

WESTERN HORSEMAN®

Un-Specializing the Specialized Horse

Competing in the Extreme Cowboy Association is an opportunity to take your reiner, cutter or rope horse out of its comfort zone and into a challenging, fun trail course.

Article and photos by Katie Frank

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Heather Burchnall and her horse, Roosters Siouxweet, race toward the finish line at the 2017 Extreme Cowboy Association World Championships. Successfully completing a course at the Extreme Cowboy Association World Championships takes speed, precision and confidence. The association was created by horseman and clinician Craig Cameron and requires riders to guide their horses through a timed obstacle course.

Branches of the club thrive worldwide, and riders from seven countries—Australia, Belgium, Canada, France, New Zealand, Sweden and the United States—participated in this year's championships, which were held November 1–5, 2017, in Hamilton, Texas.

Cameron says that in today's world of specialized horses—those bred and trained exclusively for one event—the sport of EXCA has much to offer.

“Today, most horses are specialized: they’re a barrel horse, they’re a cutting horse, they’re a reining horse. In this sport you have to have a versatile, all-around horse that does everything,” Cameron says. “We have people with reiners, rope horses, cutters and barrel horses saying how their horses really love the sport. It takes a lot of pressure off of the horse, and gives them something to do. It’s something different, and then when they go back to their sport, their horses are better than ever.”



Galloping up and down a man-made hill added a degree of difficulty to the course. For the world championship this year, Cameron developed the course with help from Bill Cameron [no relation]. It required horses to master many skills and trust their rider. It was not for the meek with back-to-back rollbacks, pulling a dummy cow, climbing up and over manmade banks, and blazing through vertical, vinyl panels.

“What I really like to put in the courses are a lot of movement, a lot of direction changes, and a lot of speed changes,” he explains. “Horses have to go fast and slow, but they also have to be technical.

“[The EXCA is] full of good people and good horses from all over the world,” Cameron says. “It’s a sport that promotes a great horse and horsemanship and camaraderie. It brings people closer to other people and closer to their horses.”



Part of the obstacle course includes crossing a wide and then narrow bridge. Next year’s championships will be held November 6–11, in Glen Rose, Texas. For more information, visit the [Extreme Cowboy Association](#).