

# RIDE 'EM COWBOY



A KORERO Report

A good tough game of Rugby is enjoyable, and ice-hockey, they say, is fast, but for sheer concentrated excitement and thrills give me the hurricane-deck of a thoroughly roused cattle-pony. There's more action packed into sixty seconds of such experience than sixty minutes of anything else.

The usual "Western" thriller, when it includes, as it almost invariably does, an account of taming an "outlaw," gives the impression that it is a pitched battle of unbridled ferocity between horse and rider for an hour or so. The picture needs toning down. Although a bucking horse indulges in some weird contortions, they only last in their intensity for about a minute as a rule. Even outlaws must breathe, and between each fierce bout the "bad 'un" spends his time in harmless pig-jumps. Then when he has got his wind he will get back to business. The whole affair will last about twenty minutes to half an hour.

For mustering sheep and cattle in New Zealand a horse is indispensable, and so there is still plenty of horse-breaking. There are the regular horse-breakers who go the round of the big sheep and cattle stations each spring and "bust" the

unbroken horses. On a big station the horse-breaker will stay three months, perhaps. Two horses a week, sometimes less, is his rate, and when he has handled, bitten, and mouthed them for three days, and ridden them for another one, they are turned over to the shepherds to ride. They still need to be taught paces and manners—canter, trot, and, above all, walk. Riding after, and cutting out, cattle will teach them to answer the reins, and waiting by gates will give them patience. Many of them resent their newly found servitude and buck at unexpected moments. All of which adds to the "shepherd's sweet lot."

Many shepherds break in their own ponies, and their method is an abbreviated and rough-and-ready copy of the horse-breaker's. Sunday being the one free day on a station, the shepherd will run his pony in before breakfast, and afterwards rope it. Then during the morning he handles it, puts on a bridle with a mouthing bit, and, before lunch, gets on its accoutrements—saddle, breast-plate, and crupper. Round the yard prances and minces the animal, wondering what the blazes has happened.

After lunch a little more handling, and, finally, with the help of a couple of friends, the hectic side of the business. Horse and rider, as the cavalry-sergeant said to the recruit when he gave him a freshly-broken horse to ride, have got to find each other out. The rider's pals squat on the rails of the horse-yard and watch the fun. If the rider is any good, the pony soon knows its master and "picks up." It is a superficial method of breaking in, and the pony will try at odd intervals during the following week to "dump" its burden, and after a spell in the open paddock will make a determined effort. If the rider is thrown, it is a more difficult business next time, for the animal has tasted power. Another couple of falls, and unless someone is there ready to show the pony his mistake, an outlaw is in the making.