

Horse & Rider

Extreme Cowboy Racing

Test your horse's versatility in this timed event, open to all breeds and types of equines.

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Extreme Cowboy Racing is an event in which horses and riders compete over a timed trail course—one that features obstacles and tasks beyond those found on traditional show-pen trail courses. Striving to test a horse's versatility and willingness to work, and a rider's skills at negotiating a course of obstacles in harmony with the horse, Craig Cameron created Extreme Cowboy Racing about 12 years ago. He established the Extreme Cowboy Association (EXCA) as the governing organization for competitions.



Credit: Photo by Marilyn Merrick, courtesy of EXCA Extreme Cowboy Racing rewards versatile horses and riders of all ages and skill levels.

“Remember the days of all-around horses? Horses that could do anything—jump a log, work cattle, pony another horse, or ford a creek?” asks Cameron. “That’s the type of horse these competitions reward. There’s so much specialization in the horse world now that we’re

losing the type of horse that can do a bit of everything.”

EXCA is divided into regions, with competitions offering points that help horse-and-rider teams earn their way to regional, national, and world finals. Competitions may be held

outdoors, where they often incorporate the natural landscape into the course, or indoors, where terrain features such as hills or ponds are created.

Extreme Cowboy Racing has been featured on RFD-TV. Cameron says its popularity is growing across the nation and even around the world.

Riders: EXCA riders come in all shapes, sizes, and ages, and represent a wide range of experience and ability. EXCA rider divisions include Young Guns (kids 7–11), youth, novice, non-pro, pro, and Ride Smart (amateur riders ages 55 and up). The number of obstacles and difficulty of the course vary for each division. Competitions are scored on time and a judge’s assessment of how well the maneuvers are performed, so the rider’s ability to navigate the obstacles on course is the key to success.

“Anybody can compete,” says Cameron, “but of course, those who put effort into exposing their horses to a variety of experiences and practicing the kinds of obstacles found on the courses prior to competing will have an advantage. The obstacles are the kinds of things that can be found in the landscape or made at home, so riders can create their own training courses.”

Horses: “Any equine can compete and succeed,” notes Cameron. “We’ve seen everything from ponies and mules to draft crosses and gaited horses. In fact, one of our champions is a Tennessee Walking Horse.”

Horses should be well shod or trimmed, and fit and sound enough to compete. Temperament matters, as horses with accepting attitudes toward new experiences can excel.

Get started: Visit EXCA at extremecowboyassociation.com. Information there includes a map of EXCA regions; an events calendar; division descriptions; the official rulebook; and even videos, a fantastic way of getting a first glimpse of competitions. Further information is available by phone.

If possible, attend an EXCA event as a spectator to get a feel of the atmosphere and expectations, and to see the horses and riders in action through obstacles you may encounter once you’re competing.

EXCA competition incorporates elements of many types of riding, including trail, ranch work, jumping, barrel racing, cutting, and reining to name a few. Therefore, expert assistance can be found in a good all-around trainer, or from sessions with various specialists. EXCA riders aren't required to have professional trainers, though, so if you feel confident in your ability to condition, manage, and train your horse, competing may be your next step.

Benefits: The sport promotes true versatility, giving horses and riders challenges at various ability levels, and provides a structured competition program. Through training and competition, you and your horse will become a team with can-do attitude and abilities.

Good to try if: You enjoy variety, want to compete with your horse against the clock in a fun atmosphere, and want to build camaraderie with like-minded horse people.