

Protest drags gay rodeo through mud

By Dennis O'Brien
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Some 50 protesters from three animal-rights groups picketed a gay rodeo at the Montgomery County Fairgrounds yesterday, saying homosexuals should know better than to oppress animals.

"We're not anti-gay, we're anti-gay-rodeo," said Judy Sweetland, 36, coordinator of the Gay and Lesbian Animal Rights Caucus of People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals.

"After all the pain, fear and suffering I've been through as a lesbian, I'll be damned if I'll put anything else through that," Ms. Sweetland said. "It's an obvious case of the oppressed becoming the oppressors."

The fourth annual Atlantic Stampede is a corporate-sponsored fund-raiser held by the Atlantic States Gay Rodeo Association to benefit various charities.

The activists protested the traditional rodeo contests, which they said are cruel, as well as "camp events" unique to gay rodeo.

Camp events included the wild drag race, in which a cowboy and a cowgirl struggle to put a person in drag atop a steer for a dash to the finish line, and steer decorating, in which one contestant tries to control a steer by a rope tied to its horns while another ties a ribbon to its tail.

But the goat dressing contest angered protesters the most.

A goat was tethered to a concrete block while two cowpokes lifted its hindquarters and try to



Photo by Dennis O'Brien Special to The Washington Times

People for the Ethical Treatment Animals pickets a gay rodeo at the Montgomery County Fairgrounds yesterday.

force a pair of drawers on it, Ms. Sweetland said.

"I know for a fact some of these men had the same thing done to them in high school, in locker rooms, and now they want to humiliate and abuse," she said. "They don't need to force panties on a goat, force a steer to the ground or use a bucking strap to force pain on an animal to raise money."

A bucking strap, tied tightly around an animal's girth, gets the steers to buck and run wildly as

they try to remove it.

Other techniques to spur animals into frenzies include using cattle prods, poking with sharp sticks and even rubbing dirt in animals' eyes, she said, citing several incidents at gay rodeos when animals were hurt so badly they had to be slaughtered.

Organizers of the rodeo took several steps to keep the protesters and the press out of the event.

Private security patrolled the arena, searched bags and forbade

entrance to the protesters. All cameras had to be registered at the front gate, and all photographers had to agree not to publish pictures taken inside the rodeo grounds.

Corporate sponsors of the rodeo included Miller Lite, USAir and the Hyatt Regency Washington.

The rodeo program featured letters of welcome from D.C. Mayor Marion Barry and Montgomery County Executive Douglas M. Duncan.