

Horsemen in the cold

Insurance may kill classics

HORSES will be banned from a Mansfield cattlemen's festival for the first time in its 150-year history.

Skyrocketing public liability insurance premiums will deny the Mountain Cattlemen's Get Together of the traditional horse races, effectively sucking the life out of the event.

The president of the Mansfield Branch of the Mountain Cattlemen's Association, Charlie Lovick, said without the money raised from the event the very existence of cattlemen could be threatened.

"Without horses, what are we?" he said.

"As a cattleman, horses are our first and only means of transport. People on horses opened up the high country and now we can't even ride them for a bit of fun."

Mr Lovick said the association had tried every avenue to get insurance but found doors slammed in their faces at every turn.

"They said it just didn't fit where they wanted to go. We were left high and dry," he said.

Historically, the meeting has included formal riding events like the pack saddle race, and novelty events like backwards and blindfolded horse races.

Mr Lovick said he feared the ban would stretch to all other fes-

By **PATRICK O'NEIL**

tivals and horse races.

Last month the Mansfield Country Cup — considered by many to be the Melbourne Cup of the bush — was cancelled for the first time in 28 years because organisers could not afford the insurance.

"We are the first cab off the rank and the rest will follow suit," he said.

The Cattlemen's Association relies on the funds raised from the Get Together to stay afloat and protect their interests in the high country.

"This is really staring us down the barrel — it might be the start of the end," Mr Lovick said.

"We are only small farmers, cattlemen — we are not a huge organisation."

He said without the cattlemen in the area, tourism could be threatened and the whole community could be affected.

"We are the symbols of the area," he said. "We have got a little bit of that age-old poetry about us — it is easy to promote."

"Without us, Mansfield will be left in a fairly skinny situation."

Mr Lovick said if the cattlemen were not financially sound, age-old knowledge passed down the generations would disappear.

"The knowledge handed to me by my father won't be passed on to my kids because we won't be here," he said.



Ghost riders: traditional races like the Mountain Cattlemen's Classic may be lost to history.

"It is more than about families making money — it is about a huge culture that has been developed over the years. We don't want to lose that."

Mr Lovick begged the Government to sort out

the insurance crisis.

"It has got to stop. Something has to be done," he said.

He appealed to people to attend the festival next month to help keep the association afloat.