

Tenderfoot to cowpoke in one step

A beginner's guide to Rodeo events

Staff report

Professional rodeo action consists of two kinds of events: roughstock events and timed events.

In the roughstock events — bareback riding, saddle bronc riding and bull riding — a contestant's score is equally dependent upon his performance and the animal's performance.

In the timed events — calf roping, steer wrestling, team roping and steer roping — a contestant's goal is to post the fastest time in his event.

In these events, calves and steers are allowed a head start. The competitor, on horseback, starts in a three-sided fenced area called a box. The fourth side opens into the arena. A rope barrier is stretched across that opening and tied to the calf or steer.

Once the calf or steer reaches the head start point predetermined by the size of the arena, the barrier is automatically released. If a cowboy breaks that barrier before it is released, he is assessed a 10-second penalty.

The California Rodeo Salinas hosts six of the seven events sanctioned by the Professional Rodeo Cowboys Association, including the three roughstock events and calf roping, steer wrestling and team roping.

Here's a closer look at the various events:

Bareback riding

Bareback riding offers a sensation about as enjoyable as riding a jackhammer, pogo stick-style, using only one hand.

And that's the easy part. The bareback rider's real challenge is to look good while he's being punished. Bareback riding is the most physically demanding event in rodeo; its toll on the body is immense.

Muscles are stretched to the limit, joints are pulled and pounded mercilessly, and ligaments are strained and frequently rearranged.

The strength of the broncs is exceptional, and challenging them is often costly.

Bareback riders endure more punishment, suffer more injuries and carry away more long-term damage than all other rodeo cowboys.

To stay aboard the horse, a bareback rider uses rigging made of leather and constructed to meet PRCA safety specifications. The rigging, which resembles a suitcase handle on a strap, is placed atop the horse's withers and secured with a cinch.

As the bronc and rider burst from the chute, the rider has to mark out his horse. In other words, he must have both spurs above the horse's shoulders until the horse's feet hit the ground after



RICHARD GREEN/THE SALINAS CALIFORNIAN FILE PHOTO

Bareback rider Mitch Rickman leans back and spurs his mount en route to a score of 84 in the 2005 Rodeo.

its initial move from the chute. If the cowboy fails to do this, he is disqualified.

As the bronc bucks, the rider pulls his knees up, dragging his spurs up the horse's shoulders.

As the horse descends, the cowboy

straightens his legs, returning his spurs over the point of the horse's shoulders in anticipation of the next jump.

But it takes more than sheer strength to make a qualifying ride and earn a money-winning score. A bareback rider is judged on his spurring technique, the

degree to which his toes remain turned out while he is spurring and his exposure, or willingness to lean far back and take whatever might come during his ride.

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