

# A man of many talents to **KEEP RODEO FUN**

By **JEFF BUDLONG**  
*EO Media Group*

**J**ohn Harrison is like the fans he will entertain during the Farm-City Pro Rodeo. The longtime rodeo clown is excited to be back in front of large crowds in Hermiston after the pandemic forced the cancellation of last year's event for the first time.

"It is a fun rodeo and this is probably my fourth time coming to it," Harrison said. "Hermiston is a great rodeo that all the cowboys hit, so you always remember it. They bring in Randy Corley, who is a hall of fame [announcer], that I get to work with."

Harrison brings his own impressive credentials to the rodeo, having been a six-time National Finals Rodeo barrelman and earned comedy act of the year three times. The past year tested everyone on the circuit, with most rodeos sidelined in 2020 from March through June. Harrison began working a few rodeos in the Midwest in June and July, but a weekly schedule did not return until the calendar flipped to 2021.

Harrison grew up in the rodeo, trick riding at 6, and earning his Professional Rodeo Cowboys Association card in 1999.

"I started off as a specialty act doing the trick riding, Roman riding and trick roping," he said. "In 2001, I started clowning and have been doing that ever since."

Harrison crisscrosses the nation to perform at rodeos from Florida to Nevada and everywhere in between. He is an independent contractor who



Carla Harrison/Contributed Photo

**Rodeo clown John Harrison brings a different act each night of the Farm-City Pro Rodeo to keep the fans entertained.**

developed his love for rodeo from his grandfather, Warren "Freckles" Brown, a world champion bull rider.

Harrison tried to follow in those footsteps, but quickly learned that the entertainment side of rodeo was his calling, even if his list of injuries reads like nearly every bull rider's. Working as a barrelman to distract the bulls

after a cowboy falls off often puts him in harm's way, and has led to surgeries on both knees and rotator cuff, herniated discs in his neck and issues with his hips.

In addition to his work as a barrelman, which the 42-year-old compares to being in a car crash each time, Harrison has a variety of comedy acts

he relies on to entertain crowds. It is something that was thrust upon him early in his career.

"I had a comedy act I was doing and a barrelman did not show up for the rodeo, so the contractor told me I needed to do this," Harrison said. "I had no clue what I was doing, but the announcer would tell the joke and I would throw the punchline."

"Now I change up my act every night. I have four different acts with me because I like to keep it fresh because some people will go to the rodeo every night."

Harrison has gone to different corners of the entertainment world to find inspiration for his act, ranging from Cirque du Soleil to a play on rhythmic gymnastics. He incorporated clowns he looks up to when devising the makeup he puts on for each performance.

Harrison is often aided by one of his children, who do some of the same things he did at a young age. Rodeo is a family event for the Harrisons as they are able to spend time on the road doing something everyone enjoys.

The trick riding act came from Keith Isley, a Farm-City Pro Rodeo veteran who passed the routine down to Harrison. It has earned him act of the year four times, to go along with three acts he developed himself. His success is often measured in the laughs that roll down the stands and the friendships he has forged over the years.

"I am good enough friends with the riders or other people with the rodeo that I will use them in my routine telling jokes," he said. "The relationships with them and the personnel are great."