

Happy Chuckles and 81-year-old Extreme Cowboy racer seek 4th trip to Texas

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They call it extreme, but it's nothing 81-year-old Doris Heintz and Happy Chuckles can't handle.

The duo were competing at the Extreme Cowboy world qualifying point event in Cochrane on Sunday, where Happy Chuckles the horse was the same age as the youngest human competitor and Heintz took the crown as the oldest.

The event saw roughly 40 competitors from the ages of seven to 81 vie for the chance to compete in Texas at the world competitions this fall.

But don't let Heintz's age fool you — she and Happy Chuckles have raced their way to the EXCA World Championship three years in a row.



There are several competition divisions determined by age bracket and skill level. They vary in both the number of obstacles and their difficulty. (Mario De Ciccio/CBC)

Originally from High River, Heintz spent the last 40 years showing horses before she decided to branch out into Extreme Cowboy racing.

She said she used to enjoy trail, an event similar to Extreme Cowboy where riders navigate a course of obstacles with their horse, but that it was too slow.

"I've always liked trail, except they've got trail so slow in the shows now that you can hardly move from one obstacle to the next," she said.

"It says they're supposed to flow. But I don't think they flow, so I got into something that flows a little faster."

'All in the rider's head'

The Extreme Cowboy competition sees rider and horse gallop through a timed obstacle course that mimics everyday tasks on the farm, such as log pull, log crossing and barrel jumps and turns.

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- **[67-year-old Mary Burger wins 4 straight in Calgary Stampede barrel racing](#)**

"Anybody can race in this with any horse. You don't have to have a special horse to do it; you just need to have a brave horse to do it," said Rick Wickland, chairman of Extreme Cowboy Alberta.

Sharon Hay, a 71-year-old from Cochrane, can attest to that.

Cochrane's Sharon Hay says the real challenge isn't teaching Snuffy how to tackle an obstacle, rather it's managing her nerves on race day. (Mario De Ciccio/CBC)

On any other day, Hay would be riding her horse Snuffy bareback and barefoot "just for something to do" — all ease and confidence.

Not so on race day.

"The horse does better than me, because I get nervous," laughed Hay, who attended the first Extreme Cowboy clinic in Calgary eight years ago.

On competition days, it's a mental challenge and an absolute necessity for Hay to channel positivity. If your head quits, the horse will quit," she said.

"If you're not confident, the horse is not gonna be confident. It's all in the rider's head whether you're gonna do something or not."



Wickland says the Alberta branch of the Extreme Cowboy Association sees its membership increase year after year.

For their part, both Heintz and Hay say they plan to stick around for as long as they can