

# Harrel Clinic a first-ever

by Laurel Wood

Taking part in World Cutting Horse champion Leon Harrel's first ever Canadian clinic was a unique experience. During the first morning's introductions, it quickly became evident that the participants and spectators were truly at a world-class event.

Clinic hosts Ken and Karen Mix had their facility at K&K Livestock, Calgary, AB, working to perfection and Leon was in his best form stating that the mantra of the clinic was for everyone "to do the common thing uncommonly well."

As the clinics attendees listed their cutting experience, Leon was presented with individuals and or horses that had never cut before through to highly competitive cutters. Working with a group possessing such diverse experience levels is definitely not a common



thing. But as the clinic took form, it soon became apparent that everyone was going to walk away with the experience of a lifetime and that Leon held his mantra true not only for the student but for himself as well.

The process of becoming a "cutter" can be intimidating if one is on the outside looking in. Thankfully, the odds are in your favour. This is a very user-friendly crowd. Clinic hosts Ken and Karen Mix will always take the time to answer questions. Leon is a master at drawing people into conversation. If you are too shy at first to ask those important questions or do not know what to ask he will have you comfortable and engaged within minutes.

The clinic created a camaraderie among the participants that will carry on long past the clinics finish. By the end of the first morning, Leon had everyone laughing and not only focused on

their own personal goals, but cheering on each other as challenges were met and overcome.

During the clinic Leon emphasized that it is true that cutting horses are trained to work on their own. But that the rider has a big influence on how well the horse works. In Leon, students find a knowledgeable coach that will help you learn to ride your cutter and identify for yourself when you have rounded a turn, missed the stop or were out of sync with the cow.

The final day was "show day" and everyone was challenged with the goal to be a winner in the cut-

ting arena and to do "the common thing uncommonly well". The students were divided into two teams and given a tune-up lesson in the morning followed the opportunity to ride two scored runs in front of a judge in the afternoon. This allowed the novice cutter a chance to experience a "show" and be prepared for the time that they step into the arena at a sanctioned event. While it also offered the experienced competitor had a chance to work on their style in the arena and get some key pointers on developing style while showing off your horse.

If you are new to the sport of cutting by the end of the clinic you really will have been bitten by the cutting bug. Or if you were an experienced cutter coming into the clinic you are definitely going to enhance your ability to enjoy the "best seat in the house".

