

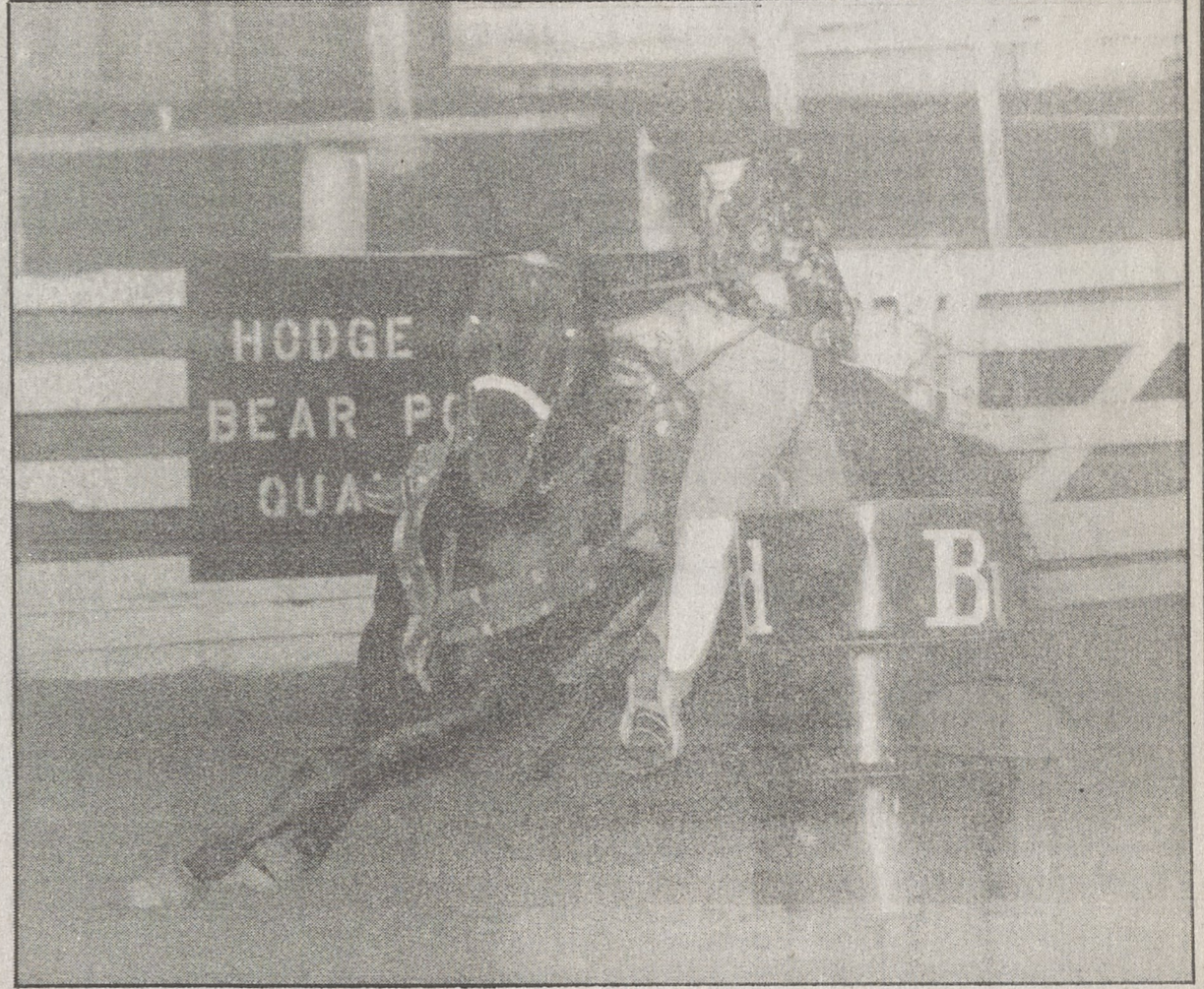
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HORSING AROUND - Steve Keeter of Grover competes in the bareback riding contest at a recent championship rodeo.



BARREL RACING - Kim Keeter and Richie make the turns around a barrel in competition at a recent championship rodeo.

Horsin' around

Steve and Kim Keeter share love for riding in weekend rodeos

By ELIZABETH STEWART
of The Herald Staff

The Circle K Stables in Grover got its name because of its owner's love for horses and after Steve and Kim Keeter began a do-it-yourself project to renovate their early turn of the century home. It took six years and hundreds of sweat hours by the young couple to transform the house and barn into a beautiful country home in the city limits of Grover.

Steve Keeter and Kim Wilson were married in July 1986 and started working immediately evenings and weekends to renovate the house on Carolina Avenue across from Grover School. The eight acres joins the farm property of Steve's parents, Mr. and Mrs. Tommy Keeter.

"When we decided to buy the property from the Warren Hicks estate we were interested in the big barn to house our animals because Steve liked to trade horses. It was a big job building new stalls and putting up fences," said Kim.

Because they love animals it's natural that two horses and a pony romp in the large barnyard with a family of goats and dogs.

But for a few seconds every weekend Kim and Steve are transformed into cowgirl and cowboy at area rodeo events. Their young daughter, Kelsey, 4, and fans applaud as they gallop through events such as bareback riding and barrel racing.

Steve got rodeo fever four years ago riding bucking horses. His expertise has paid off for him at several events. He is one of the few young riders who successfully mastered bareback in a short time. In fact, he was voted the most promising upcoming cowboy in a recent competition.

Kim has been riding for three years and may have been a cowgirl from the day she was born, inheriting her horsemanship talents from her family who have rodeoed all their lives. Kim's brother, Chris Wilson, and her cousins, Chuck and Timmy Brown of Gaffney, SC, have top reputations as riders.

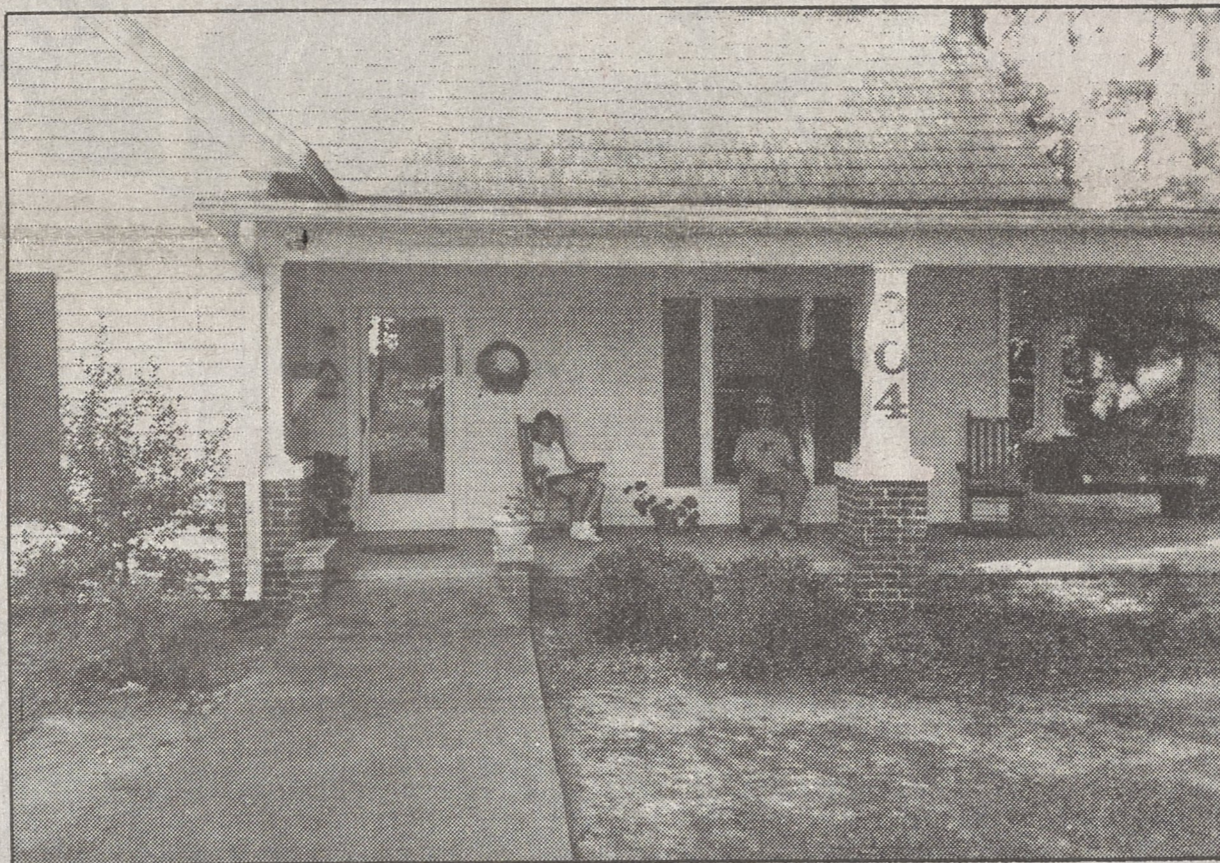
Being the sons of Ed Brown, the man who started the famous rodeo in Blacksburg more than 20 years ago, may have something to do with that reputation. Chuck and Timmy Brown have done more than their share to make their names known on the rodeo circuit. Kim says all three men have that beautifully crafted championship saddles and silver belt buckles they compare to football players Super Bowl rings. When other cowboys see the family coming they know the competition is going to be tough.

Chuck competes in bull riding and Timmy rides bulls and also bareback horses. Chris is also an accomplished rider.

The sport is dangerous, according to Steve, who broke two fingers, dislocated a collar bone, and was bruised several times when he first started riding bucking horses. He rode 10 horses before he was bucked off and made up his mind to master the event. At each rodeo the cowboys draw to ride bucking horses and are scored. The rider with the highest points earns the cash. The catch is that the rider must stay on the horse eight seconds.

"Getting out there on the back of a horse, man it feels like riding a big old puff of wind. It feels free," says Kim, an X-ray technician at Upstate Carolina Medical Center in Gaffney. In the barnyard of her home she rehearses Richie, her beautiful black, for the next barrel race. Kelsey, astride Cotton, a friendly white pony, watches. Kim teaches her horse to bend around the barrels, explaining that even if the horse is fast as lightning he must stay close to the barrel to excel.

Both Steve and Kim say that rodeo is addictive. "It's an indescribable feeling of exhilaration," says Steve, who works at Motor Panels in Grover. "We work all week and go to these rodeo events and get



Kim and Steve Keeter are pictured on the big porch of their beautifully restored Circle K Stables in Grover. The young couple restored the former Hicks homeplace themselves and decorated in a country motif.

on our horses and the pressure just goes away," says Kim, who highly recommends rodeo for the whole family.

Cowboys for Christ is a religious program that is popular now in the rodeo circuit, she says, and Steve leads the worship service when the regular minister is absent. Kim says that the services are held at every rodeo and has developed a family closeness with the rodeo crowds. "We have made so many new friends of all ages at the rodeo and look forward to seeing them at all of the events which are held almost year-round," Kim said.

Most of the events raise money for volunteer fire departments and other charitable organizations. Other popular events are calf roping, goat tying, team roping, and bull riding.

Kim's horse goes along to every event. "Once you start, you just live to rodeo. There's no stopping you out there. It's so free," says Kim.

It's the excitement that brings the people in, according to Steve, who says the weather doesn't stop the fans who turn out for rodeo events. People watchers find plenty to occupy them. The rodeo riders take their share of spills, but even so they dress up in their Western best.

The men sport starched shirts, jeans, wide hats, and cowboy boots. The women wear the same with a few fancy touches. The top fashions in rodeo shirts are the Aztec Indian shirts, the more flashy designs.

Versatile Kim has made his and her outfits and tops them with white wide-brimmed cowboy hats. Kelsey also has a costume, although she only rides with her mother when she is preparing for the event. Kelsey watches from the sidelines with family friends.

Riders come from across the Southeast to participate in the top events. Some of them are in their 20's like the Keeters and others are older. It isn't unusual to see women over 40 participating in the barrel races and ropers 60 years and older. The rough stock event is usually limited to people 35-40.

Steve was a big winner in three recent competitions, racking up \$700 for one of the events. Riders pay \$25-\$35 entry fees. As many as 400-800 riders participate in some events.

Kim and Steve's love for the out-of-doors is evident in their comfortable three bedroom house. The wrap-around porch is decorated with Williamsburg blue rocking chairs and a big swing to match the Williamsburg blue shutters of the white house soon be replaced with siding. When Kim was pregnant with their daughter, she said she relaxed by painting heart designs on the chairs and bear designs on the swings. The couple have also painted and papered the house, keeping the country motif in blues and cream colors to enhance the homey atmosphere.

Original hardwood floors in the bedrooms and corner cupboards in the kitchen are reflective of the period of architecture of the original portion of the house which used to be a three room white frame and the only one on Carolina Avenue. Granny quilts and patchworks in the bedrooms were gifts of Kim's grandmother, Grace Wilson, and her great-grandmother, Maggie Foster. Kelsey, who represents the fifth generation in her family, has stuffed animals and handiwork made by her mother in her bedroom. Two Foster bonnets which the family used to wear to the cotton fields to protect them from the sun are combined with white and black cowboy hats pillows, and crafts to reflect the couple's love of family and hobbies.

Martha Hicks Turner, a former resident of the house, told the Keeters the house was probably among the first built in Grover on a then dirt road and was added on several times by her parents, the late Mr. and Mrs. W.S. Hicks Sr.

"I had always wanted to live in the country and when we first looked at this house and saw that it was in town I was disappointed," said Kim. She said her disappointment soon turned to delight when she glimpsed the almost all around wrap porch and the tremendous back yard which extends to the barn with

plenty of room for back yard picnics and fun with the animals.

"Both Steve and I are outdoors people and this home is just perfect for us," says Kim. Future interior projects will include adding more electrical outlets and closets and renovating the large attic into a master bedroom.

The living room of the house is decorated in off-white and cream with a country border of wallpaper. The room is carpeted in beige and enhanced by cream-colored curtains and a fireplace with family memorabilia on the mantel reflect the couple's creativity.

The tiled kitchen is large and one of Kim's favorite rooms in the house which bring in the outside through the windows and doors which open onto the big back yard and green pastures.

The house contains the original light fixtures.

Kim decided not to cover up the beautiful hardwood floors in the bedrooms with carpets. The couple painted the rooms in off-white and cream colors to match the rest of the house.

The bathroom has the original tub with claw feet.

In a sitting area in the hallway is a love seat over which is Kim's favorite needlepoint. It reads, "Marriage is like a small garden. It takes a lot of love and a little work each day."

"We feel that the Lord has really blessed us," says Mrs. Keeter. "He helped us to own this beautiful home and has helped us to learn to ride and gave us a good horse. He also gave us good health to do the restoration on our house."

Steve and Kim met at a softball game in Grover. Steve graduated from Kings Mountain High School in 1984. Kim graduated from Blacksburg High School in 1983 and from Cleveland Memorial Hospital School of X-Ray Technology in 1986.

"We discovered we liked the same things," said Kim of their romance which blossomed into marriage.

Another hobby they love is recording the rodeo events which they play back to try to correct mistakes in riding. Before they got on the rodeo circuit, Steve owned numerous horses and operated a trade lot. Before their daughter was two months old her father had her on a pony.

Bareback riders like Steve draw names of horses from a hat. "When you get on a horse you've got to concentrate on what's going to happen," says Steve, illustrating what can happen with pictures on his VCR.

The horse exploded across the arena of the rodeo with Keeter's body bobbing wildly up and down on the saddle. But he held fast for eight seconds. Other riders missed and flipped off the back of their horses.

Kim is proud of Steve's showmanship. Her own horse was trained by her husband and horse and rider work out on the barrels in the Keeter pastures.

"Rodeo people take care of their horses," says Steve, stopping his picture-showing to go to the barn and water the animals, including the billy goat family and the dogs.

The Keeter barn is clean as a pin. The stalls don't smell like a barnyard. "We hauled tons of manure from this barn when we first moved to Grover," said Kim, recalling the tough job to completely renovate the barn and build livable quarters for the horses. "We don't want Richie to get blistered from the hot sun." "We like him the color he is and the sun would change his color."

Kim said rodeo-goers are working hard to keep the spirit of the cowboy alive and shine up the image. Cowboys for Christ Association has helped the image.

Adds Kim, "We put God first and that's the security we have on our horses."