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Extreme cowboy comes to Juneau



Bill Cameron trains Laura Baker on her horse, Maverick, at Swampy Acres on Thursday.

Bill Cameron talks about training students and horses for Extreme Cowboy Racing at Swampy Acres on Thursday.

Bill Cameron throw a rope at a target as he trains

students and horses for Extreme Cowboy Racing at Swampy Acres on Thursday.

Bill Cameron rides a horse named Maverick as he trains students and horses for Extreme Cowboy Racing at Swampy Acres on Thursday.

For the past 15 years, famed equestrian Bill Cameron has been making an annual weeklong trip to Juneau to give riding lessons to the capital city's aspiring cowboys and cowgirls.



During his past six trips, he has been training riders in a fairly new sport: extreme cowboy racing. The sport is essentially an obstacle course run, in which riders and their horses race to complete several ranch-related tasks, such as reigning, shooting and roping, all while moving as quickly as possible.



"It makes people push themselves to the edge of their abilities," Cameron said while he watched one of his students ride through an extreme cowboy course he'd set up at Swampy Acres.

Texas Cowboy Hall of Fame member Craig Cameron started the sport 10 years ago as a challenge between top ranch hands. Cameron, who has been riding

horses "since memory," learned about the sport nine years ago and has been involved in it ever since.

"I saw it on TV and said, 'Hmm, I was born for this,'" he said. Cameron's dad was a famous Hollywood horse trainer — having trained horses and riders for "The Man from Snowy River" and "City Slickers" — and he made sure Cameron grew up around horses.

He was a jockey until he turned 9 years old and was too big for horse racing. At the age of 14, he started working with his dad on movie sets in southern California, where he grew up and lives today.

Cameron was the first rider to be inducted into the Extreme Cowboy Association Hall of Fame. Anybody who doesn't believe him need only look at his belt buckle, which corroborates his claim. His former horse, Dun It For Money, was the first horse to be inducted into the hall of fame.

After Dun it For Money died about four years ago, Cameron stopped racing in extreme cowboy events, concentrating instead on judging competitions and training new riders.

During the past few years, Cameron has judged extreme cowboy races around the world, including events in Sweden, Belgium and France.

"Thousands of people compete worldwide," he said. "I've helped make it really big in Europe. It's really popular over there."

Even though Cameron has traveled the world and judged some of the best extreme cowboy riders out there, he said that Juneau has a handful of riders that could hang with the best.

"These people up here are as talented as riders anywhere in the world; they just don't know it," Cameron said. "There's at least seven or eight people here who could compete and make the world finals."

One of those is Juneau resident Laura Baker, who Cameron was training while speaking with the Empire Thursday afternoon. Cameron has been training Baker, who has ridden horses for most of her life, in the ways of extreme cowboy for the past five years.

"She's one of the top riders up here," he said.

Baker and her horse, Maverick, will be competing in an extreme cowboy race today at Swampy Acres. The first event starts at 10 a.m. and a second event will begin at 1:30 p.m. A separate extreme cowboy race for children will follow the two main events. The kids' race will start at about 3 p.m. Admission for the events is free.

"I think extreme cowboy is fun," Baker said. "It's a whole different realm learning all of this, and I get pretty competitive."

If Cameron is right about Baker, her competition had better keep an eye on her.