

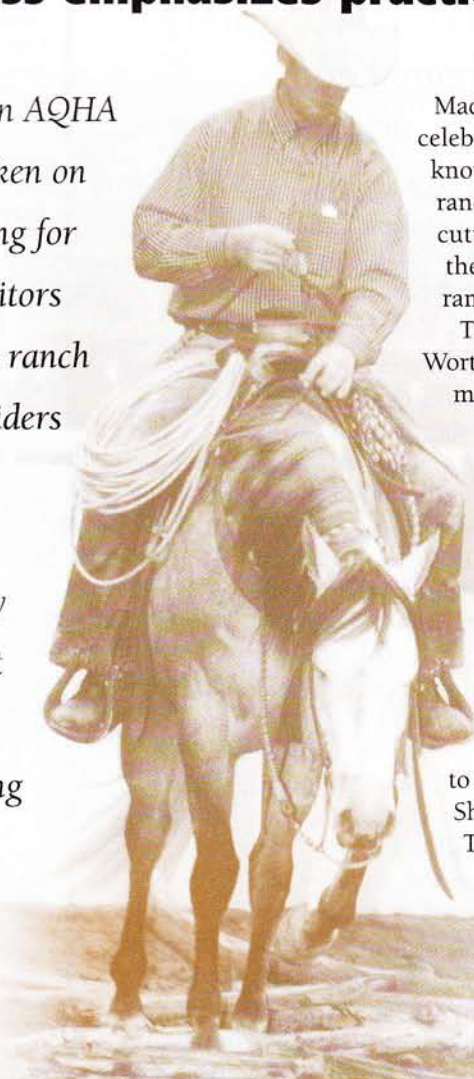
Working ranch

AQHA's new class emphasizes practicality and skill.

by Jennifer Barron

Showing in an AQHA class has taken on new meaning for many exhibitors since the inception of the ranch horse versatility class. Riders and spectators alike are getting a whole new feel for competition once they witness the elements that make up this event, and a whole new buzz is being created.

Joe Wolter and Little Playgun maneuver through the logs in the ranch trail portion of the class. The pair placed second in ranch trail.



Made up of five sections, the ranch horse class celebrates what the Quarter Horse, historically, is known best for—its versatile nature. Working ranch horse, ranch riding, ranch trail, ranch cutting and ranch conformation classes allow the top horse to be determined based on his range of skills.

The competition made its debut at the Fort Worth Stock Show in January, and then a week later moved to Denver for the National Western Stock Show. In both events, Joe Wolter and Little Playgun came out on top of the pack. The four-year-old gray mare, owned by Burnett Ranches, Ltd., of Fort Worth, Texas, showed her cow sense, working ability, structural soundness and easygoing attitude to impress the judges and spectators at both events.

"I started her as a two-year-old, and she's a little touchy," Wolter said of the mare. "She's just been a good mare. She's the kind of mare that needs a lot of different things to do. She can get kind of bored with one thing. She's better if you're doing lots of different jobs. This deal here is right down her alley."

These photos are from the competition in Denver and can give you a better idea of what to expect if you decide to try the class when it's offered in your area. For more information about the ranch horse versatility class, call 806-376-4811 or go to www.aqha.com.

Ranch conformation

This form-to-function evaluation lets the judge take a close look at your horse and how he's put together. And in this "halter class," they aren't looking for tanks on tiny feet, but horses that are built to work.

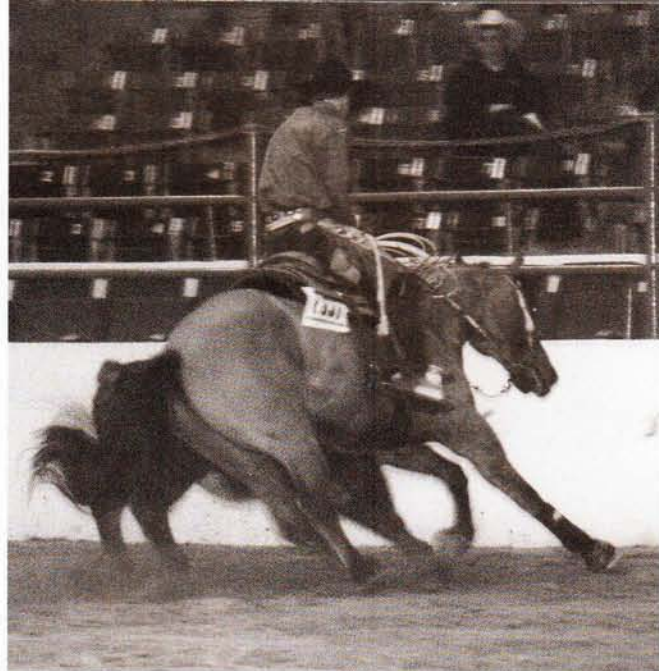
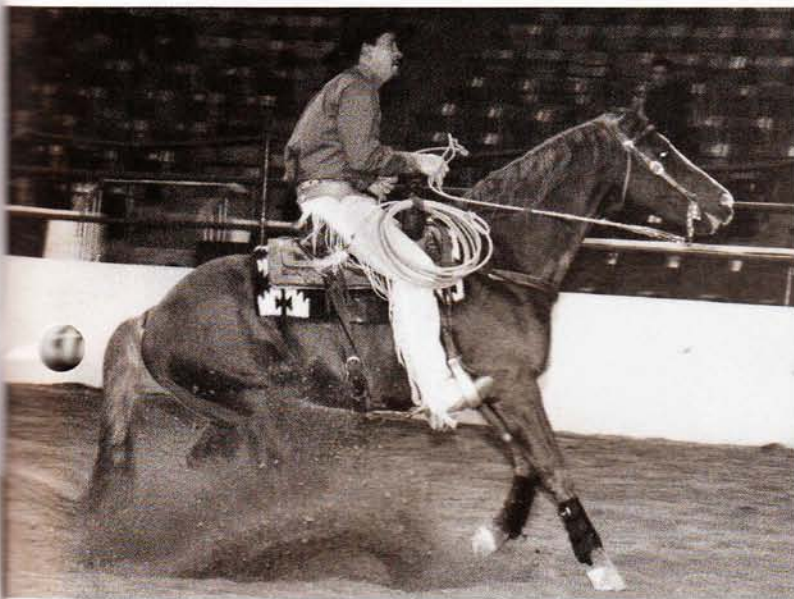
Little Playgun works a cow in the ranch cutting to earn second place.



skills

Working ranch horse

Combine reining, working cow horse and roping skills, and you have the working ranch horse class. Upon entering the arena, you show that you can unbridle and bridle your horse, pick up all four feet and then mount. You then perform prescribed maneuvers—spins, stops, lead changes, rollbacks and a backup—in any order, similar to a reining pattern. Then a cow is turned out, and you box (hold) the cow at the end of the pen, then take it down the fence, completing one turn on the fence in each direction. Finally, you rope the cow and dally to complete the class.



Ranch riding

You might think this looks like a typical western pleasure class, but these horses move out. Because of the number of horses at Denver (21 entries), the class had two cuts (groups of 10 and 11 horses) work on the rail at a walk, trot, extended trot, lope and hand gallop. Five finalists were chosen from each cut. Then, one at a time, the horses entered the arena and worked at each of the gaits again.



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Ranch trail

A good ranch horse has to nimbly navigate obstacles on the ranch. This class tests those abilities through a trail course. The obstacles at Denver included opening, passing through and closing a gate, dragging a log, crossing a bridge, walking through logs, roping a bale of straw, ground tying or standing with hobbles and loading and unloading in a stock trailer.



Ranch cutting

Ranch cutting combines team penning and traditional cutting. As you enter the herd, you are given a number for the cow you are to cut. You then work the cow in front of the herd, drive it to the other end of the arena, and pen the cow.

