

# Rodeo club members keep on ropin' and ridin'

By Christopher Galen

Not all the cowboys in Nebraska are found on the ranches and farms in the western part of the state. And not all of them are men, either, said Rod Nelson, president of the rodeo club.

Nelson is head of the University of Nebraska Rodeo Association, a group of about 75 UNL students interested in rodeo competition. Any student in good standing with a 2.0 GPA can join the club, and almost half of the membership is women, Nelson said.

The goal of the club is "to promote rodeo as a whole, and the academic cowboy, so to speak," he said. "University students formed the club, and it takes care of its own finances."

The club sends a team of six men and four women to various rodeos in a 10-state Great Plains region during the spring and fall, said George Pfeiffer, assistant professor of agricultural economics and the rodeo club's adviser.

"The rodeo season runs pretty much all year long," Pfeiffer said. There are six regional rodeos this fall, and seven this coming spring, with a lull from December through February.

The club is a member of the National Intercollegiate Rodeo Association, which is the national regulating body for college rodeos, Nelson said. The NU Agriculture College at Curtis is also a member of the association, as are about 36 other colleges in the Great Plains area, Nelson said.

Rodeo club members compete both in individual and team events in nine categories at the rodeos. For men, there is bareback bronc riding, saddle bronc riding, calf roping, bull riding and steer wrestling. Women compete in break-away roping, barrel racing and goat tying. Team roping is an event open to both sexes, Pfeiffer said.

After the 13 regional rodeos are completed, the two highest scorers in each event from each region move on to the national championships, as do the two top men's and women's teams. The NIRA championship rodeo is at Bozeman, Mont. in June.

One of last year's finalists from UNL was Lisa Swanson, a senior majoring in nursing. Swanson placed second in the break-away roping event and earned a trip to Bozeman last spring.

"The biggest thrill you see is that you've worked toward something worthwhile," Swanson said. "It's fun. You meet kids from all over, and you get to travel all over."

Swanson said rodeo isn't necessarily a man's sport. "There are some girls who don't want to get dirty, but I'm from a farm, so I'm used to it. Besides, it's worth it," she said.

Members of the rodeo club have to work hard in preparation for the competitions, Nelson said.

"A member schedules practices for himself, and most are out there every weekday afternoon," Nelson said.

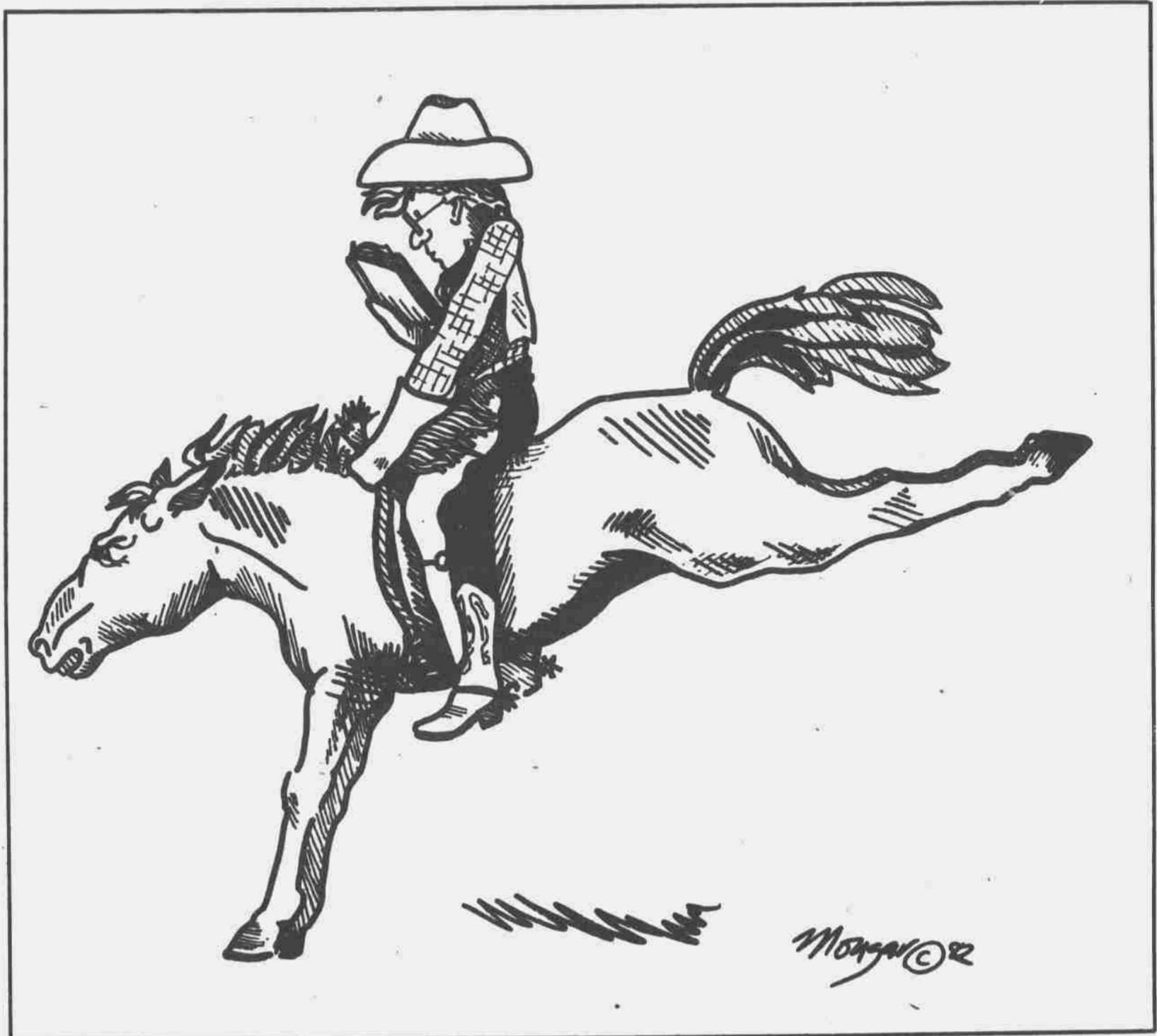
The rodeo club has a practice arena on the north side of East Campus, with the practice animals housed nearby.

"The club itself doesn't own any animals. They're all owned by individual members," Pfeiffer said.

"The focus of the UNRA is to put together a good team, and to sponsor the University Rodeo held every April," he said.

UNL's rodeo is one of the 13 regional contests, and it usually takes place during the first weekend in April at the State Fairground Coliseum, Pfeiffer said.

"The real purpose of the club, though, transcends that," he said. "It involves development, growth, leadership and the ability to work with people. I've seen students grow substantially because of the responsibility placed on them by the club."



The club is not just for "rodeo cowboys," Nelson said.

"It's a good place to meet people of the same kind of background. It's for anybody on the campus interested in rodeo or livestock, not necessarily ag majors alone," Nelson said.

The image of rodeo as a sport has evolved through the years, but there still are misconceptions about it, he said.

"I'd like to see it thought of less as a circus event, and more of an athletic event, which it really is. The riders aren't paid to compete. It's not a carnival," Pfeiffer said.

The club has enjoyed considerable success during the past few years, Nelson said.

"The men's team has gone to the national championships two of the last three years. Three or four members qualified individually also," he said.

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