

TWO-PEAT FOR MERLE NEWTON

Forty dog, handler and horse teams competed in the Rodear America 2019 Texas Fall Bash Finals, but Merle Newton came out on top for the second year straight.

The 2019 Rodear America Texas Fall Bash Finals once again saw Merle Newton atop the leader board. This year, Newton and 8-year-old "SJ" took home the win. The dog, owned by Steve Robinson, won the Open division title with a perfect 150 score.

"I was giving him a chance to prove us old guys can still do it," said Newton. "[SJ] is 8 years old, my horse is 20 years old and I'm 74 years old. It was a senior show! SJ is super broke. I trained him as a puppy for some people who lived in upstate New York, and then Steve bought SJ from them. Recently, he sold his ranch in Texas and he is letting me keep SJ for a while. I thought I'd give the old boy a chance."

The rodear cowdog competition showcases how a working dog and horseback handler can accomplish cattle work in a set amount of time. In 10 minutes or less, teams had to move cattle through three obstacles.

By Kate Bradley Byars
Photos by Allison Walker



Open Champion Merle Newton.

In 2018, Newton won the event with "Puncher." Within the last year, the rodear style competitions have increased in attendance, Newton said, which was evidenced by the 40 preliminary teams competing October 8 and 9 at the John Justin Arena in Fort Worth. The final round was held on October 10.

For SJ and Newton, it was simply another exhibition in front of a crowd, which is something the long-time duo has done across the country.

"I've used him for demonstrations a lot, like at the National Cattleman's Association and at rodeos like the Cow Palace in San Francisco," said Newton.

While it was a textbook run where SJ took all three cattle through the toughest part of the obstacle course, the duo were close to timing out. Though the teams also competed on an obstacle course in the preliminaries, the course changed daily. The time it takes sorting cattle—handlers get to pick which cattle to work through the course—is added to the obstacle time for the final. Newton and the dog completed it in 9 minutes and 49 seconds.

"We were pushing right up to the clock," said Newton. "They had a rope tied on that gate and it would not open. I had to get off of my horse to get the latch

open on the gate. Ole SJ held the cows for me, of course, and it took extra time. The courses vary so much. It is about stockmanship and being smarter than a cow."

Newton lovingly talks about his "old partner" SJ and how special he is to work. Similar to riders and horses making solid partnerships, rodear dogs and handlers also form the bond. Holding the rodear event with the Snaffle Bit Futurity® allows for an audience that appreciates dogs to enjoy watching them work.

"Most people that compete in other cowdog competitions can't handle the horse well enough, but our competitions require both horse and dog handling,"



Non Pro Champion Clint McDaniel.

said Newton of the Rodear America event. "It is a cowboy deal. A lot of the horse people enjoy it, but they don't have quite enough time to mess with dogs. We have rodears from New York to California and Oregon to Texas, so there is an opportunity to do it."

Non Pro Champion Clint McDaniel and "Gus" navigated the course for a 140 score in 7 minutes and 14 seconds. The dog is owned by former U.S. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson.

Competitors left Fort Worth with more than \$15,000 in cash and prizes, including custom-made saddles awarded to the champions. For more on Rodear America, visit rodearamerica.com.

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