

# City cowboys ride nuts and bolts bull

By CRAIG PIECHURA

They come from the far reaches of Southfield and Center Line traveling west to Westland.

Instead of hanging up their hats at the end of a hard day, that's when they put them on at the Urban Cowboy Saloon.

The main attraction, aside from the urban cowboys and cowgirls, is a mechanical bucking bull identical to the one featured in John Travolta's latest movie, "Urban Cowboy."

What "Saturday Night Fever" did for gold chains and discoes, Livonia's John Sagsak hopes "Urban Cowboy" will do for 10-gallon hats and country bars like the one he owns in Westland.

What draws these urban adventurers to the club on a muggy Wednesday night? What compels these city folk to dress up in pheasant-feathered straw cowboy hats and dirty red bandanas? What unfulfilled desires do these patrons hope to satisfy here?

Well, paradox, they just may have succumbed to a barrage of free publicity, this story included.

"Urban Cowboy" is the summer's media fad. Locally, The Detroit Free Press recently ran a front section color layout on the place. Channel 7 filmed Bill Bonds riding the mechanical bull for an upcoming special on the corn-fed phenomenon. Or, they may have heard about the place from WCXI disc jockey Deano Day who plugs his Tuesday performances at the club daily on his radio show.

IT SOUNDS like a lot of hype. But Scott Price, 25, of Southfield says once you get beyond the fad you'll find there are sincere, solid-as-bedrock American values in country music and our country's canonization of cowboy.

An introduction to country music last year was enough to make Price forget his flirtation with New Wave bands with names like "Destroy All Monsters" and the "Sillies."

Today Price takes admission, encourages publicity and runs the \$2-per-ride mechanical bull concession at the Urban Cowboy Saloon.

"As I get older my beliefs change," Price said. "I find I get more back to the basic American beliefs. When I was a rock and roller I could give a crap about Afghanistan, about Iran. Now I think, those are Americans over there in Iran and some lunatic named Khomeini is holding them hostage. Just like with Russia, we have to stand up to them."

Does that mean going to war like John Wayne in the Green Berets?

"I wouldn't go that far, not unless we have to if they move in other countries. I like the people here better," Price said, comparing the country clientele to rock crowds. "They're friendly, livelier. In rock 'n' roll bars it's a clique. Here, you walk up to any table and ask women to dance and they'll say 'Sure,' not 'Drop dead, creep.'"

Price says he gave his rock albums to his ex-girlfriend and now listens to promotional country records record companies give to the club to play.

"It's a more pure form of music," Price says. "The lyrics you can understand and relate to. There's a lot of love and emotion involved in cowboy music. You know, the guy who works hard, takes care of his woman and takes care of people in general. It's got that southern hospitality, that good old home feeling."

BUT WHAT about the cowgirls? What's in it for them?

Sally Akhurst, 22, of Center Line confided that she came to the club with a college friend, Cheryl Bennett, 22, looking to meet an authentic cowboy.

"We're from Moo-U, Michigan State of course," Ms. Akhurst said. "I hang around with the rodeo people up there."

They said you can tell the phony cowboys from the real ones by looking at their boots and jeans. The real cowboy's boots are broken in and their jeans are faded and ripped up.

"We don't want any skinny, faggy disco guys," said Ms. Akhurst. However, she said, she doesn't mean their ideal is a caveman who clubs women to win their favor.

"We like people who are down to earth, we want somebody to be their own person, somebody who's independent, who let's you be independent."

Despite the denials, Mitch Johnson, 23, of Detroit says there's a lot of macho behind the mechanical bullriding. But he says he comes out to ride the machine mostly "to break the monotony."

"Sure it's a big ego trip," Johnson said. "You hear 'em say, 'Oh, it's him again on the bull, the guy who rode it all.' It's the same thing as walking up to the dance floor with a knockout, the best looking girl in the bar."

After riding the bull at the top setting, number 11, he says he's met more women. As if on cue, a woman who rode the bull at setting number 8 walked up to Johnson after he reached 11 and told him she'd pour him a beer from her pitcher.

He gave the urban reporter a somewhat-I-mean smile and moseyed back into the bar to dance the two-step to the strains of "I Don't Think Hank (as in Williams) Done It That Way."



Julie Binkley of Livonia stays in the saddle despite the wild gyrations at an 8.5 setting. A setting of 11 is tops.

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