

Champions make Del Norte debut

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The Redwood Coast Rodeo had a brand new look this year as the Coastal Farm and Ranch Challenge of Champions Tour, based out of Oregon, made its debut at the Del Norte County Fair on Saturday.

“We decided that we needed a change because we were having a hard time getting the riders to come up,” said Kim Floyd, CEO of the Del Norte County Fair. “We had wonderful stock and a great stock contractor for many years, but since we are so far away and the Ukiah Rodeo was on top of us it was really difficult to get the riders to buy into driving all the way up to Crescent City.”

Although there were fewer total events than in past years with the California Cowboys Professional Rodeo Association, there were lots more bull riders in Tri-Counties Bank Area on Saturday. “We had been doing the same thing for the last (18) years, so we thought we would try something new,” said Herk Sturdevant, who took over as president of the Red-wood Coast Rodeo Committee this year.

“We thought that we would try the Bulls and Barrels and see how that goes. I think there was a pretty good turnout, so we will see if we continue to do the same thing. It turned out pretty good.” For the last decade the

Challenge of Champions Tour has been focusing on bull riding as the main attraction of their events. “All the guys here rode bulls professionally and our idea was to put together a tour where guys like to get on good bulls,” said Jason Mattox, the promoter and producer of the Challenge of Champions Tour.

“They bring good bulls for these guys to get on and we bring in the best guys. It makes for good rides, it’s great for the crowd, and great for the sponsors.” Although the tour brought in all of the bull riders, with the exception of junior bull rider Quenton Phillips, there were still several ways for community members to participate.

“We did the barrel race to try to get more of the adults and kids from the community involved in the rodeo,” Sturdevant said. Younger kids also had a few chances to get into the action with the return of mutton bustin’, as well as the always popular calf scramble which brings kids out to try to nab a ribbon tied to the tail of a calf for a brand new bike.

Mattox said he was particularly impressed with all of the various things to do for kids throughout the Del Norte County Fair in his first visit.

“I enjoyed your fair all the way around. We go to a lot of towns, and just the way this event was run, the calf scrambles, and all the kid stuff was great,” he said. “That allowed us to be part of that. To see what you guys do for your kids is awesome around here.”

Not only was this the Challenge of Champions debut at the Del Norte County Fair, it was also its first time competing in California on a tour that already includes Oregon, Washington, Idaho and Nevada.

“The Del Norte Fair took a chance and brought us in, and we are grateful to be able to do a show in California now,” Mattox said.

This year Challenge of the Champions featured 16 professional bull riders, in addition to five junior bull riders. Phillips, of Crescent City, was the only local to climb on a bull this year.

“That was cool because it is always good to have a local bull rider,” Mattox said.

Out in the arena it was a pretty good day for the bulls, as they proved too feisty for most of the bull riders to complete their full eight second ride to register a score.

TJ Gray of Dairy, Oregon kicked off the day with a long enough ride on Cool Whip and ended up with the best score of the day at 84.5. Jesse Aitken from Covell barely passed the eight second threshold while riding White Soldier, moving him into second place after the first two riders of the day. They ended up being the only bull riders to qualify for a score for the rest of the afternoon other than Lane Vaughan, who took first place in the junior bull ride.

Taylor Barrington and her horse, Cooper, came through for a first place finish in the senior barrel race on Saturday. Alysha Lee rode Jackson to a first place finish in the junior barrel race.

After their first trip to the Del Norte County Fair, Mattox said Challenge of the Champions hopes to be back.

“You guys have a great crowd,” Mattox noted. “Everybody was enthused the whole time, and everybody was just jacked up for a great event. We were pretty excited for it because the town is really inviting to us all. It was cool. We have had a great time here and we would like to come back.”