

From Grassroots to World Stage, RSNCA's Ranch Sorting Family Keeps Growing

ARTICLE BY **TIFFANY CHAPMAN** | IMAGES COURTESY OF **TP VISUALS**

Ranch Sorting has a way of grabbing people from the very first cow. Just ask Cindy Henderson. “We were at an event where they were taking entries on the day, and I said to my husband, it looked so much fun, I’m going to have a go at this today.”

Cindy and her daughter managed to get one cow out. “It was like we’d won the Olympics,” she says. That moment, equal parts adrenaline and joy, has shaped the way Cindy and her husband Lonnie have helped build Ranch Sorting in Australia, not just as competitors, but as people determined to keep the sport welcoming, consistent, and full of opportunity.

Today, as part of the Ranch Sorting National Championships Australia (RSNCA), Cindy has watched the sport grow at a pace that still surprises her. Since becoming independent in 2020, RSNCA has grown from around 200 registered members to close to 3,000. Not everyone competes every weekend, but the momentum is clear. More riders are discovering that Ranch Sorting has a place for them, whether their goal is a relaxed local run with friends, a serious state campaign, or an international trip to test themselves on a bigger stage.

That international pathway is one of the sport’s biggest drawcards. The RSNCA rulebook and class structures align with Ranch Sorting globally, which means Australian riders can step into arenas in the United States, Canada, Brazil and beyond, and compete in a system they already understand.

For Cindy, the proof is in what she has seen firsthand. In recent years, more Australians have travelled to the World Finals in Texas, with strong results. Her own family has been part of that experience too, with her daughters increasingly active in the sport. “They’re riding alongside all of these riders most weekends,” she says. “They get beat, but then they go over there and are successful. For me, that shows there are opportunities for so many people.”

It is not only about the competitions, either. Cindy speaks warmly about the relationships built overseas, and the way the wider Ranch Sorting community supports Australians when they travel. From sourcing horses to helping young riders find their feet at unfamiliar shows, those connections have become an extended ranching family.



Alfie Lawrence & Cody Barwick

Back home, Cindy believes one of the biggest reasons people stay with RSNCA is the atmosphere. "People love the friendly, supportive, encouraging environment," she says. "It's so unique. People will be on the sideline cheering for each other, or spotting cows for each other, and all of that's encouraged."

That support matters most when someone is brand new. RSNCA offers a beginner class, and Cindy is clear that everyone starts somewhere. What surprises newcomers, she says, is how willing higher-rated riders are to share knowledge, and how genuinely competitors want each other to succeed. It is a culture RSNCA works hard to protect.

"We work too hard during the week for it to be hard work on a weekend," Cindy says, repeating advice that has stuck with her. It is a simple line, but it captures the spirit she wants riders to feel when they arrive at an event. Come as you are, have a crack, and leave with a smile.

That inclusive feel has also helped Ranch Sorting draw riders from other disciplines. Cindy has noticed a steady shift of western pleasure and ranch riding competitors wanting to add cattle work, along with riders from English backgrounds who are curious to try something new. "People joke they're crossing to the dark side because they want to chase cows," she says. "But people don't care. They're supportive, and it's more than what people expect when they come."

Looking ahead, RSNCA's 2026 calendar has plenty to keep riders busy. Events are set across three states on the Australia Day long weekend, with the biggest date of the year locked in for National Finals, running 16 to 19 April at the Dubbo Showground. Entry is free for spectators, and RSNCA is keen to welcome not only new competitors, but also traders and small businesses who want to be part of the atmosphere.

Later in the year, RSNCA continues to strengthen its state footprint, with Western Australia's state event set for October and plans underway to introduce New South Wales State Championships, also expected in October. There is also movement in the Northern Territory, with RSNCA looking to kick off there in May, followed by the typical winter quiet period before events ramp up again from August.



Hadleigh Wass, NSW



Alfie Lawrence & Cody Barwick



Madison West, Forbes NSW



Ruby Schneider, Dubbo NSW



Lily Nugent, NSW

For riders who have been watching from the sidelines and wondering if they can make National Finals, Cindy says the qualification pathway is achievable. First-year RSNCA competitors only need to attend one event to qualify for National Finals. Existing competitors need to attend five events across the year, which also qualifies them for National Finals and World Finals. With some weekends running multiple shows, Cindy says it can be easier than people think to meet the requirements.

Behind the scenes, RSNCA also continues investing in horsemanship education, running clinics to help riders develop the skills needed for a fast-moving sport. Caring for horses, cattle and riders is a constant priority, and Cindy says the sport's long-term success depends on getting that balance right.

And as the season closes, RSNCA is also taking a moment to acknowledge the businesses that have backed the sport's growth. Major support in 2025 has included AEW Horse Walkers, Cinch, Equinade, Iconoclast, Jey's Saddlery, Marsh Carney Saddlery, Tuff Rock, Wazz-A-Cow Cutter, and Westside Hotel Dubbo. This year, AEW Horse Walkers is awarding the High Point Rider of the Year with a four-horse walker, a prize that speaks to the calibre of partnerships behind the scenes.

For Cindy, though, the real reward is simpler. It is the feeling of watching riders of every age and stage leave an event beaming, surprised by how much they enjoyed themselves, and already planning the next run. Because in Ranch Sorting, getting one cow out can still feel like winning the Olympics, and that is exactly the point.



David Nell, Orange NSW



Chris Hocking, SA



Brontie Frost, Dubbo NSW



Billy Nell, Orange NSW



Cody Barwick, Mirannie NSW