WINTER'S WILD CHILD

IT'S BEEN DESCRIBED AS BEN-HUR ON SNOW. Skijordue, held annually at the Calgary Polo Club just south of Calgary, began as a group of friends with a passion for riding and skiing. Toss in the need for speed, a Wild West attitude, love of a great party and you have the makings of a perfect storm geared to blow off the monotony of a long southern Alberta winter.

The entry fee for the initial event was cheese – the fondue variety from which the event title riffs. Three years later the mid-winter gathering, held this year on Feb. 10, has grown to four classes, hundreds of competitors, thousands of spectators, barrels of fondue and a cross-platform community spirit not often found in an equine event.

Graham and Sam Mitchell, avid boarders and riders are the brainchild behind the event. "We get a huge kick out of seeing the community coalesce around this event. It's a unique opportunity to invite athletes from different disciplines to come out and play together and to encourage people to embrace fine local food, flair and fashion," says Sam.

Indeed, the nuances of breed are lost in the quest for the speediest, yet broke, horse. Fashion is elevated to frontier Wild West and Euro-Trash outfits for the day and the hunt for the top skiers and boarders of the West to complete the team of horse and rider begins months ahead of the event.

Skijordue was one of three skijor events held in Alberta this year, with competitors as far away as Colorado attending. Event champions were Jim Kelts and Foster Kennedy in Circuit; Shelby Simmonds, Jean-Louis Frank and Riley Harvie in Relay; Riley Harvie and Jean-Louis Frank in Sprint; and Shawn Keyowskii and Shawn Alexander in Long Jump.

~ Ingrid Schulz