



Team Yarding

Darryl Copper

Speed and agility are needed to compete in Team Yarding.

The versatile Arabian has found a new sport and is already excelling using its speed and agility to win accolades in the sport of Team Yarding. Team Penning or Team Yarding has evolved in a very short space of time to become one of the fastest growing horse sports today. Originating in the USA, Team Penning now provides an opportunity for people to participate in a sport which can be enjoyed by the whole family.

Team Yarding groups and associations have popped up all over the Australia, with one such organisation, the Upper Hunter Team Penning (UHTP) association based in the picturesque NSW Hunter Valley. After four years, UHTP already boasts a membership of more than 450. With associations forming all over the country, from Tamworth and Gunnedah in northwestern NSW, Gloucester and the mid-north coast to the north, the Upper Hunter group and areas down to the Southern tablelands, it's now a sport where if you are prepared to travel, you can compete on almost any weekend.

"Team Penning is a sport for anybody and any horse from any discipline," says Peter Riordan, vice president of the Upper Hunter Team Penning Association. "At UHTP, the emphasis is on a family sport, low cost and heaps of fun," Peter said. "Competition days are held on the first Sunday of each month with at least two training days throughout the year offering information on horsemanship and skills to selecting cattle, rules, penning strategies and horse health."

The principles of team penning are relatively simple, says Peter. "Three riders have two minutes to draft out three designated cattle from a mob and place them in an open pen at the other end of the arena. If you could bottle teamwork, horse skills, cattle sense and luck you'd be in with a good chance, but it's amazing how things can change in two minutes. The size of the mob can vary from 21 to 45 cattle. Each beast wears a coloured collar and in groups of three. At the start, a

judge will nominate what colour the team is to cut out and pen. There is a foul line half way down the arena and at any time, no more than five cattle can go over that line or the team is disqualified. "This is where teamwork really comes into play. Once the cattle have been cut out from the rest of the mob and placed in the pen at the opposite end of the arena, time is given. The quickest time wins. UHTP have three categories of competition: junior (5–12 years), juvenile (13–18 years) and open. It's quite commonplace for competitive riders to form teams and travel to events around the state to satisfy their appetite for the sport. At UHTP, the fastest time in five years of competing is 17 seconds. Generally if a team gets a time under 40 seconds they will usually be very competitive.

"There must be an innate partnership between horse and rider so if the rider can read what the cattle are doing and position themselves, the horse can usually anticipate what is happening whilst displaying good speed off the mark and being able to turn on a dime is a positive attribute.

"There is no specific breed of horse that specialises in the sport. It comes down to the individual skills of each horse, its turning ability, speed, cow sense and the rider's good horsemanship. Most importantly the team is made up of three riders and all must be able to contribute with their ability to read what is unfolding in front of them (read cattle), work together and position their horses in order to best benefit the end result. Typically team penning is popular with Quarter Horses, Australian Stock Horses and breeds such as Paints that have been exposed to cattle/western or rodeo events, but you even see donkeys and mules having a go in the USA.

"Arabians are starting to make their mark in the sport," said Peter, who was introduced to the breed by his wife Amanda. "Whether you own Purebreds or Derivatives, a horse with the right conformation, training and attitude can excel in this and many other sports. Our stud, Jindalla Park, has now acquired the lovely young colt, Whitsunday Akram (Whitsunday Abiita x Ralvon Gazelle) and he is one of only a handful of pure Arabian stallions also registered Studbook Australian Stock Horse.

"Not only was this important to our future breeding program of Arabian Stock Horses, this purebred colt will allow us the opportunity to campaign him competitively in Team Penning/ Working Stockhorse and Challenge events in 2010. With his already proven endurance bloodlines and his future career as a cow horse, this is a great opportunity for us to prove the value and versatility of the Purebred Arabian."

Peter explained that one of the attractions of the sport was that it allowed horses and riders from all disciplines to participate. "Obviously the quickest time wins but it's not all about winning. If a team can get three head of cattle into a pen in under two minutes it's an achievement, but no one should discount the fun and excitement along the way for both riders and the crowd.

"When dealing with animals anything can go wrong but it's about trying to eliminate the chance of things going wrong. A bit of cattle sense in a team of riders definitely helps. Cattle can be unpredictable and I guess that's what adds to the thrill of the sport, and you don't have to be competing to enjoy it. This is an opportunity for the crowd to yell and cheer on their team without disrupting the sport. Spectators also get involved because they can see what is happening sometimes better than the team members and when the clock is ticking everyone is pumped.

"Team Penning or Team Yarding is run at the Sydney Royal each year and judging by the increase in popularity of nominations, the event can only get bigger. There still exists a window of opportunity for a breed society to be the governing body and pull all the associations together under the one banner and unite the sport. By doing this, rules can be unified, judges can be accredited and associations can work together to grow the sport." **AHN**