

History of the Valley Penning Association: The Early Years

By Chris Pankau, DVM

The sport of Team Penning originally started out in the 1950's with a three-sided pen-- no wing and the pen was in the center of the arena--and the time limit was five minutes. You were judged on how effectively you put the cows in as well as on time. Some events used dogs as well. In the early 1980's there was a revitalization of interest in Team Penning in the Santa Ynez valley.

There were very few practice clubs and the main competitions around the country were known as "**World Championship Team Pennings.**" These events cost 100.00/person to enter, so it was expensive practice... I remember penning at **Flag is Up Farm** at a fundraiser for the Republican Party, **San Marcos Camp** (subsequently renamed **Live Oak** after the Rancheros Visitadores did not renew their lease,) the **Alisal**, the **Luton Ranch**, **Las Vegas**, and **San Francisco** at the **Cow Palace** after the end of the Cattleman's Day - all were known as "**World Championship Team Pennings.**" Locally, **Brushpoppers** in Nipomo started to hold competitions.



Young Polly Firestone Team Penning with her family at The Alisal

Up until 1987 the **World Championship Team Penning Finals** were held at **San Marcos Camp** and sponsored by **Pea Soup Andersons**. There was an Open and Pro-Am division. **Bill Deputy** was the flagger. (Bill along with **Forrest Riegel** were instrumental in helping us with the grading and mowing in the early years of the Santa Ynez Valley Equestrian Center in the mid 90's.) **Helen Trammel** was our first scheduler, a tireless volunteer and a timer for 11 years.

A group of us got together in the fall of 1987 (ten riders including **Willy Chamberlin, Ann Chamberlin, Carlos Ortiz, Alan Nilsby**, and others I cannot remember right now) at my office and decided we would start a "practice club" so we would stand a better chance of winning at the major team penning events around the country. Initially we limited the membership to 30 so we would have 10 teams. We approached **Rob Purdom**, a local cattle owner, to see if he would provide the cattle. He said he would do it, if we welded an arena and painted it for him. Rob provided the materials, so we labored after work and on weekends to build that arena, which still stands off of Ontiveros Street in Los Olivos. Rob provided the pipe and materials as well as the cattle. Our cost per go was 10.00/person or 30.00/team. Rob had roping cattle, which are not the best for team penning, as they do not respect a horse very much, so eventually we talked to **Tom Shelly (Camp 4 on San Lucas Ranch)** **Jerry Williams (the 101 Sales Yard)** and **Sherrick Grantham** (where **Russ Westfall** was, and the **Branquinhos** are now). They all had arenas and the kind of cattle we needed. We would rotate providers and arenas and that kept it competitive... **Kay McWilliams** (a local artist and **Vern's** wife) drew our first logo of the three penners working cows... We all ordered jackets with the logo on them.

We hosted some very talented World Championship team penning clinicians and put on clinics. We videotaped our runs, so we could figure out what went right and what went wrong, which kept the finger pointing to a minimum.

I was the first president from 1988 to 1993; I believe **Bill Keese** and **Jerry Plier** followed me. Our membership numbers grew to 250; we would have 180 plus cattle at our larger events. All the cattle were used twice, with one herd reserved for the Top Ten in the finals. It made for very long days.

We also felt we could keep our membership's interest stimulated by doing a series of three events with prizes at the end of the series. We penned in the Spring and

Summer and sorted in the Fall and the Winter if the weather cooperated. Financially speaking, we typically lost money on the Penning but made it up with the Sorting due to decreased cattle costs.

Eventually **Sherrick** moved to Arizona and **Tom** moved to Los Olivos, so we spent many years with **Jerry Williams** as he could provide enough cattle. In recent years VPA has moved to the **Santa Ynez Valley Equestrian Center**.

Many of our early members have been lost over time, and the rest of us are now “**Senior Penners**.” Our early volunteers and members of VPA were also instrumental in reviving the Santa Ynez Valley Horse Show Association, which originally started in 1953 and hosted various equine events in a field across the road from the Maverick Saloon. The Show Association was renamed Santa Ynez Valley Equestrian Association in the mid 1990’s, when it was gifted **Jody Carsello’s** property on Refugio. Many VPA members were heavily involved in building the Santa Ynez Valley Equestrian Center facility in addition to volunteering to help run the annual Fiesta Stock Horse Show and Rodeo. The excess funds from the Old Spanish Days Rodeo, when there were any, were donated to the Equestrian Center and became a significant part of the seed money used to build the facilities we use and enjoy today. In fact, the main lower level arena is named the “OSD” arena in honor of Old Spanish Days.