

ACTION/ A Rodeo primer

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Saddle bronc riding

Saddle bronc riding is rodeo's classic event, both a complement and contrast to the wilder spectacles of bareback and bull riding.

The event requires strength, but it is as much about style as anything: Grace and precise timing are mandatory.

Saddle bronc riding evolved from the task of breaking and training horses to work the cattle ranches of the old West.

Many cowboys claim riding saddle broncs is the toughest rodeo event to learn because of the technical skills necessary to master it.

Every move the bronc rider makes must be synchronized with the movement of the horse.

The cowboy's objective is a fluid ride, as opposed to the wilder and less-controlled ride of bareback riders.

Among the similarities shared by saddle bronc riding and bareback riding is the rule that riders must mark out their horses on the first jump from the chute.

While a bareback rider has a rigging to hold onto, the saddle bronc rider has only a thick rein attached to his horse's halter. Using one hand, the cowboy tries to stay securely seated in

his saddle. If he touches any part of the horse or his own body with his free hand, he is disqualified.

Judges score the horse's bucking action, the cowboy's control of the horse and the cowboy's spurring action.

While striving to keep his toes turned outward, the rider spurs from the points of the horse's shoulders to the back of the saddle. To score well, the rider must maintain that action throughout the eight-second ride.

Bull riding

In a time when action-packed, adrenaline-filled extreme sports are the latest craze, it only seems natural that bull riding would become rodeo's most popular event. The risks are obvious. Serious injury is always a possibility for those fearless or foolish enough to sit astride an animal that weighs a ton and is usually equipped with dangerous horns. But cowboys do it, and fans love it.

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AT RIGHT: Bradley Harter of Weatherford, Texas, competes in the finals of the 2005 California Rodeo Salinas. Harter was overall saddle bronc champion.

