

## Davidson's the reigning champion

# His ponies have proper pulling power

Few people who watch their children joyously riding atop a pony at the fair realize just how strong that "cute" animal is.

But Bob Davidson knows. It is his hobby to try and urge his ponies to use every ounce of strength they have. Bob Davidson is a pony puller.

In fact, Davidson of 5526 Sebawaing Road, Owendale,

is the reigning champion of the Blue Water Pony Pulling Club and the man to beat among his fellow pullers.

Pony pulling is similar to tractor pulling except an animal replaces the machine. The two-pony teams are hitched to a weighted sled and must pull it for a specified minimum distance or beyond. The team pulling the sled farthest wins.

Rules vary from meet to meet but horses generally have three tries to achieve the minimum distance. The ponies are divided into two divisions. Lightweights can measure no more than 44 inches to the top of the hipbone and heavyweights cannot be over 48 inches. In addition, some clubs may weigh the animals.

According to Davidson, tractor pulls attract the

younger crowd while pony pulls draw many of the older folks who remember the days when horses did most of the work around a farm.

One of the main differences between a tractor pull and a pony pull is that machines can be modified and "souped up" to give their engine more power. With ponies, the owners must rely on the strength and will of the animal itself.

Developing a winning team takes time, Davidson stated. "You don't get a good team overnight. I've been in the racket since '75 and I'm just at the top now."

Most of the strength and spirit of a good pony comes from the breeding, he explained. The ponies also must be exercised every day.

Davidson does not use his ponies to work around his farm. Rather he exercises the ones used in competition at least once a day with a small sled he built. He sits on the sled as the animals pull him around the yard. And since he and the sled weigh considerably less than those used in competition, Davidson said he sometimes "goes for quite a ride."

DAVIDSON OWNS seven ponies but does not use them all in competition. The best ones are those around the ages of six or seven.

He said he generally takes one or, at the most, two teams to a meet.

"You work two teams every day and it can get to be quite a job," he explained.

One pony that he bought about four months ago, a sorrel-colored animal named Flicka, is considered the best of the lot by Davidson. Unfortunately Flicka has been having some problems lately.

For the past couple weeks, Flicka has been showing some lameness in her front legs but as soon as she gets better, as Davidson is sure she will, the female will be the pride of his stock again.

DAVIDSON'S MOST RECENT pull was in Owendale July 6, where he finished second. However, a second place finish is rare for him. The Owendale meet was just one of the 17 or 18 pulls that Davidson plans on participating in this year.

He has many chances to pull since he belongs to four different clubs.

However, one club he does not belong to is the one he has been trying to start in this area. For some reason, he has had a hard time getting people interested in the sport.

ONE REASON SOME may not wish to participate is financial. It costs a fair amount to outfit the teams and make it to most of the meets.

Davidson said he has \$750 invested in one team of ponies alone. Their harnesses run an additional \$1,000, it costs \$40 every time they are shod, and there are transportation costs to and from competition.

Davidson has cut the cost of feeding the animals by raising his own oats and hay.

So one may wonder, with the expense and problems that can arise in a hobby such as this, why would anyone want to get involved, much less keep at it as Davidson has?

"It's like a disease. It gets in your blood," he said, with the pride of a man who enjoys his "disease."

DAVIDSON GOT INVOLVED with pulling about five years ago when he teamed with a friend, Truman Maynard, who had another pony.

"Truman came over and broke her (Davidson's pony) and we put them together and there wasn't many who could beat us."

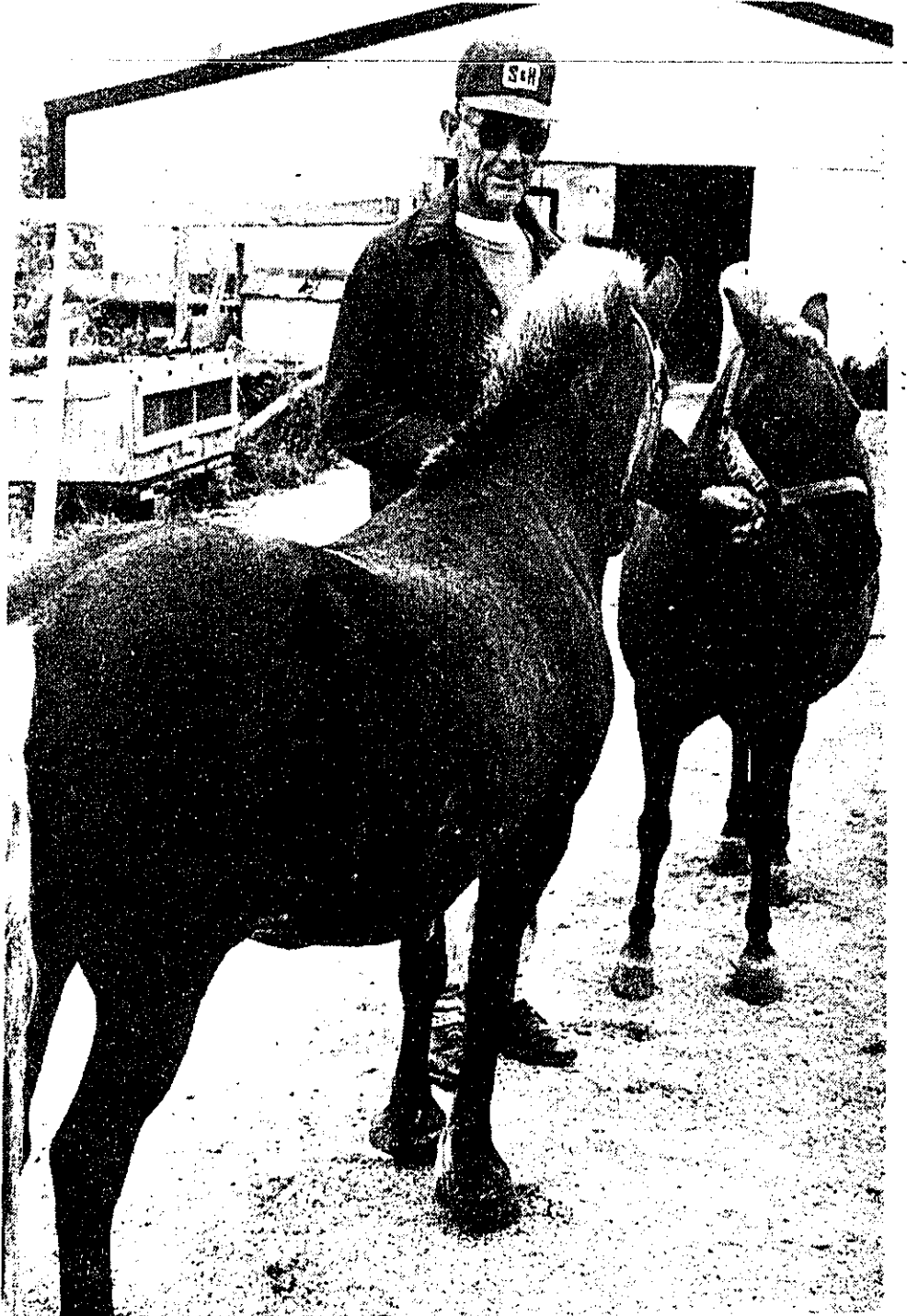
Davidson said he has always owned horses since he was young and his love for the animals is evident as he inspects each horse in the stable and worries over those that, like Flicka, may be feeling a little punky.

LARGER DRAFT horses, also participate in pulls but Davidson said he enjoys working with ponies much more.

"Ponies are a lot more spirited and there are some of the little ones that can pull as much as the draft horses."

Bill Maynard, son of Davidson's first partner, agrees.

"Big horses, well, you expect them to pull a lot but when you see ponies tear into it it's really something."



TWO OF THE PONIES that help make Bob Davidson a champion pony puller are led out by Davidson for their daily exercise. Davidson owns a stable of seven ponies.

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