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Charros charge discrimination

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By [Sheila Sanchez](#)

If county supervisors ban Mexican-style rodeo then they should also ban American rodeo, say Charros who claim they're being discriminated against.

On Feb. 12, supervisors asked county staff to prepare a study examining whether an ordinance could be adopted that would reiterate state law prohibiting cruelty to animals and prohibit tripping or felling an equine animal, or intentionally tripping, dragging, or felling any bovine animal by the tail. The report is expected to be completed at the beginning of April.

"It's definitely discrimination against us," said Martin Marquez, president of Asociaci-n de Charros El Herradero de San Martin. "They're always looking for ways to bug our culture and molest our tradition."

And though Marquez and other charros don't like to point fingers at their American cowboy counterparts, they're ready for the sake of protecting their sport.

As Marquez puts it: "If we're not going to steer from the tail then they're not going to steer from the horn."

To animal rights activist Alfredo Kuba, president of the Mountain View-based Defend Animals Coalition, charros and rodeo cowboys are the same.

"For the sake of culture they perpetrate atrocities and cruelties toward other creates that cannot defend themselves. You got to be totally stupid not to realize that tripping an animal to the ground is cruel and inhumane," Kuba said.

Eric Mills, coordinator of Action for Animals, believes supervisors may not consider banning rodeo events because there's a lot of money involved in rodeo, unlike charreadas, which are conducted by the charros for prestige and trophies. Rodeo has multi-million dollar sponsors, charreadas don't, Mills said.

Charros feel they're also without political power. At Armando Castaneda's 17-acre ranch off Bloomfield Avenue in unincorporated Gilroy, Marquez and others gathered on a recent sunny afternoon to show their sport is not cruel as portrayed by animal rights activists.

"What worries me is they (supervisors) want to take away the charrería," said Castaneda. "What they're protesting are tailings, done by tailers. I don't like tailings." They're also here to protest what they perceive as discrimination and bias against specific exercises or events in Mexican-style rodeo or charreadas.

The exercises are known in Spanish as "colas en el lienzo," and "terna en el ruedo." Colas en el Lienzo, or coleadero (arena bull tailing) is similar to bull dogging except the rider does not dismount; the charro rides along the left side of the bull, wraps its tail around its right leg, and tries to cause the bull to fall and roll as he rides past. Terna en el Ruedo (team of three) is a roping event in which charros attempt to rope a bull - one by its neck, one by its hind legs and the last then ties its feet together. They have 10 minutes to accomplish the feat.

Charros stress that if these exercises are banned by Santa Clara County supervisors then so should calf roping and steer wrestling events in American rodeo.

"People should be in jail for calf roping. It's a baby animal. Would you do that to a dog?" Mills said.

Castaneda fears that Santa Clara County could join Alameda and Contra Costa counties in banning rodeo exercises. This summer, Castaneda has 10 new youths participating in his free charrería program, which teaches Gilroy youth about the sport. The 22-year Gilroy resident has been riding since infancy. "Venimos de caballo," he says, which translated means, "We come from the horse."