. The committee groups, such as the Jaycees, Shriners and fire companies, hire the contractor to do advertising, find the animals, set up the arena, and take care of any other show needs.

At the "Buck" show, only father and son will be competing from the Rhineer family. Mike Jr. and his partner, Kenny Brown Jr. from Maryland, will compete in the team roping and the calf roping events. Mike Sr., and his partner, Brooks Staples from Virginia, will compete in the same events.

In setting goals for the contest, the Rhineers will work on their timing in the events. Factors in determining timing are the arena conditions, size of arena, and size of the calves and steers, Mike says.

On the average, a competitor shoots for six to nine seconds in team roping and nine to 15 in calf roping, Mike adds.

In addition to rodeo competitions, Mike Jr. is also contracted to present trick roping shows. Mike Jr. says he was inspired to learn trick roping after reading Will Rogers book, put out



The Rhineers, from left, Darlene, Mike Jr. and Mike Sr., are very much into the rodeo scene and are looking forward to competition, Oct. 8, at the Buck Tractor Pull site.



These cattle are among the 41 steers and seven horses raised on the Rhineer's seven acres. The steers, shown here, are pastured and used for team roping practices.



The 1982 American Rodeo Association champion team roper, 20-year-old Mike Rhineer Jr. is also an accomplished trick and fancy rope artist. In these photos, Mike demonstrates his trick roping techniques.

by the Western Horseman Association, on the art.

Mike trained under Dick McCoy, Mount Joy. He says his favorite move is the Texas Skip, a move that's most impressive to the crowd. It took a while to learn roping, Mike adds, and the hardest part was the learning.

When the Rhineers aren't competing in rodeo shows, they run a rodeo school at the farm and have sponsored schools throughout the state. Students at the school are instructed on roping and

receive helpful hints in finding a horse suited to their needs.

Mike Sr., who runs Mike Rhineer Excavating, is looking forward to the final two competitions of the year — the show at the "Buck" and the finals. It's a thrill, he says, to win the finals in your event at the national show because you compete against the top 10 only.

And Mike's most memorable event from rodeo competition was being named champion in 1979. "It's the most exciting and prestigious award," he claims with pride.

