



Rodeo

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Two Israeli cowpokes marvel at event

Father and son at rodeo parade run ranch in Judea

By SARAH VIREN

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Perhaps it was the tractor-sized inflatable dairy cow, or the dancing "Howdy" figure, or the miles of covered wagons and trail-riding horses.

Watching Saturday's rodeo parade, 67-year-old Anthony Lipschitz repeatedly shook his head in wonder.

"Unbelievable," he said as another act passed. "This is incredible."

What may be a commonplace sight in Texas is an unlikely one in Israel — as is Lipschitz himself. With his cowboy hat and boots, a brass belt buckle and a snug pair of Wranglers, the Israeli rancher often draws stares at home.

"People look at us like we fell off the moon," said his son Arik Lipschitz, 33, who was similarly attired.

In Houston, especially during rodeo season, the two are just another couple of Western fans amid the throngs of wannabes and true-blue cowboys and gals.

Father and son run a horse ranch and riding school in the Judean hills outside Jerusalem. They took a trip to Houston this week solely for the Livestock Show and Rodeo, a multimillion-dollar tradition heralded every year with Friday night's barbecue and Saturday's parade.

"We took him to the cookoff last night," said their host, Gerry Sacks, a Katy estate planner who immigrated to the United States from South Africa in the 1970s. "He couldn't believe so many people came out to eat some meat."

Sacks grew up in South Africa with Lipschitz, a third-generation horseman who moved to Israel 35 years ago. Last year, he invited Arik Lipschitz out to see the show. This year he wanted the father to see the sights as well.

Their trips are arranged, although not paid for, through a special international committee with the rodeo.

Sacks' Israeli guests will be staying until March 8. During that time, they want to see the bull rides and country-music concerts but also hope to do some networking. Although there are places to buy their Western attire in Israel, the men say their horse supplies have to be shipped in from the United States, often from places around Houston. They are also considering branching into the cattle market.

Back home, Arik Lipschitz said his family waits expectantly for copies of *Western Horseman* and *Cowboys & Indians*. For such true horsemen, the magazines are a window into another world — a world like the Houston rodeo — where everyone rides.

At the parade Saturday, the two stood through nearly an hour and a half of light drizzle beside a Bud Light van to watch the marching bands and trail riders pass by.

"Everything surprises me," the elder Lipschitz said. "The thousands of people, even though it's raining."

This is at least the third year of bad weather for the 69-year-old event, but it still drew thousands of spectators.

Girls in matching pink cowboy hats waved American flags at the floats, an announcer scolded sluggish trail riders for having too much fun the night before, and every once in a while a band would pass playing *Deep in the Heart of Texas*, and Lipschitz would start to clap his hands. He and his son finally got their picture taken in front of a group of passing wagons.

"I am going to enlarge these pictures," he said afterward. "And stick them to the stall walls of my stable back home."

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