

CHARREADA



El Charro

Charreada

MEXICAN RODEO IN TEXAS

Photographs by Al Rendon

Essays by Julia Hambric
Bryan Woolley
Francis Edward Abernethy

Publications of the Texas Folklore Society LIX

Francis Edward Abernethy, General Editor

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1958 PROCLAMATION BY THE
NACIONAL FEDERACIÓN OF CHARROS IN MEXICO CITY

Holy Mary of Guadalupe
Mother of our nation
Guide of its history
And Pledge of its destiny,
The Charros of Mexico,
On bended knee and with hearts on high,
Proclaim you Queen and Captain.

Your faithful subjects,
We implore Your Powerful Mercy
That Mexico live the Peace of Christ,
Free, great, strong, and respected,
And that in the militia of life,
With virile nobleness,

We find ourselves generous at every undertaking
Whenever your service and that of our country
calls us.

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About the Photographer

In 1981, Al Rendon, a photographer in his early 20s, received an assignment that changed the content of much of his photography over the next twenty years. The San Antonio Fiesta Commission sent Al to photograph the events of a *charreada* as one of the events of the annual April Fiesta celebration. Rendon, a native San Antonian, had never attended a charreada. In fact, he thought the participants in the events were from Mexico. He quickly discovered the riders were local residents and members of the San Antonio Charro Association.

Al began photographing events held by the San Antonio Charro association on a regular basis and was befriended by the member *charros*. The photographs of the charreadas became Al's personal interest and no longer an assignment. He made photographs of the installation of officers, of the presentation of charro queens, of the crowds at the colorful gatherings; but his main interest continued to be the horseback events. The charro's roping and the dangerous horseback maneuvers were usual subjects, but a particular interest in the riders of the *escaramuza* captured Al's lens. *Escaramuzas* are young women in the most feminine of dresses making dangerous passes on horseback at a full gallop.

As works of art, Al Rendon's images speak for themselves. The photographs also serve to document twenty years of the San Antonio Charro Association. Many of the subjects in the photographs have married, grown older, and a few have passed from the charro life. Founded in 1947, the San Antonio Charro Association has worked diligently to maintain the traditions and skills docu-

ABOUT THE PHOTOGRAPHER

mented by Rendon's photographs. As an added challenge to the photographer, on the days of the charreadas, the arena was often dusty dry or wet and muddy. The difficulty of capturing the exact second a rider changes horses in the *paso de la muerte* is almost an impossibility, but it was a second that Al burned onto film. The moment of action in many of the photographs took hundreds of discarded film negatives and hundreds of attempts by the photographer.

Dodging moving horses, ropes, and the excited crowds for over twenty years, Al Rendon has artfully captured the action and excitement of the charreada for the rest of the world to see.

—Bruce Shackelford

Preface



I've been to a goat ropin' and a rodeo, so you can see that I didn't just ride into town on a potato wagon. But about ten years ago I went to an El Paso charreada and expanded my education considerably. This was no small-town, cow-lot charreada, you understand. This was a *big-time* El Paso charreada with mariachis and flags flapping in the breeze and stands draped in gaudy bunting and a rodeo arena filled with the best dressed—or most romantically-dramatically dressed—bunch of folks I was ever in the same room with. I would have given a large amount of cash and my shotgun and casting rod to have a charro suit like the young studs were wearing that day—and to look as good as they did in them. And the women a-horseback were all as beautiful as movie stars and dressed like a field full of flowers. And the horses were proud and curried slick as velvet and carried gear and saddles that you would keep in your living room.

Those folks put on a memorable show. I never saw such intricate rope work as they displayed that day. They twirled their lariats in large loops, jumping in and out, mounted, standing, lying, upside down. They could flat handle a rope! And they could rope an animal—fore legs, hind legs, head, or tail. They were egregious show-offs, and I envied their every move and wished I were one among them with the roping skills and horsemanship that they had.

That is the first step in explaining how this charreada book got started.

Julia Hambric supplemented my El Paso charreada experience with her exciting presentation of her charreada paper and slides at the Midland meeting of the Texas Folklore Society in 1999. Julia re-created the charreada in words

PREFACE

and pictures. She brought back the El Paso experience vividly and explained much that I never knew and had never thought about. Then Bryan Woolley, another TFS member, wrote a beautifully illustrated feature story in the *Dallas Morning News* on charreadas. By that time, I was convinced that the charreadas and charro associations were in Texas to stay and were becoming a real factor in the cultural evolution of this state. I read books and articles and looked at pictures and talked to folks about charro associations, and I considered myself an expert. This misapprehension nearly led me to disaster. Contrary to public opinion, an editor needs a lot more than a warm, fuzzy feeling about some subject before he can build a book about it.

In my wanderings through charreada lore, I visited that fount of much Texas cultural knowledge, the Institute of Texan Cultures in San Antonio. I learned there that the Institute had recently had a showing of charreada pictures. The show was an exhibit of the work of Al Rendon, a professional photographer with a gallery in San Antonio. Al had been shooting charreadas for a decade, and he had enough pictures to tell the full story of charros and charreadas. He stepped in and organized the text around his wealth of charreada pictures and was the key to its final completion.

The Texas Folklore Society has since its beginning contributed to the study and appreciation of the cultural diversity of Texas. *Charreada: Mexican Rodeo in Texas* is another recognition that this state is forever evolving a culture that harmonizes the multitudes within its boundaries.

This editor expresses his appreciation for those who saw this book to the binder. Had Al Rendon not shown up with his magnificent array of charreada photographs and had he not worked diligently as picture editor, *Charreada* would still be on the drawing board. Karen DeVinney, editor of the University of North Texas Press, also edited much of the text of *Charreada* during a time that the Society's duly appointed editor was elsewhere in mind and body. The Society thanks Karen and is impressed with her editorial expertise.

UNT Press Director-Emeritus Fran Vick—who tried to retire but will not be allowed that surcease from labor—read, edited, and advised from this book's conception to its birth. This editor is much indebted.

Finally, this editor thanks the Society's secretary-treasurer-assistant editor, Shannon Thompson, who went out of her way to have a baby named Sean

PREFACE

Patrick in the midst of this editorial process. She never dropped a stitch in her editorial duties.

The Texas Folklore Society annually thanks Stephen F. Austin State University and its Department of English for their continued and dependable support.

Francis Edward Abernethy
Stephen F. Austin State University
Nacogdoches, Texas



Don Socrates

Al Rendon would like to give special thanks and appreciation to:

Mr. and Mrs. Carlos Rodriguez

Bruce Shackelford

Socrates Ramirez

Dr. Raul Gaona and Family

Colonel Max Virgil

A. B.



Father and son in
opening parade

Charrería

FROM SPAIN TO TEXAS

Francis Edward Abernethy

The self sufficient Spanish conquistador-rancher-hacendado who brought the wild new land of America under his control, who branded the cattle and horses and made them his, who (far separated from Madrid and Ciudad Mexico) made his own laws and enforced them—this man became the Mexican who loved the land and its soil and he loved the spirit that he had made. This close Mexican identity with the land and love of the land was the spirit that made *charrería* and its celebration in the *charreada*.

Charrería is the traditions and the skills of the *charro*, the ideal Mexican on horseback and his spectacular use of the lariat in roping and handling stock. The *charreada* is the gathering of teams of charros and charras to perform a series of formalized exhibitions of roping and riding.

The charro, who is the center of charrería tradition, goes back in history to Spain, where the term at first had a negative connotation and implied rusticity and crudeness. But language grows, and the term *charro* soon became respectfully applied to skilled horsemen, in the same way as did *caballero*. A recognized pride and machismo was part of being a charro, and his pride in himself was announced by his beautiful charro regalia and the splendid trappings for his horse.

The story of the charro is woven into the history of Mexico.

The Spanish began bringing horses and cattle into the New World in 1519. By 1537—less than twenty years later!—there were so many cattle and horses in Mexico that ranchers were required by the Spanish authorities to have an annual roundup to brand and castrate stock and to see that

all the stock was with its rightful owners. This New Spain became a land of ranches and the land of the daring and skillful men on horseback who managed them.

This annual roundup of range cattle, or *rodeo del ganado*, is the sixteenth century beginning of the charreada, the Mexican rodeo and the ancestor of Texas rodeos.

Ranch headquarters were far apart in colonial New Spain and after 1821, in the Mexican Republic. The ranchers and their vaqueros had little time or opportunity to meet and socialize. The annual rodeo became that time. Families of the ranchers involved in the roundup gathered at the roundup grounds, near one central hacienda. Then after the work of the roundup was finished, the hacienda that sponsored the roundup gave a celebration for the hacendados and vaqueros of all the ranches that had participated in the roundup. They had a barbecue and bands played and people danced, and this celebration became meeting and mating time for the rancher-frontiersmen of Spanish Colonial and Mexican times.

Natural exhibitionists as all males are, the vaqueros and the young sons of the hacienda showed off their skills and their bravery to win the hearts of the women present and to arouse the envy of their peers. The man-on-a-horse became the unit that was the center of the whole stock raising world of Spanish and Mexican ranching, and the purpose of the exhibition was to demonstrate the expertise of the man on horseback who was responsible for the success of that ranching world.

By the twentieth century the charro, the man of horseback, became the symbol and the representative of the spirit and the pride of heritage of the Mexican people. He became to Mexicans what the cowboy is to Texans, only more so. The charro was not simply a vaquero, a working cowhand. He was more likely to be the landed gentry, or the son and heir of a hacienda. Nowadays, he is usually a city dweller. The charro was the best of men on horseback, riding with style and ease, recalling the heroic charros who fought against the Spanish in 1821, against the French and Maximilian in 1865, and against governmental corruption in the Revolution of 1910. In his dress and in his machismo the charro represents the heroic and dramatic in Mexican history and tradition. Every Mexican is a charro or charra at heart.

The charreada, the exhibition of the equestrian skills of the charro, is the national sport of Mexico and is its celebration of that country's spirit and its love of the dramatic. The charreada, unlike the Texas rodeo, is practiced for style, not speed, and it is competition among teams, rather than among individuals. It is entered into for applause and admiration and for the patriotic celebration of Mexican tradition, never for money. No one pays an entrance fee.

Unlike the Texas long-oval rodeo arena, the charreada takes place in an exhibition area that looks something like a frying pan. The pan part is the *rueda* or *plaza*, a circular arena forty meters in diameter. Most of the events, or *suertes*, take place in the arena. The audience's stand is at the end of this arena. The pan handle is called the *lienzo*, or alley. The lienzo, in addition to being one special competition area, is the alleyway through which all the teams come into the arena.

The charreada, as it evolved from the Spanish roundup celebrations three hundred years ago, is begun with prayers in the chapel to Our Lady of Guadalupe. The opening performance is the *desfile*, the parade of the teams of charros and charras, accompanied by the association's officers and local dignitaries, with the Mexican flag and the flags of Texas and the United States. A mariachi band brings the teams into the arena with the playing of the "Zacatecas March" and the national anthems. Religion and patriotism are ever present, as is mariachi music and the baile that often follows the charreada.

The charreada is highly structured and is divided into *suertes*, or competitions among teams of charros. (*Suerte* really means "luck," but in this case a suerte is a competition.) The *suertes* begin with *La Cala de Caballo*, the presentation and the examination of the qualities of the horse and its rider. After this introductory demonstration, the main competitions begin. The first two *suertes*, team roping of running mares and tailing the bull, take place in the alley. The rest of the events take place in the arena. Sometimes the ladies, the charras, perform their team demonstrations, the *Escaramuza*, or skirmish, at the end of the competitions in the lienzo and before the *suertes* in the arena. The charros are all beautifully costumed and perform intricate team maneuvers riding side saddle. The competitions in the arena include wild mare and bull riding and amazing displays of ropesmanship as they lasso mares and bulls from afoot

and on horseback. The final event is the *Paso de la Muerte*, which consists of the charro's leaping from his running horse to the back of an unsaddled and unbridled wild mare and then riding the wild mare to a halt with only the mane to cling to. One can see why the Paso de la Muerte is the final act of the charreada competition and why it is called the Pass of Death.

All of these events are performed with the most scrupulous attention to the welfare of the bull or wild mare. The mistreatment of an animal brings the judges' and the audience's censure.

As in the early colonial days, after the demonstrations of horsemanship the charros and the audience visit, have a barbecue, listen to mariachis, and have a baile. The charreada is an important cultural and social occasion and the Mexican people's reminder of the drama and the romance of their rich history and heritage.

The importance of the charro, the *caballero*, and the *vaquero* in Mexico goes back to their colonial beginnings and their history in a nation and a people whose lives were built on the ranching tradition. The skills of the man on horseback, in peace or in war, were the exercises of survival. And these men on horseback became—and remain!—their culture's heroes. During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the popularity and the skills of the charro was displayed in all sorts of exhibitions all over the world. In 1894, charros were a celebrated attraction in Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show, and their showmanship was displayed in South America and in Europe and Britain.

These performances were equally admired among their own Mexican people and gradually all of the displays of riding and roping came together in a structured form, called the charreada.

After the Revolution of 1910-20, in 1921 the National Association of Charros was founded in Mexico City. This was a movement of mainly urban charros who were athletes who trained to become skilled in the arts of the lariat and horsemanship. Their purpose was to maintain and promote Mexican nationalism and the spirit and identity of Mexico through its charro symbol. In 1933 the National Federation of Charros was created. It has become the parent organization of charro and charreada associations in Mexico and the United States. The San Antonio Charro Association, chartered in 1947, was the first accredited charro association north of the Rio Grande.

Texas can boast of seventeen chartered charro associations, in addition to dozens of hometown and horse-pasture charreada arenas. San Antonio alone has four associations. Bruce Shackelford, in his “Twenty-First Century Charrería,” says that there are fifty-seven registered associations in the United States, the greatest number—thirty-nine—being in California. And there are four in Illinois!

The popularity of charreada competitions in Texas has increased with the continual arrival of immigrants from south of the border. In an alien land, the charreada reminds them of home and is a symbol of a strong Mexican national and cultural identity that they still treasure. The number of charreada competitions and charro associations with accompanying bailes and banquets in Texas increases annually. I can envision a time when charreada and rodeo mate and spawn new equestrian competitions and entertainments. That will be an interesting show!



Oscar Barrales,
charro

Charro Regalia

Julia Hambric

The attire of both the charro and horse is outlined in the *Reglamento General De Competencias*, the rules and regulations book produced by the *Federación de Charros*. There are five types of attire that the charro may own. They are the working, the half-gala, the gala, the grand gala, and etiquette.

The most commonly used attire is the working uniform. This is the suit that is worn in the competitions. The half-gala, gala, and grand gala attire differ from each other only in the types of material used and the amount of decoration sewn onto the suit, the half-gala and gala being less decorated than the grand-gala attire. The grand-gala costume will come complete with a felt sombrero with silver and gold embroidery, and the jacket and pants are of fine cashmere with silver buttons. The horse's saddle and bridle may have silver detailing to go with the gala types.

The etiquette attire is worn exclusively for such ceremonies as weddings and funerals. The pants and jacket are made of black wool material and are decorated with silver buttons. The sombrero can be made of white, gray, or black felt and be adorned with silver. A white shirt, tie, black boots, and often a holster and gun complete the ensemble.

The sombrero can be of various colors, the most common being tobacco. The working sombrero is made of straw, while the formal one is made of felt. Both sombreros should be approximately six inches tall from the crown to the brim. The brim should be tilted up in front and be very stiff in order to help reduce damage to the charro's head should he fall. The hatband is often made of braided animal hair and is decorated appropriately to match the rest of the

outfit. There are three styles of sombreros: the San Luis Moderado (the front tip of the brim is curved), the Pachuqueño (the brim is fairly flat), and the Jalisco (the front tip of the brim is curved quite high).

According to the governing rules of the charreada, the shirt the charro wears must be white or off-white. The collar should be military style (a flat collar with tapered tips) if the charro is not wearing a jacket. If he chooses to wear a jacket, the collar of the shirt may be civilian style, with a high stand-up collar. In this case, the charro should not remove his jacket. Socrates Ramírez, a member of the charro association in San Antonio, Texas, states with contempt that younger charros are wearing modern-trendy shirts with “yokes that are in a variety of colors and this is unacceptable. It’s done just for show.” The shirts must be long sleeved and buttoned at the wrists. Mr. Ramírez proudly displays the silver shell-shaped buttons on the shirt that he wears daily, demonstrating that the pride and honor of being a charro goes beyond the charreada. Some charros may have horse heads, spurs, or other articles associated with the charreada for buttons on their shirts or jackets.

The jacket that the charro wears must also meet regulations. It can be made of cashmere, wool, or chamois, and may be plain or decorated with braids. The buttons on the sleeves of the jacket can be of various designs and may be made of bone or silver. The jacket length must be ten centimeters below the waistband of the pants. If the charro should remove his jacket and is observed to be wearing a shirt with a civilian collar, he would be disqualified from participating in the charreada.

The vest is optional, but it must be made of cashmere, wool, or chamois. Usually the vest is gathered with elastic at the waist. It is often lined with a thin layer of foam rubber to prevent perspiration from ruining the material. If a charro chooses to wear the foam-lined vest, he is not allowed to remove it during the charreada, for doing so would be grounds for disqualification.

The pants are custom-made to conform to the charro’s leg so that any movement made by the charro will not be endangered by loose material. Like the jacket and vest, the pants are made out of chamois, wool, or some other coarse material. The material of the pants must be the same as that used for the jacket so that they match. The pants for the formal suit may be decorated with silver braids and buttons on both sides of the outer leg, from the waist to the pant

cuffs. Silver braids and buttons require considerable polishing to maintain their original sheen.

Chaps are worn over the pants and are either buttoned on or tied around the charro's waist. These are made of chamois and conform to the leg, so that, like the pants, they will not interfere with the rider's maneuvers. The chaps are open at the sides, with straps to hold them in place. The purpose of the chaps is to protect the thighs and the legs and to prevent the charro from rope burning his shinbone during the coleadero.

The boots are calf-length. The working boots are made out of leather, while the formal boot is usually made out of chamois. The spurs are attached to the boot heel and are used only when the horse or the bull does not want to cooperate in the given task. The charro only lightly taps the animal with the spurs so that he does not harm it. A charro who deliberately harms an animal loses the respect of his fellow charros.

The charros are permitted to wear gloves called *manillas* to prevent rope burn. The gloves are made of leather or chamois. The gloves cover only the palm and back of the hand, leaving the fingers free. The need for gloves in some events is obvious. As a charro ropes an animal and wraps the lariat around the horn of the saddle, you can see smoke rising as it tightens on the saddlehorn.

The charro's tie, often referred to as the butterfly tie, is made of material—frequently of chamois—that complements the suit. It is to be kept tied and tight at all times during the charreada. Some ties are made of a satin type of material and are embroidered. The embroidery is usually representative of the owner's favorite event. For instance, young West Texas charro Miguel Castro has a tie that shows a charro grabbing a bull's tail, representing the coleadero.

The belt is made of chamois and is expected to match the chaps. It is made so that a strap can be added to it if the charro chooses to carry a pistol.

The equipment for the horse has to meet specifications, just as the charro's clothing must. All equipment on the saddle must be made of natural materials, not man-made such as plastic.

There are primarily two types of saddles that the charro owns: the working saddle and the formal saddle. The working saddle consists of three main parts: the wooden pommel, the leather seat, and the metal trim, tie rings, and iron work. The working saddle has to be very sturdy and made in such a way as to

help the charro gain leverage and make his dally around the horn when roping an animal. The working saddle is very plain. There is little ornamentation in the leather work. The saddle should not be so lavishly decorated that it will distract from the skills a charro may be demonstrating.

In contrast to the working saddle, the formal saddle will have much detail and often floral designs in the leather work. It may be decorated with silver and polished to a rich shine. Some formal saddles may be richly adorned with turquoise inlay.

On the right side of the saddle is the *reata* (lariat). The reata is made of a desert plant called *lechuguilla*. The lariat is made in a variety of thicknesses and lengths as needed for each roping event. The lariat is measured in *ibrazados* (loops). Each *ibrazado* equals three feet. Behind the saddle is a rolled *serape*, or woolen poncho. The reins, halter, and the cinch must all be made of leather or chamois. They must be clean and strong. These are inspected by the judges as part of the first event of the charreada, called *La Cala*. This inspection is done to insure the safety of the horse and the charro. Worn equipment and equipment that does not fit or is not properly adjusted on the horse can lead to accidents that can endanger the rider as well as others.

The true charro dress is one whose pants, jacket, shirt, hatband, and saddle blanket all carry the same pattern. The costume shows the charro's pride. A fine outfit can cost thousands of American dollars.



Charreada
warm-up.
Alfonso "Poncho"
N. López



Strapping on
charro emblem



Escaramuza
team photo



Young girls
walking before
event



Adelita



Sylvia López Gaona
with daughter, Emma
M. Gaon and Manolo
Gonzalez Ortega

La Vida del Charro

Bryan Woolley

Dallas Morning News 23 May 1999

Sure, his senior prom was important. He was graduating, wasn't he? Farewell, dear alma mater, dear Fort Worth North Side High. He had done all the right things, rented the tux and the shiny new car, bought the corsage. He liked the girl he was with. He was having a good time.

But at ten o'clock, Jose Piña, Jr., bugged out.

"I was at the airport by eleven," he says. "My plane left at 11:30 P.M. I was in San Antonio, ready to compete, the next morning. The prom was important, but the *charreada* was more important."

Defined simply, a *charreada* is a Mexican rodeo. Its events are similar to the events in an American rodeo, focusing on the riding and roping skills of cowboys. A Mexican rodeo cowboy is called a *charro*.

But, like most simple definitions, those are too simple. In the minds of those who compete in it, a *charreada* is much more than a series of athletic contests involving men and animals. And a *charro* is much more than a rodeo contestant. Becoming a *charro* and competing in a *charreada* are expressions of a way of life called *charrería*, peculiar to Mexico. And for many North Texas families, *charrería* is a proud expression of their Mexican-ness, whether they've been Texas citizens for generations or have arrived so recently that they don't speak English.

"Charrería is tradition," says Mr. Piña. "It has kept us in our roots."

As he speaks, he's standing in a remote pasture on a ranch near the small town of Kemp in Kaufman County, about thirty-five miles southeast of Dallas. He's wearing boots and spurs, pants and shirt decorated with fancy braid work,

and a butterfly-shaped necktie. He's about to put on leather chaps and a wide-brimmed straw sombrero, also decorated with braid, that will complete the rigidly traditional costume that a charro is required to wear while competing in a charreada.

His horse's gear is as traditional as his own: a rawhide-covered Mexican saddle with a horn as big as a saucer, a rolled serape tied behind it, a braided leather quirt hanging on the left side, a braided bridle with a Mexican bit.

It all must be just so.

Because of photographs of Mexican revolutionary hero Emiliano Zapata, who dressed in such costumes—and Mexican movies and TV shows starring charro characters, and thousands of travel posters and brochures decorated with his image—the charro has become a national symbol of Mexico, as his cowboy counterpart is a symbol of Texas. He is the embodiment of Mexican history and pride.

A few yards from Mr. Piña stands a makeshift arena, shaped like a keyhole or a frying pan, called a lienzo. There, for the next two days, five or six teams of charros, all members of the Charros Association of the Northern Zone of Texas, will compete in a practice charreada to prepare for the state championship competition in San Antonio on Memorial Day weekend. Winners in the San Antonio event qualify for the fifteen-day Mexican national championship charreada in Morelia, west of Mexico City, in October.

“All the top dogs in Mexico will be at Morelia,” says Mr. Piña. He expects to be among the contestants there. At twenty-two, he has been a charro for seven years, and he's one of the best in North Texas.

He says he and his nineteen-year-old brother, Fidel, and their father, Jose Sr., will shut down their construction business to make the long trip together.

“Fifteen days of nothing but charrería,” he says. “God, it's beautiful!”

At the beginning

The beginnings of charrería arrived in Mexico with Spanish conqueror Hernando Cortés and the first horses on April 21, 1519. The events of charreada competition grew out of the skills required for working with cattle and horses on the big haciendas that the Spaniards established.

“Ever since it was brought over from Spain, the charro tradition has been carried on year after year,” says Juan De Leon, forty-nine years old, an investi-

gator for the Tarrant County district attorney's office during the week, but a charro on weekends. "It was a tradition of the nobility. It was the way aristocrats entertained themselves."

Charrería also celebrates the close bonds of family and community. And, because of the roles charros have played in their history, it sustains strong patriotic feelings in Mexicans wherever they live.

"Charrería was in Texas way before the Pilgrims came to this country," says Mr. De Leon. "It's passed on from generation to generation."

Because aristocratic charros were prominent in Mexico's war of independence from Spain in the early nineteenth century, the big-hatted rider became a patriotic symbol. But it was a foreign usurper, the emperor Maximilian, who's largely responsible for the costume that charros still wear today.

"Maximilian saw the prosperous Mexican landlords dressed in a certain way," says Mr. De Leon. "He liked their style. He took up the charro style and made it popular throughout Mexico."

Maximilian's clothes were more popular than he was. In 1867, three years after the emperor Napoleon III sent Maximilian to Mexico City to establish a monarchy and bring Mexico into the French empire, rebels led by Benito Juárez overthrew and executed him. The Mexican holiday of Cinco de Mayo celebrates the demise of Maximilian's reign.

In the 1910 revolution against another dictator, Porfirio Díaz, charros again played a prominent role, especially Emiliano Zapata, who before the rebellion was a famous horse trainer, a charreada competitor, and a village dandy.

Because of his skill as a military leader, Zapata is still the most revered figure of charrería. And because of the deeds of their kind in the revolution, charros give a military salute to the Mexican flag at the beginning of every charreada as they ride into the lienzo to the music of the Mexican national anthem.

In Mexico, the charros still are considered part of the army reserve and are authorized by law to carry guns.

"Of course, in Texas, none of that applies," says Mr. De Leon.

Teams on horseback

According to the Encyclopedia of Mexico, there are about 700,000 charros

in Mexico, Texas, California, New Mexico, and Arizona who compete in the charreadas sanctioned by the Federación de Charros in Mexico City.

Of those, not many are in North Texas. Over the past ten years, the number of charro teams in the area has grown from three to six, each with fifteen members or more, including wives and children. The largest is the Fort Worth team, with about thirty members. There are sixteen teams in the whole state.

The Dallas–Fort Worth area teams compete against each other in half a dozen makeshift lienzos built on land owned or leased by charro families in the area. Most of the contests are casual affairs, organized with little advance notice, almost like pickup softball games at a city park.

Sometimes members of five or six teams participate, other times maybe just two. The charros show up one or two at a time, bouncing along rough ranch roads in pickups, pulling trailers loaded with horses or steers.

The charreada begins whenever enough people and animals are present. The Kemp competition, scheduled to begin at 10:30 A.M., did not get under way until 1:00 P.M. A number of the contestants had trouble finding the remote pasture where the lienzo is. But nobody cared.

The trucks are filled with whole families. Many women and children are performers, too, in the larger charreadas. At the smaller competitions, the women serve as cooks and helpers for their men. They're usually the only spectators as well.

Joe Gomez, 47, is the fifth generation of his family to roam the charreada circuit. He has followed it for more than twenty years.

“My family were into charrería long before we left Mexico and came to Texas,” he says. “Being a charro is part of our pride. It’s going back to the old ways. You know, like owning an old ’57 Chevy gets you to thinking about the 1950s? Well, charrería is getting on a good horse and thinking back on what our fathers and forefathers did. For them, it was their living. For us, it’s a sport.

“I learned it from my grandfather,” he says. “Most boys learn it from their grandfathers. Their fathers are too busy to teach them, so the grandfathers do it. It’s typical. Some of these families have a hard time getting the money together to buy and feed horses and buy costumes and equipment and travel. But they still try.”

Juan De Leon estimates that eighty percent of the charros in North Texas work as ranch hands. “The rest come from all walks of life,” he says, “but the charrería is their passion. It’s what they live for.”

For Jose Piña, Jr., the passion began when he was eleven and, like many boys his age, he was continually pestering his father for a horse. Then, when he was fifteen, he learned that a charro named Gastulo was working on a ranch owned by Mr. Gomez.

“Gastulo told my father he would teach charrería to me and my brother, Fidel, who was eleven,” Mr. Piña says. “My dad thought it was something we would try for a while and get tired of. My dad and Gastulo agreed on a fee, and Gastulo loaned us a horse. Fidel and I went out to that ranch every day, every day, every day. Fidel and I were born in Texas. Our parents spoke English at home. When we first started with Gastulo, our Spanish was poor. But Gastulo would say, ‘Hey, I don’t want you speaking English around the lienzo.’ So we had to pick up Spanish. It got us back to our roots. Since then, we haven’t stopped. We built our own lienzo with our own hands. My dad sponsors our team. He pays for our trips. And every charreada we go to, our mother is there, too. We’ve always been a very tight family. We move as a pack, always.”

The Piñas own a construction business and a ranch near Alvarado, where they stable their horses and practice in their own lienzo. They travel to charreadas all over the Southwest and Mexico and provide the livestock for many of the charreadas in North Texas.

“It’s our family obsession,” says Mr. Piña. “No telling how many thousands of dollars a year we spend on it.”

“It’s like golf,” says Mr. De Leon. “Once you get into it, you spend more and more money. You’ve got to buy all the clothing and your saddle and horse. You’ve got to feed that horse and stable it and carry it in a trailer. You’ve got to have something to pull the trailer with. A charro sombrero costs \$400 to \$500, chaps about \$250, a saddle anywhere from \$200 to \$1,800. A fancy charro suit—pants, shirt, vest, necktie—can cost \$1,000. It’s got to be a real family thing. You can’t do it by yourself.”

Women on horseback

It's hard, says Caty Ochoa. She's the *capitana* of the Fort Worth Charro Association's eight-member women's team, which competes in a precision riding event called *escaramuza*. The women perform intricate drill patterns on horseback, wearing long dresses and riding sidesaddle at full gallop. The dresses—matching cotton prints decorated with ruffles, ribbons and lace—are homage to the role women played in the 1910 revolution.

Mrs. Ochoa, who is thirty, spent her childhood on a ranch in the Mexican state of Durango, but she and her husband, Reuben, didn't become involved in charrería until three years ago.

"Reuben started first," she says. "Then the ladies asked me if I wanted to go with them. I said, 'Well, let me see.' Then I started riding my horse real slow. I was holding on for my life. But I'm still doing it. I love it now. We spend a lot of money on charrería. We have three horses to feed. We keep them in Alvarado and have to drive from Arlington every day to take care of them. It isn't easy for us. I work in a school cafeteria in Arlington. My husband is a cook at On the Border. He has worked there for seventeen years. But he's from Mexico, too, like me."

Mrs. Ochoa's nine-year-old daughter, Berenice, wears a dress identical to her mother's and rides with her in the *escarmuza*. The Ochoas' eleven-year-old son, Reuben, Jr., is a miniature version of his father in sombrero and chaps and boots. In time, the youngest Ochoa, four-year-old Chably, will become a *charra*, too.

"Our kids were born here," Mrs. Ochoa says. "They're U.S. citizens. But they're still Mexican. So charrería is important to us."



Paco Gaona and
nephew Rodrigo
Gabriel Gaona



Young charros



San Antonio
charro, Carlos
Rodriguez



La Entrada. Left to right:
Joe Luna, Dave Hernandez,
founder of San Antonio
Charro Association



Saluting the
colors



Opening
procession
into ring



Awaiting the
start of the event



Erica Moran,
1998 San Antonio
charra queen



Charro
association
banner

Sylvia López
Gaona, past
charra queen





Children saluting
colors. Marcos
Alfonso Nicolas
López facing camera



Ameriquin
Garcia, future
charro



Carlos A.
Rodriguez II,
machetero



Caballo con charro

The Events in the Charreada

Julia Hambric

The charreada takes place in a lienzo (arena). The events used to take place in horse corrals on *haciendas* (ranches), but when the charreada moved into more populated areas, corrals were not readily available, so the present day lienzos were built. The basic structure is shaped like a frying pan. Facing the panhandle is the spectators' stand. At the junction of the panhandle and arena is the judges' elevated stand. It is from there that the judges can observe the panhandle events as well as the arena events. On either side of the panhandle are the pens to hold the bulls and mares used for the competition.

The charreada begins with a parade of the teams and participants. A mariachi band plays *Marchas de Zacatecas*, the traditional music of the charreada. The riders enter the lienzo from the panhandle, or alley. They parade the flags of the United States, Mexico, and Texas and circle the arena counterclockwise, saluting the judges and spectators by raising their right hands to their sombreros. They exit the arena in the same manner in which they entered. During some charreadas, half way through the parade, the procession stops and a charro representing his team presents his horse to the judges to get their approval to enter into competition. In some charreadas, this presentation is given after the parade, the custom varying from lienzo to lienzo. This presentation is called *la cala de caballo*.

La Cala

La cala is the formal presentation of horse and rider to assure the judges that both meet the strict regulations set by the governing association of charros.

The charro rides his horse into a rectangle that is marked off in the arena. The rectangle is six meters wide and twenty meters long. The charro dismounts, and the three judges inspect the saddle and cinch on the horse to make sure they meet regulations. They must be made of all natural materials and cannot have plastic or nylon on any part. During this inspection, the charro removes the bridle and bit of the horse so that the judges can observe that they, too, meet regulations and fit properly so as not to do injury to the horse. After getting approval, the charro thanks the judges, replaces the bridle and bit, and rides to the end of the panhandle.

Once there, the charro steadies his horse, salutes the judges once again, and gallops at high speed into the rectangular area marked off in the arena. There, he must bring his horse to a sliding stop without going beyond the boundaries of the chalked rectangle. This exercise is referred to as the *rayar* (“to hit the mark,” the three stages of the stop). The horse crouches on its haunches, slides forward, and crouches again. When the horse is at a complete stop, it must stand still and be completely silent, with never a snort or a whinny.

When given the signal from the judge to continue the presentation of the horse’s skill, the charro directs his horse to spin in a circle leading off to the right. The horse must make several complete 360-degree circles while keeping his right hind hoof in place. He is to pivot on that hoof with as little movement from it as possible. Ideally, the hoof will stay stationary. When the horse comes to a rest, the charro then directs it to repeat the same skill, but this time to the left.

After these maneuvers are completed, the charro will direct his horse to turn *medio lado* (half turns) to the right and left. Each half turn must be precise. At this point, the charro might be asked to dismount for the judges’ benefit. When given an affirmative nod from the judges, the charro must back his horse out of the arena into the panhandle. The horse must back a minimum of fifty meters. This is difficult for a horse, for he cannot see behind him, and his trust has to be with his rider.

Penalty points are given if there is even the slightest infraction. Some reasons for infractions might be, but are not limited to, the horse’s snorting or whinnying or making an unnecessary movement, such as raising its tail or not

supporting itself on its hind feet during the half turns. Penalty points are given if the horse does not back out of the arena in a straight line.

Penalty points can also be assessed if the charro makes mistakes. If any part of his gear comes loose, if he loses his sombrero, or if he gives improper commands to his horse, he will be penalized. The judges are looking for perfection and a clean presentation. They also focus on the relationship between the charro and his horse. The two need to perform in such a way that they look like one in presentation. They need to look polished. If either the horse or rider performs badly, the judges have the option of disqualifying either one or both from the competition.

Piales

The second event, the *piales*, takes place in the panhandle of the lienzo. For the piales, the judges move from the center of the arena to a tower that is located at the corner where the arena and panhandle meet. From here, the judges get an unobstructed view of the action.

The length of the panhandle is marked off in chalk at ten, thirty, and fifty meters. There are three charros from a team, one at each meter mark. A fourth charro chases a riderless mare down the panhandle wall, while the other charros try to rope her hind legs. Each charro is allowed three attempts to lasso the hind legs of the mare. The men rotate positions after each try so that each charro is given an equal chance. The charros are not given a chance to practice or warm up for this event.

The piales is one of the most difficult of the charreada's events, for there are many factors involved. Often, a mare is overused for this event and knows how to avoid the rope by speeding up, slowing down, or dodging between the stationed charros waiting for their chance to rope her. Another consideration is the condition of the panhandle. If the ground is damp or wet, the horse tends to run more slowly; if it is dry, the mare can run faster and kick up dirt, obscuring the view of the charros. The charro must also have the perfect lariat to rope the mare. It must be the weight that he is comfortable with so that he knows just how much power he has to put into his throw to be successful.

The piales is a *suerte* in which much luck is involved. "Many times I have been to charreadas in which no mare is caught in this event," stated Socrates

Ramírez of San Antonio. Even if the ropers fail to lasso the mare, judges still score the charros on several items, such as the type of throw attempted or whether they roped any part of the mare other than the hind legs or whether the charro made a second attempt on the same mare.

El Coleadero

Probably the most exciting of the charreada events is the *coleadero*, the tailing of the bull. It is the final event to take place in the panhandle.

The action of the *coleadero* moves quickly. A bull is released at the far end of the panhandle. The charro must salute the bull, slap the animal on the haunches, grab its tail, wrap the tail around his leg, and accelerate his horse in order to throw the bull. This is done while the mounted charro is riding alongside the bull, both running at full speed. According to Socrates Ramírez, “There must be three distinctive moves on the part of the charro. He must salute, slap the bull, and grab the tail in three different moves. It cannot be done smoothly as if in one sweeping move.” After the bull is thrown, the charro steers his horse to the left to avoid a collision with the downed animal.

Points are deducted if the charro fails to salute the judges, acknowledge the bull, wrap the tail of the bull properly, or if he touches the horse’s mane or makes any other movements not approved of in the regulation book.

Points for the charro are tallied based on the fall of the bull. If the bull rolls completely over, the charro is awarded up to twelve points. If the bull lands on his right side and its shoulder touches the ground, the charro is given as many as ten points. If the bull lands on his belly and the belly touches the ground, only six points are earned. There are many positions in which the bull can land during a *coleadero*, and each position has its own number of points awarded.

Jinete de Toro

Jinete de toro (bull riding) is the first suerte to occur in the arena of the lienzo. The average bull used for this event weighs in the neighborhood of one thousand pounds.

The team members are allowed three minutes to situate the rider in the chute on top of the bull. They place a girth and a flank strap around the bull.

The bull rider is allowed to hold on to the girth with both hands during his ride. The flank strap is used to encourage the bull to buck. When the bull and rider are released into the arena, the rider must stay on the bull until it either throws him or settles down. If the rider removes the flank strap while still riding the bull, he is given additional points. He may use his spurs to encourage the bull to buck more, but at no time may he use the spurs to such an extent as to do injury to the animal.

While the bull riding is in progress, the other team members stay close by in order to assist the rider should he fall off the bull. If a rider should fall off, the others will distract the bull and steer him away from the rider as he seeks safety. Points are deducted if the charro loses a spur or his sombrero. As soon as the rider has dismounted from the bull, the next suerte begins.

La Terna en el Ruedo

La terna en el ruedo (team roping) uses the same bull that was used in the jinetes de toro. In this event the team ropes the head and the hind legs of the bull.

The first move is for a mounted charro to rope the bull's head. Before roping the bull, however, the charro will demonstrate many *florins* (roping techniques and flourishes) that he knows. For example, he may jump through the twirling loop of his rope while in a standing or squatting position. The rope used for this event is fifteen *ibrazadas* (rolled loops) in length, which is approximately fourteen meters, or forty-five feet. When the head is lassoed, the rider and his horse try to hold the bull in position so that another mounted charro can lasso the hind legs. This charro also demonstrates a variety of *florins* before lassoing the hind legs of the bull.

Sometimes, the second charro will do his rope tricks and lay the lariat on the ground so that the first charro can walk the bull so that his hind legs are in the loop. At that time, the second charro tightens his lasso on the bull's hind legs and then both charros pull the bull in opposite directions until the bull is stretched out on the ground. As soon as the judges acknowledge this maneuver, the bull is quickly released so that no harm will come to it. If a bull is roped improperly or gets out of the lasso before it is supposed to, penalty points apply. The team is scored on their teamwork, roping skills, and timing.

The role of the horse cannot be dismissed in this event. The horse must not be spooked by the bull in the arena. He must, though, be alert at all times and instinctively know when, where, and how to move without the rider telling him. While the rider is busy with his flourishes of the rope, the horse must know where he needs to be positioned in order for the rider to lasso the bull. La terna en el ruedo is the most exacting of all the charreada events, for the charros must wait until the right moment to execute their roping techniques.

Jinete de Yegua

Jinete de yegua (mare riding) is the next event. It is similar to the jinete de toro in many ways. The charros prepare a mare in the chute by strapping on a girth and a flanking strap. Instead of the three minutes allowed to prepare for the bull, the charros are allowed four minutes to prepare the mare. Any extra minutes used to prepare the mare allow the judges to assess penalty points, one point for every minute they are over the four allowed. The charros choose the mare they will ride by lots.

The charro is allowed to hold on to the girth or the mane of the mare during his ride. The charro wants a mare that will kick and buck and give him a good ride. The longer he stays on the mare and the more she kicks and bucks, the higher the score. This can be a dangerous event. It is not uncommon for the rider to be thrown over the head of the horse or into the wall of the arena. The charro is expected to ride the mare until the mare settles down and is relatively calm.

If the charro wants to get additional points, he may remove the flank strap during the ride. He is given additional points if he lands on his feet upon dismounting the animal. If at any time he loses a piece of equipment, such as a spur or his sombrero, he will lose points.

Manganas a Pie

Manganas a pie, lassoing the feet, is a true test of a charro's roping skill. Using the same mare as they used in the jinete de yeguas, a team member prepares to rope her hind legs. A chalked line is drawn between the wall of the arena and the charro, who this time is on foot. The other mounted team members chase the horse around the arena to where she will run between the wall

and charro. The charro on foot will do a variety of rope tricks while the mare is running. When the mare approaches the charro, he attempts to throw the rope and lasso her hind legs. The roper is allowed three attempts.

Manganas a Caballo

In the *manganas a caballo* (roping the horse) the charro ropes a running horse, but this time the charro is mounted. This event demonstrates how well the charro's horse is trained. His horse must stay as still as possible while the charro spins his lasso around and over his horse preparing to lasso the hind legs of the running mare.

The job of the other three team members is to position the mare between the wall and the mounted charro and to control her speed for the roping charro. One charro is parallel to the mare, one is behind the mare using a rope to chase the mare, and one is parallel to the one with the rope.

Points on these two manganas events are based on the type of rope spins the charro makes and on the execution of the throws. Points are also based on the team's timing and their teamwork. The charro team may request a new mare for the second manganas event without a penalty when they feel that the first mare is tired or is not cooperating.

Paso de la Muerte

Paso de la muerte (the pass of death) is, no doubt, the most dangerous of all charreada events.

A wild mare is released from the pen. A charro rides on his horse bareback parallel to the wild mare. The other team members run behind the mare and beside the charro. Their objective is to assist the charro by trying to keep the wild mare's speed even with that of the charro's horse. They are not allowed to be in front of the mare to slow her down or stop her. To do so would disqualify the team.

The charro must make a clean leap from his horse onto the back of the wild mare, grabbing only her mane for support. If the charro misses and falls, there are several dangers he encounters. He could be run over by the wild mare or his own team members' horses, or fall against the arena wall.

The charro is scored on the timing and the manner in which he leaps on to the animal's back. Points are added for the time the charro remains on its

back. The charro is disqualified if he uses the fence for support, falls from his horse, or falls from the wild mare.

“If you fall, you curl up into a ball, close your eyes and hope you don’t get trampled,” says Javier Bazan, 19, of Austin, Texas. “There’s a rush that flows through your veins if you complete it successfully.”

This event evolved from a time when *mesteneros* (mustangers) would capture wild mustangs to sell. The mesteneros would grab the mane of the wild mustang and leap from their horses on to the back of the mustang and then ride it to a stop.

The Judges

The judges for a charreada competition must be approved by at least three members of the Federación Nacional de Charro (of Mexico or Texas). They must take a test every year to keep their judging credentials updated. Upon passing the exam, they are given an identification card stating that they are official judges and have been approved by the governing organization. The judges must be in complete charro costume when they are judging, and they must be completely objective.



Audience
standing for
anthem salute



Judges inspecting
horse and rider



Horse reining
rayar

Bringing horse
to a quick stop





Rider performing
for judges



Piales event



*Piales event
in action*



Event judges



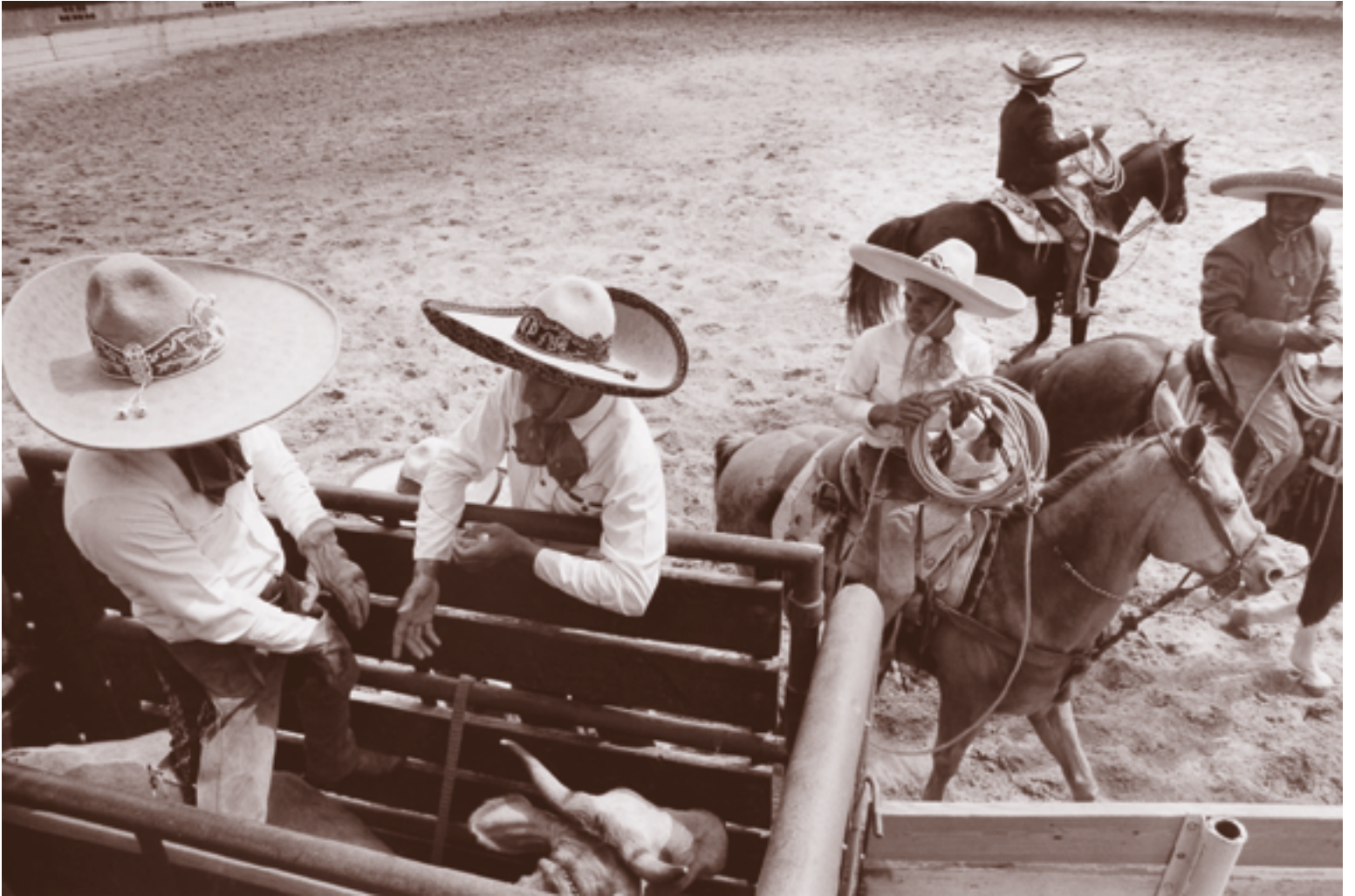
Riders awaiting
their turn to
participate



El coleadero



Tailing of the bull



Charro preparing
for bull ride



Charro and bull
in action



Bull riding and
spectators



Jinete de toro



Charro bull
roping



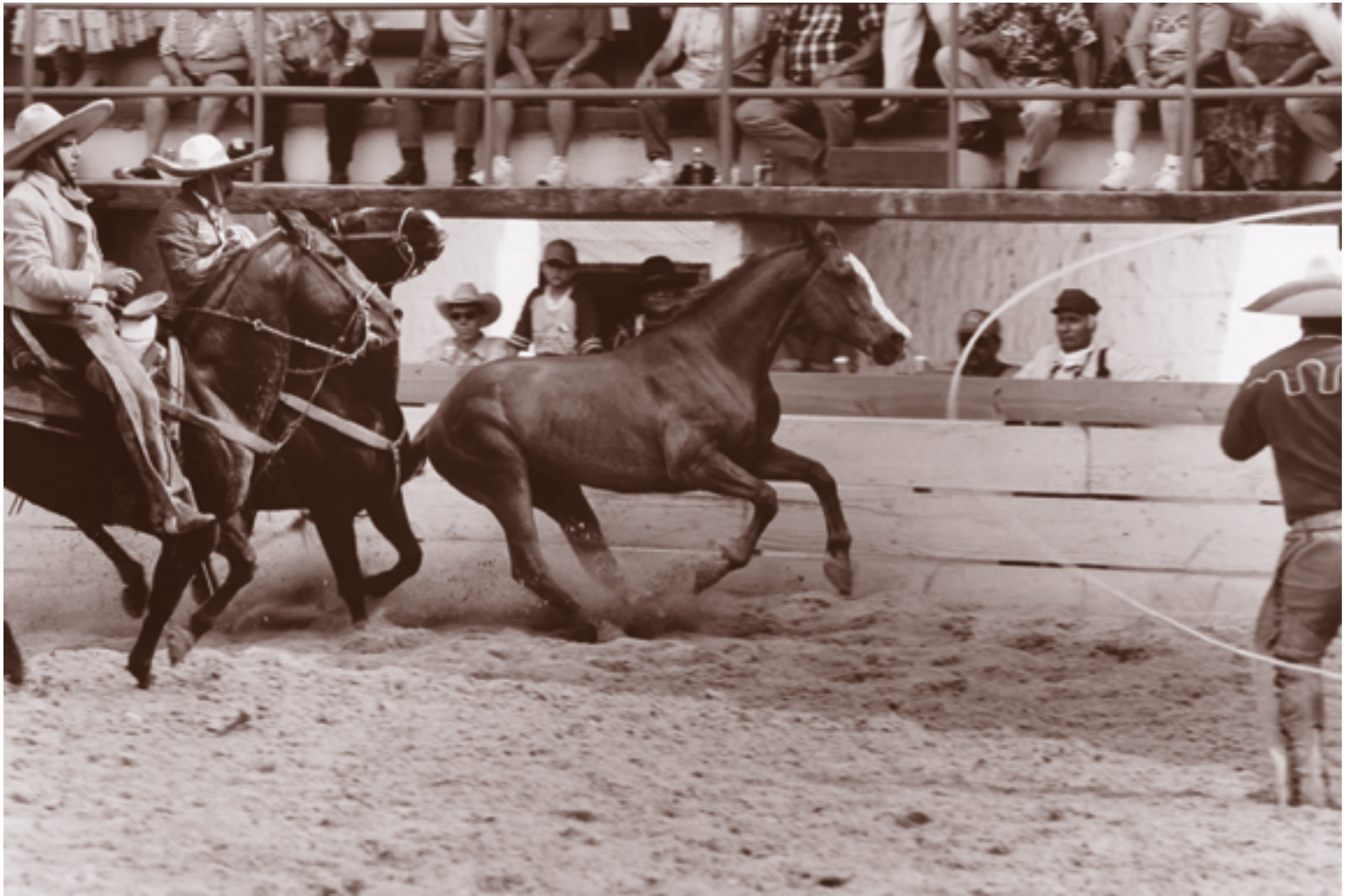
Terna en el ruedo



Team roping



Jinete de yegua



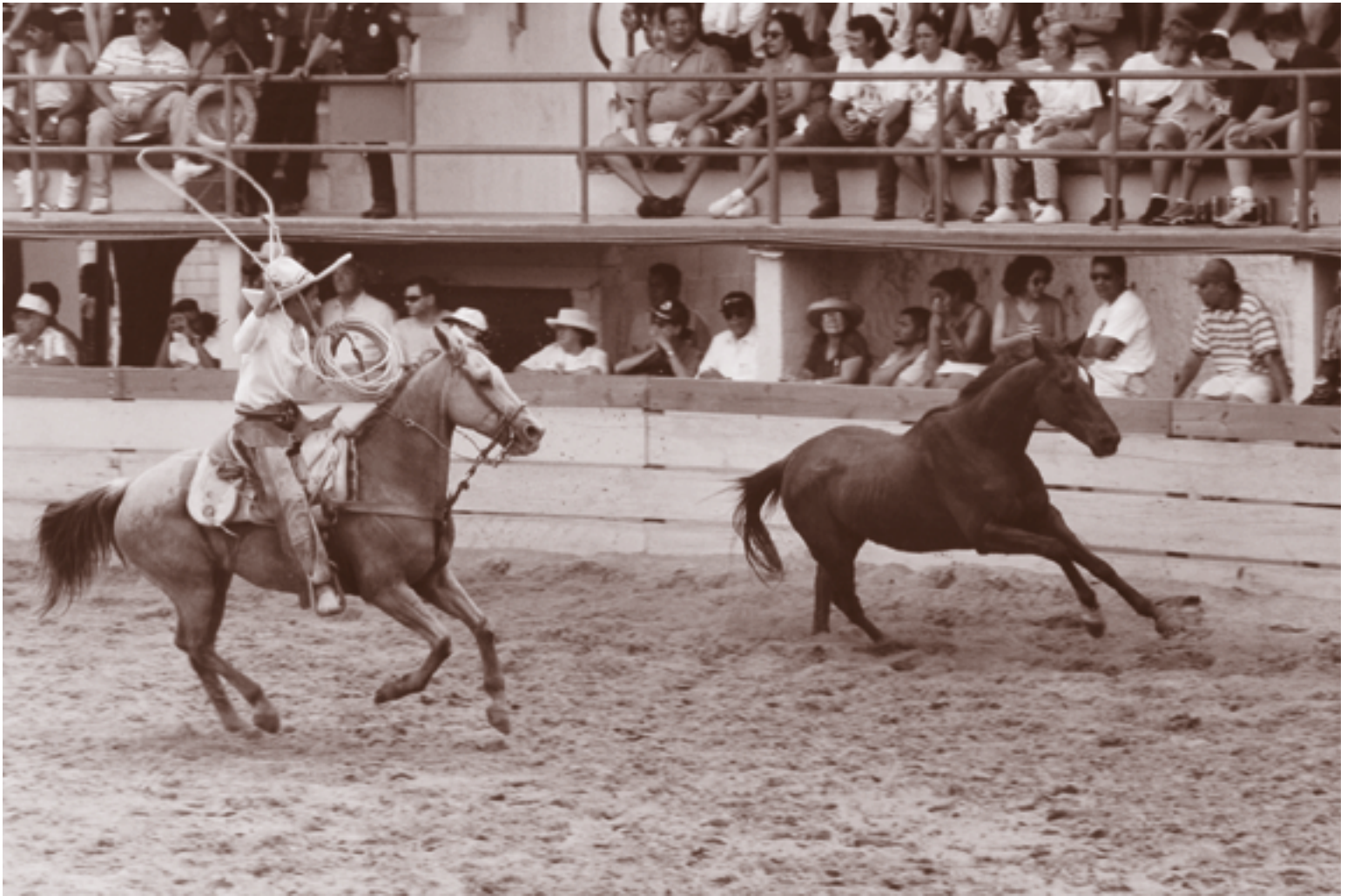
Manganas a pie



Charro showing
roping skills



Attempt to lasso
hind legs



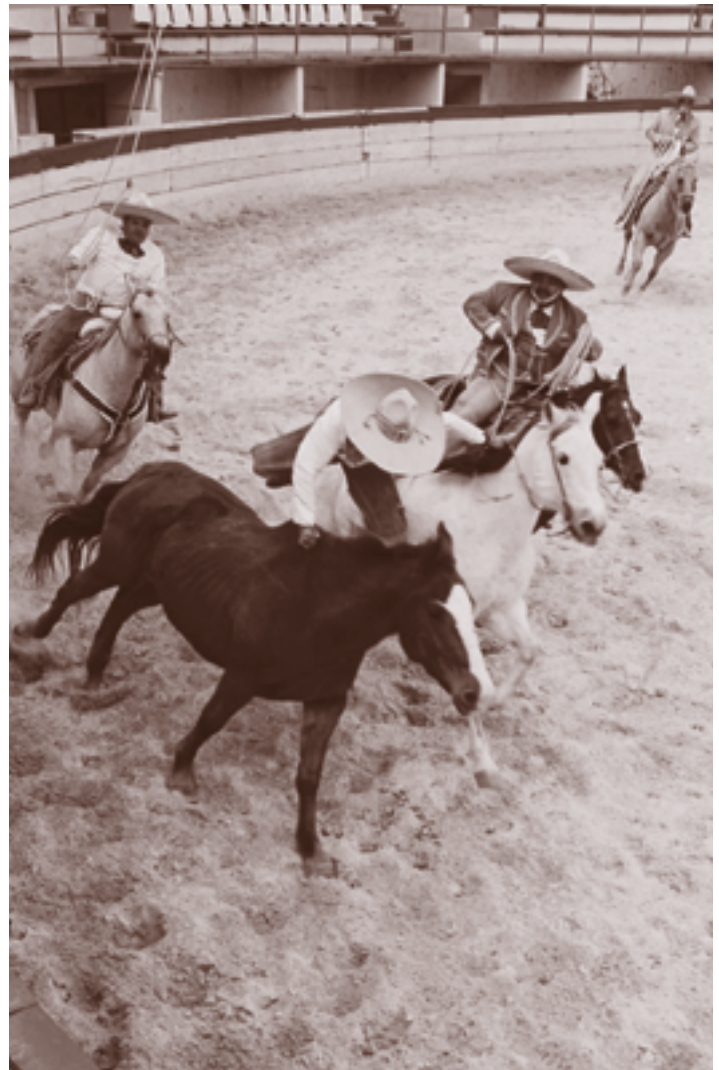
*Manganas a
caballo*



Lazo lariat



Trick roping



Paso de la muerte





Un aplauso
(applauding)

La Escaramuza

Julia Hambric

La escaramuza, performed by the women's equestrian drill team, is an added delight to any charreada. *La escaramuza* directly translated means "the skirmish." The event goes back to the jousting days in medieval times in Spain when the knights would practice their skills by jousting and riding in groups in many intricate patterns. The escaramuza, as it is known today, was not sanctioned for competition until 1989. Before that time, women were allowed to be in parades only and to give exhibitions. They could have informal riding competitions, but no set of rules and regulations were set until the late 1980s.

The escaramuza is an event that adds color and flare to the charreada. It is usually presented between the panhandle events and the arena events. It can also be the first presentation of the charreada or the last event. But having it between the panhandle events and arena events adds a nice break to the charreada. Some see the escaramuza as a dynamic half-time show.

The women in the escaramuza train just as hard to perform as do the men. Many hours are spent learning their drill formations. In order to have a good practice session, the whole team must show up. If one girl does not show, it is very difficult to set the paces and movements to the patterns in which the girls ride. Teams are made up of either eight or twelve members.

There are three categories of escaramuza teams. The categories consist of the young girls' teams (eight to thirteen years of age), the teenage girls' teams (thirteen to eighteen years of age), and the women's teams (eighteen and older). Occasionally, those who are mothers perform on special occasions, such as Mother's Day and Mexican Independence Day.

As Thelma Castro of Vado, New Mexico, a former charra of the escaramuza, relates, “My daughter has been training for the escaramuza since she was five years old. She is now thirteen and sometimes rides with the little girls and sometimes with the older girls.” Thelma Castro was active in the event from 1976 through 1980. Thelma was twice elected Queen of the Escaramuza in New Mexico. In order to be queen, the candidate has to be bilingual and has to be in a position to travel in order to represent the organization.

In an ideal situation, the charra will train with the horse she plans to ride in the escaramuza. The charra and the horse must become as one through all the movements. The horses preferred by the charra are the quarter horse and the Arabian or a mixed Arabian and quarter horse. Just as in the men’s competition, the women want horses noted for their intelligence, endurance, and discipline.

The costumes for the charra can cost as much as several hundred dollars each. The charra’s costume is said to be fashioned after that worn by the legendary female soldier, Adelita, a follower of Pancho Villa. The dresses are ankle length and full-skirted, with a fitted waist and bodice. The bodice will have a high neckline, and the sleeves are long. Under the skirt, the ladies wear white bloomers and a full crinoline petticoat that is starched so that it can stand on its own. The bloomers are tucked into calf-length boots. All riders have their hair pulled back, and teams usually adopt the same hairstyle. The hair is held back by matching clasps decorated with a butterfly bow. All of the girls will wear sombreros. They wear no jewelry, with the exception of earrings. All girls on a team must have identical costumes.

Being on an escaramuza team is a costly sport for girls. If they begin at a young age, they must be provided with new costumes as they grow. They also may have need of five or more costumes at any given time. To completely dress a charra with one costume, boots, sombrero, and sidesaddle could easily cost \$1,000. Another \$500 can be added for each additional dress.

Just as in the men’s events, the Federación de Charros has set specific guidelines for the costume of the charra. The sombrero can be made out of straw or felt and can be trimmed in chamois. The dress must be made of cotton. If a costume is made out of satin or is in florescent colors, the team may be disqualified. The hair must be pulled back with a clasp decorated

with ribbons. Flowers can also be attached to the clasp, but they must not distract from the view of the overall dress. They must wear a *rebozo* (shawl) tied around the waist while performing. When not performing, they wear the *rebozo* across their shoulders, or draped over one shoulder, or around their neck. The *rebozo* must be in the same color as the dress or complimentary to it. All of the equipment on the horses for the *escaramuza* must be made of natural materials. The saddle blanket, reins, and sidesaddle must all be made of such materials as leather or chamois. Plastic and nylon would be grounds for disqualification.

There are many maneuvers that are possible in the *escaramuza*. The team is required to make at least ten moves but may do more, should time allow. Some of the moves are: 1) *la punta* (the sliding stop), 2) *el abanico* (the fan), 3) *cruzados* (the cross), 4) *pasados romanas* (Roman passes), 5) *trenza* (the braid), 6) *caracol* (the shell), 7) *mariposa* (the butterfly), 8) *anillos* (the rings), 9) *coladera* (a narrow pass), 10) *escalera* (the ladder), and 11) *giro* (a rotation or revolution). The team can use any combination of these maneuvers, but may not repeat them.

The *escaramuza* begins much like the first event of the *charreada*. The captain and three other members of the team present their horses to the judges. Each one begins at the end of the panhandle. Each of the four runs her horse into the arena and brings it to a full stop in a marked-off rectangular area in the arena that is twenty meters long and six meters wide. At some *charreadas*, the judges or the *charras* may request that all team members be allowed to present their horses.

A mariachi band plays background music as the *charras* ride into their complicated patterns, barely missing each other. Their horses travel at high speed and have to be prepared to make instant turns. One has to wonder how the horses and their riders know where to go or when and where to turn. Their performance will last approximately eight minutes.

In order to prepare for this dangerous event, the *charras* sit down with their trainer or captain and work out the patterns they want to perform on paper. When everyone is satisfied that this movement will work, they walk their horses through the paces. When all are well versed in the various maneuvers, then they ride their horses through the paces, picking up speed with each practice.

The teams are given the opportunity to draw the patterns they intend to use on the score sheets. The judges then know what to look for and in what order their maneuvers will be presented. The judges give points on how well the girls perform together, how coordinated they are, how much alike they are dressed, how well each charra handles her horse, how close the riders are in their passes, and how well aligned and balanced their movements are. The patterns they follow must illustrate the title of the maneuver. For example, the escalera must look like a ladder. In order to see these patterns clearly, the judges remain in their tower, overlooking the lienzo.

The charras must be in good physical condition. Their bodies take a natural pounding during their rides, and they must be able to handle being thrown from their horse. Their muscles must be strong in order to keep their bodies balanced and centered on their horses while riding sidesaddle. They must also be alert and have good concentration. If a charra's concentration leaves for just an instant, it could mean a collision between riders and their horses, and someone could get injured or killed.



Escaramuza
mothers



Salute



Riding salute



Escaramuza
charra entrance



Escaramuza
charra entrance



Escaramuza
charra riding



Adelitas



Marinella
Martinez, past
charra queen



Picking up
riding speed





*Cruzada,
a narrow pass*



El abanico
(the fan)



Cruzados
(the cross)



El abanico
(the fan)



El abanico
(the fan)



Charra being
helped



Trenza (the braid)



Sonrisa del saludo



End of the event

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