

Out of the round pen

How competing helps Joe Wolter start colts.

by Jennifer Barron

You probably know Joe Wolter from his horsemanship clinics or maybe the work he's done with colts on the 6666 Ranch in Guthrie, Texas.

What you might not know is that the horseman shows the colts he starts on the ranch at National Cutting Horse Association events, including the 2001 NCHA Futurity. Wolter also competes in American Quarter Horse Association shows in

the cutting classes and made the finals at the 2001 AQHA World Championship Show. He starts his colts the same way many of you have and then takes them on to be performers, thereby making the horses' offspring more valuable because they have show records.

"This was planned when I started the colts," Wolter pointed out. "I start the 2-year-old replacement mares and try to get a show record on them for when they become broodmares. It's a good opportunity to take them all the way through. The advantage and what makes it easier for me is that I am the only one who will ever ride these horses. Actually, taking one to show has helped me with the starting process because I have a better idea of where we are going."

Along with preparing the horses for competition, Wolter had to learn to prepare himself to compete. "I'm learning about competing by doing it," he said. "I'm 47 years old, and I haven't done a lot of competing. My background is starting colts and working with problem horses. I always wanted to compete, but the other aspects have been more important. When

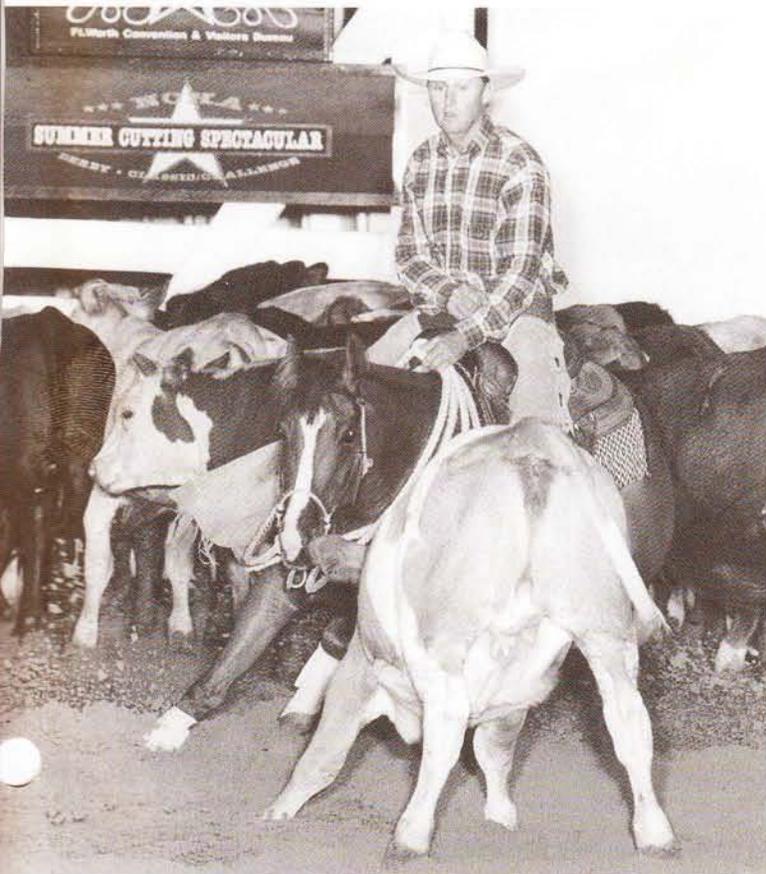
I compete, I don't compete with other people. I try to get my horse shown (the best I can). I try to learn from the others (exhibitors)."

Futurities in the cutting business are for 3-year-old horses that are shown with one hand. At the NCHA Futurity, held every December in Fort Worth, Texas, the top horses, which have never been exhibited in a conventional show, compete in two qualifying rounds for one of the 60 spots in the semifinal performance. The top 20 of those continue on to the finals where the winner earns more than \$200,000. Horses advance by the scores they earn when cutting cattle during their 2 1/2-minute performances.

When Wolter starts any of his colts, he might have 10 to ride, and he might start each of them differently. He said it all depends on what the particular colt needs.

"I don't feel like I have to rush," he said about showing 3-year-olds. "I show them (the colts) where they are at. If the horse has never marked a 75, I won't ask for it. The contest is between the cow and the horse. I don't interfere with the horse's decision-making process. This (2001) is my third year to show at the futurity. I always wish I was a little better prepared, but the only way to get prepared is to do it. I've learned a lot."

Wolter offered some advice to anyone else who competes or is interested in trying out the show pen. "Don't try to beat someone else," he said. "Do the best you can. Don't go surprise your horse on the day of the show—don't ride them any different than you would at home."



Joe Wolter cuts a cow aboard Natural Sense, a Quarter Horse owned by Burnett Ranches Ltd. Photo by Don Shugart.