



Spooked horse collides with carriage; bystanders injured

By COLBY FRAZIER — Aug. 8, 2009

Several people suffered minor injuries during Old Spanish Days Fiesta's El Desfile Historico parade yesterday when a horse became spooked, ran out of control for nearly two blocks and collided with a carriage, authorities said.

The incident occurred at 2:15 near the intersection of State and Anapamu streets. Lt. Ralph Molina, a Santa Barbara Police spokesman, said the horse panicked after a leather strap snapped.

As the horse, one in a pair that was pulling a carriage, galloped north along State Street, Molina said authorities and parade officials herded the crowd away from the roadway. He said the carriage driver somehow managed to steer the horses clear of the crowd, but a number of people were injured.

"It sounds like there were a couple of people who may have been stepped on by the horse ..." Molina said, adding that one person, a female who suffered some scrapes and an injury to her leg, filed a police report.

The renegade horses traveled nearly two blocks before colliding with the back of another carriage in the 1400 block of State St., Molina said.

He said both horses collapsed, one of which was briefly unconscious and received aid from a veterinarian before rising to its feet. He said neither horse appeared to be badly injured, though one person in a carriage was hurt.

Anthony Borgatello, this year's Fiesta El Presidente, said he knew few of the details surrounding the incident, but was thankful the injuries were minor.

He said it appeared all of those involved, from the carriage driver to the occupants of the carriage who exited quickly before the horses bolted, and the authorities, acted appropriately.

With hundreds of horses in the parade, which is one of the largest of its kind in the country, Borgatello said issues are bound to arise from time to time.

"When you have that many horses, you run the risk of something going wrong," he said. "It's very fortunate that no one got hurt seriously and I hope whoever did get hurt minorly [will] be alright."

Knowing there are risks involved with so many animals, Borgatello said Fiesta officials go to great lengths to prevent accidents. Most notably, he said each carriage is accompanied by a handful of outriders, or people on horseback whose primary function is to spot any problems before they occur.

“We spend a year preparing for this and getting the right people in the right places and I believe those people were in place doing their job today,” he said, adding that someone, possibly an outrider, spotted the problem before the horse became spooked and directed the occupants of the carriage to exit.

Borgatello said the carriage’s occupants were affiliated with Bartlett, Pringle & Wolf, LLP, a local accounting firm that sponsors the event.

Though incidents like this aren’t the norm, Borgatello said they do happen.

But yesterday was somewhat exceptional.

About 15 minutes before the carriage incident, Molina said a horse at the intersection of State and Yanonali streets reared backwards, bucking off the 19-year-old female rider, and landing on top of her.

He said the rider was treated by paramedics for minor injuries, but was not taken to the hospital.

Molina, a 22-year veteran with the Police Department, said the only parade incident involving a horse that he can remember was about five years ago. He said a child uncorked a popper-like firecracker, causing a horse to drop dead from a heart attack.

“That was the last incident I know of,” he said.