

Rains drench crowd, dampen dust at fair

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WATSONVILLE — Torrential rains drenched a big Saturday crowd at the Santa Cruz County Fair, turning dirt parking lots into greasy mires and prompting fair organizers to close the gates to new arrivals at 4 p.m.

The rainstorm was the first to disrupt the fair in 21 years, according to fair manager Ron Haedicke.

Showers that ended early Saturday morning settled the dust and "made things real nice and pretty" for crowds of early arrivals, Haedicke said. But the weather took a turn at about 1:15 p.m.

"It was heavy, heavy rain from 1:15 to about 5:30," Haedicke said. "Nobody in their wildest imagination dreamed we'd have that kind of storm. The gutters at the fairgrounds were running three and four inches deep."

Dozens of cars got stuck and had to be hauled out by farm tractors when the fairground's dirt parking lots turned to mush, he said. At 5:30 p.m. there were still 80 cars needing help to leave the lots, Haedicke said.

The scheduled Buck Owens concert was canceled when the stage lights and equipment got "drenched."

"I guess you could say the concert was a washout," Haedicke said.

While new arrivals were turned away at 4 p.m., people already at the fair were allowed to stay until 7 p.m., when the fairgrounds were closed down. Despite the weather, crowds of people stuck it out until closing time, he said.

If the showers taper off, most of the fairground parking lots will be safe to use today, he said. But fairgoers should tune in to local radio stations today to find out where parking will be available, especially if the rain continues, he said.

Today's scheduled events have not been canceled.

Loggers and Latin music will

fill the bill today as the Santa Cruz County "Carnival of Plenty" 48th Annual Fair comes to a close.

Although attendance has been down from previous years, with 2,459 fewer people coming through the gates through Thursday, the crowds have been having a good time, according to Fair Manager Ron Haedicke.

Today has been dubbed Family International Day for the variety of events that will be offered. Gates open at 10 a.m. and close at 9 p.m.

The grandstand stage will host several big events during the day. The Loggers Show kicks off at 1 p.m., with a competition and demonstration of the skills needed in the timber industry.

Teams from Santa Cruz County will be competing against groups from throughout the state in such skills as sawing and axing.

Also at the grandstand stage will be two shows by Ray Camacho and his band, at 4:30 p.m. and 6:30 p.m. A leader in Latin dance bands, Camacho has been performing for 30 years throughout the world.

"I want to promote new groups and involve myself in innovative Hispanic entertainment," Camacho said in a press release.

The Pepsi Amphitheater will also host two Latin bands throughout the afternoon. They are Linda Y Sus Centellas Grupo Femenil and Los Tantera de Mexicali, both of whom travel with the Ray Camacho Band.

Of course, there's the usual fair fare, such as the fine photography exhibit at the J.J. Crosetti Building, and the brilliant floral displays under the eaves of the Floriculture Building.

The 4-H Building will have cooking demonstrations on how to make fudge pie and surprise pie at 1:30 p.m. and 2 p.m.

And in the horse arena, most of the final day will be given over to equitation and hunter class competitions.