

## Team Penning

By Katie Olean

Teamwork, speed, skill and communication all tie in with a little luck for the western sport of team penning. It all started years ago with a practical objective. In order to brand, doctor or transport single cows, ranchers first had to separate them from the herd. As animals of prey, separating a single cow from the safety of the herd was not an easy task. Add two riding teammates and a ticking clock to the mix, and you've got the present-day basics for team penning.

The event begins with 30 cows, each marked zero through nine in multiples of three, at one end of an arena (three cows are marked with a zero, three are marked with a one, three are marked with a two, etc.). A team of three penners lines up and an announcer calls a number. The riders then race against the clock to strategically separate each cow (three in all) with that number. Once separated, the cows must be gathered into a pen at the other end of the arena.

"It's really interesting because these people need to know what each other are doing," says Carl Weirich, executive director of the United States Team Penning Association. "They need to be able to read cattle and they need to have a game plan before they go in."

To make matters more difficult, a foul line is drawn in the arena. If at any time more than four cows cross the foul line, the team results with a no time and is disqualified from the competition. Depending on the difficulty level of the competition, penners have between 60 and 90 seconds to complete their task. The team with the fastest time wins. "The timing is what makes it exciting," Weirich says. "It's very fast paced."

While team penning continues to grow, there are several options for those who are interested in trying it out. One of the best ways is to attend a beginner or novice clinic. Clinics can help eliminate frustration by helping newcomers learn the most effective methods of penning. Clinics also offer a place to meet other penners and possible partners for competitions.

If attending a clinic isn't a feasible option, there are other things you can do. Simply working with cows on the ground is one. "It's called cattle sense," Weirich says. "You learn how to position yourself to get the cattle to move in the direction you want them to go."

Another way to learn is by attending team penning competitions. Experiencing the event and watching the techniques of other penners can help familiarize you with the sport. It can also be a good way to make contacts with other team penners.

Organized team penning competitions take place all over the country throughout the year. For more information on team penning in your region, visit [www.ustpa.com](http://www.ustpa.com).