

Six days of fun come to an end

SC County Fair caps successful run

By STEVE PEREZ
Sentinel staff writer

WATSONVILLE — It was the last chance to ride the ridiculous "Hi Roller," see the county's agricultural wares on display and eat a corn dog the only way they are meant to be eaten — at the Santa Cruz County Fair.

Sunday marked the end of a fairly peaceful six-day run.

In marked contrast to last year's event — essentially rained out the final weekend — it was characterized by wonderful weather that brought with it some rather sizable crowds.

According to fair manager Ron Haedicke, paid attendance Saturday, the last day for which complete figures were available, was 17,305.

That is far better than the approximately 6,000, who braved inclement weather on the same day the year before, but not quite as good as in 1988, when 18,840 attended, according to Haedicke.

"My own feeling is that there is still some lingering affect (because of the quake)," he said. "And people, I think, are also aware of the parking situation."

Thirty-five FEMA trailers that house quake refugees stand where acres of parked cars used to sit, meaning those not fortunate enough to fit in the main lot had to park in a field a half-mile west of the fairgrounds.

Shuttle buses, brought in at a cost of \$12,000, were used to take fairgoers the rest of the way.

Haedicke said a Santa Cruz Metropolitan Transit District running from Watsonville Plaza each half hour was little used.

For a few hours Friday and Saturday, he said, traffic backed up on Highway 152.

"We just tried to do the best job we could do," he said.

Those for whom the fair could not provide — residents of the FEMA trailers — were treated by the community itself.

About \$500 was raised when word spread that children living at the emergency trailer park could not afford to pay their way in, and the fair was in no financial position to waive fees.

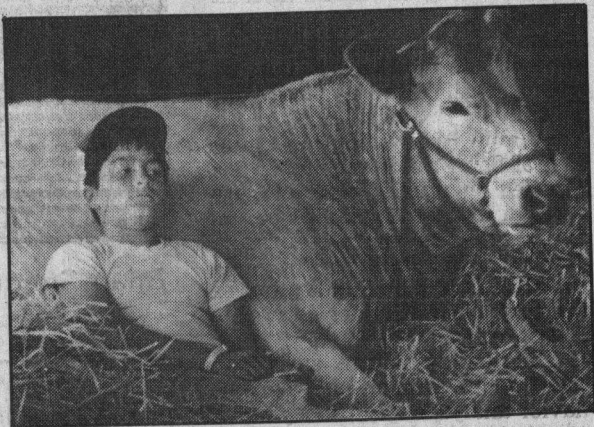
"I think it's been a super fair," Haedicke said. "One of the things I'm seeing in the crowd is a lot more families. There's a considerably smaller amount of problems with alcohol. Of course, you're always going to have those people who don't know how to drink alcohol in public."

According to Sgt. Denny Smith of the Santa Cruz County Sheriff's Office, there were 31 arrests at the

fair from opening day to mid-Sunday afternoon. Most of those were for being drunk in public, with a handful of others being taken away for fighting and petty theft.

Many of those in attendance were like Mark and Veronica Hotsko of Salinas, who were taking their children, Nika, 4, Brandt, 2, and Brittany, 9 months, to the midway for a few rides.

"We just decided to come on the spur of the moment this morning," Mark Hotsko said. "We're going to



Shmuel Thaler/Sentinel

Garlin Kaupp and "Curly" were ready to return home to Soledad after long week.

throw the kids on a few rides and then go home."

"All in all, it's been pretty good," Veronica Hotsko said when asked for her assessment of the fair. "The kids really liked the pig races."

The air on the main walkway was thick with the unmistakable aroma of "Smokin' Jim's" barbecue. Weary families were seen lounging in the shade or taking in the Watsonville High School Wildcats band playing on the bandstand.

A quick tour of the Midway showed the longest lines forming at the faster thrill rides such as the "Hi Roller" a huge, gravity defying contraption that can best be described as a egg-beater turned sideways, the "Gravitron," "Thunderbolt" and "Typhon."

Vendors reported business was steady.

Pat Carr, a supervisor with Hanson Trading Company of Santa Clara, said novelty items relating to the crime-fighting reptiles, "Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles," proved to be most popular.

"I wish I owned the patent on them," he said.

However, he said, he was surprised at the popularity of an old favorite gag.

"We've been selling a lot of 'whoopie' cushions," he said. "My boss brought a few of them in and I'm really surprised at how well they're doing. The teachers around here can look forward to a lot of noise in the classrooms, I think."