



The course pits horse and rider against hills, washes, gullies and water hazards.

FOR COWGIRLS AND COWBOYS WITH FAST HORSES

“Suicide Race” Tests Skill, Endurance

By Doug Sorenson

Two hundred years ago American Indian braves challenged each other to horse races across the open country. Later, cowboys raced on horseback from butte to butte on the western plains in friendly competition. This kind of cross country horse race survives today and is experiencing a rebirth as a “suicide race”.

“It’s the only true American horse race,” says Frank Kuntz, president of the Great Plains Suicide Riders Assn. “It’s not a Kentucky Derby or an English steeple chase. It’s a cross country race over natural terrain that tests the endurance and skill of both horse and rider.”

The association was started a few years ago to standardize the rules and conditions for suicide races when they became a popular spectator sport. It now sanctions a half dozen races each year in North Dakota, South Dakota, and Minnesota.

One of the outstanding suicide races is run every September at the Long X Trail Ranch in Grassy Butte, N. Dak. The fifth annual race last year attracted 40 riders and 1,200 spectators. Riders compete for more than \$6,000 in prize money.

Merv Wike, who operates Long X Trail Ranch and promotes the race, says, “Though it’s a tough ride, everything is done to ensure the safety of horses and riders. It pits them against the elements. Our one-mile course has straightaways, hills, washes, gullies and a water hazard.”

Riders and horses are trained and conditioned for the race, which is run by the rules of the Great Plains association. Rules require that horses be inspected for soundness before the race, that the track be inspected, and that eight judges monitor the race.

Riders usually wear jeans and shirts rather than fancy riding clothes because they encounter water and mud along the course. More riders have begun to wear safety helmets, but the rules don’t require them. Also, some riders tape their horse’s legs for the race.

The Long X Trail Ranch race is open class for men and women of ages 16 to 51. Riders under 18 must have parental consent. Riders draw lots and participate in one of the heats of five horses each. The fastest time takes a \$2,500 prize, and there are cash prizes for second through tenth place.

“We had Appaloosas, quarter horses, thoroughbreds, and crossbreeds in this year’s race,” says Wike. “Many of the horses and riders specialize in suicide riding and race in all of the major races in our area.”

“Top winner last year was Kent Bunting, Westbrook, Minn., with a time of 2:35.17. Two women, Felica Kuntz, Linton, N. Dak., and Lisa Schauer, Storden, Minn. placed 9th and 10th.

Last year’s purse of \$6,800 was the largest ever and came from donations by agricultural businesses and from the \$75-per-horse entry fees.

The association plans some growth in the number of suicide races held, but wants to have only a few, high quality races that will attract the best riders and an increasing number of spectators.

For more information, contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Frank Kuntz, President, Great Plains Suicide Riders Assn., Rt. 1, Linton, N. Dak. 58552 (ph 701 782-4323).

**FARM
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Editor’s Note: Most of what goes into Ag World stems from story ideas sent to us by readers. This special section of FARM SHOW touches on the lighter side of farming and ranching — everything from human interest stories, to unusual hobbies, to unique things farm families are doing for fun or profit.

If you’ve read or heard a good Ag World type story you’d like to share with others, send it to: FARM SHOW, Box 704, Lakeville, Minn. 55044.



Powered by a 450 cc. Honda motorcycle engine, the car is equipped with a two speed automatic transmission.

“NEXT BEST THING TO FLYING”

Airplane-Shaped Auto “Takes Off” In Iowa

It looks like an airplane but this low-priced cross between a car and an airplane stays on the ground.

The new Litestar auto was developed by Wellbuilt, Inc., Carroll, Iowa. It’s basically a motorcycle on a 16-ft. long bullet-shaped frame. The driver sits in front under an airplane-like bubble canopy that gives a wide view of the surrounding countryside.

The car is outfitted with a 450 cc. Honda motorcycle engine with a 2-speed automatic transmission. Although it’s not designed for fast acceleration, the car easily cruises at highway speeds or better, and has the capacity to go faster. The manufacturer says that the 123-in. wheelbase — longer than many full-size autos — gives the Litestar a better ride than most compacts.

“The car is great for country driving because it gives you a wide panorama of the road and the surrounding countryside, almost as if you were in an airplane,” says Darrel Crummett, manager of Wellbuilt, Inc.

The car has a fiberglass body that requires a minimum of maintenance. The driver sits in front and the passenger sits behind. One drawback of current models is that there’s no reverse gear. Crummett says plans call for this feature to be added in the near future, along with air-conditioning and a larger engine.

The Litestar sells for \$6,500.

For more information, contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Wellbuilt, Inc., Box 517, Carroll, Iowa 51401 (ph 712 792-6601).