

Rodeo is sport, entertainment, cultural heritage rolled into one

Rodeo is a unique sporting culture. It's not a game with a winner and a loser, and the contestants have to pay entry fees and are only paid with prize money for placing successfully. It's not an invented ball game — the events that a rodeo is comprised of evolved out of everyday work activities of ranch hands and drovers, and part of rodeo's purpose is to honor and preserve that ranching legacy.

And the entertainment component — a rodeo clown and intermission specialty acts — are a major part of the action.

As the Professional Rodeo Cowboy Association lays it out: "Professional rodeo action consists of two types of competitions — roughstock events and timed events — and an all-around cowboy crown. Each competition has its own set of rodeo rules and order of events."

In the roughstock events — bareback riding, saddle bronc riding and bull riding — contestants are scored by judges. The rider's performance and the animal's performance are equally important. As PRCA notes: "To earn a qualified score, the cowboy, while using only one hand, must stay aboard a bucking horse or bull for eight seconds. If the rider touches the animal, himself or

any of his equipment with his free hand, he is disqualified.

The timed events are steer wrestling, team roping, tie-down roping, barrel racing and steer roping; cowboys and cowgirls compete against the clock, and against each other.

Many of the events can clearly trace their lineage to practical ranching practices, like roping or working the kinks out of a cranky horse (*see related story, page 14*). Others owe their existence to the wild, daredevil spirit of the young men who turned the cowboy into an American icon.

Steer wrestling is a little wild, but bullriding is just plain crazy.

As PRCA notes: "Bull riding, which is intentionally climbing on the back of a 2,000-pound bull, emerged from the fearless and possibly foolhardy nature of the cowboy. The risks are obvious. Serious injury is always a possibility for those fearless enough to sit astride an animal that literally weighs a ton and is usually equipped with dangerous horns. Regardless, cowboys do it, fans love it and bull riding ranks as one of rodeo's most popular events."

In fact, bull riding is so popular that in recent years, the Sisters Rodeo has added a



PHOTO BY CODY RHEAULT

Bull riding is perhaps rodeo's most popular event — spinning off stand-alone competitions.

Wednesday night event titled XTreme Bulls dedicated solely to watching cowboys trying to stay aboard for a few seconds as a ton of muscle and attitude bucks and spins in the dirt of the Sisters Rodeo arena.

It's not an even competition: There are some sessions where not one rider stays on a bull for eight seconds. And that's part of what makes it all so exciting.

While nothing rocks the arena like bull riding, for some folks the true essence of rodeo is in watching the teamwork of horse and rider in the

roping events. Team roping is a ballet of header and heeler. Tie-down rewards perfect timing and coordination.

"A cowboy's success in tie-down roping depends in large part on the precise teamwork between him and his horse," PRCA notes. "The calf receives a head start that is determined by the length of the arena. One end of a breakaway rope barrier is looped around the calf's neck and stretched across the open end of the box. When the calf reaches its advantage point, the barrier is released. If the roper breaks the barrier before

the calf reaches its head start, the cowboy is assessed a 10-second penalty."

A cowboy has to be quick on his feet to get to the calf, then dexterous and quick in getting it tied down securely. The horse has to keep the rope taut so the calf can't slip it.

Sisters Rodeo has hosted legendary ropers like Hall-of-Famers Joe Beaver and Fred Whitfield showing the speed, grace and equestrian teamwork that makes rodeo events special — and keeps people coming back to Sisters to see it all unfold again.



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