

Barrel Race

(Photo courtesy of Dusko Maric)



The original ladies' event in professional rodeo, the contestant must cross the scoreline and run a clover-leaf pattern around three barrels and back across the scoreline to end time. Either barrel, on the left or right, may be taken first, but a contestant will be disqualified for not following the clover-leaf pattern. A five second penalty will be added to the run time for each barrel knocked down, but a contestant may, from a riding position, hold a barrel from falling. The time is generally taken with use of an electric eye to the hundredths of a second.

Rope and Tie

(Photo courtesy of Kenyon Sports Photos)



While roping and tying - or bronco roping and branding - has been a standard cattle handling practice in Australia since the 1870's, the skills and techniques of single handed roping and tying was developed to the fullest in North America. Now, there are many thousands of ropers in Australia - roping competitively in the rodeo arena, as members of roping clubs, in 'jackpots' roping or using a rope as a tool of trade for day to day cattle handling. The essential key to roping and tying is the teamwork between the roper and a highly trained roping horse. Given a head start before the barrier is released the animal is roped from horseback. The contestant then dismounts and runs to the animal, relying on his horse to keep it under control. After reaching and catching the animal it is thrown - or 'flanked' - onto it's side and three of its legs are tied with a 'pigging string' that the contestant carries in his teeth during the run. If the animal is not on its feet after it is roped it must be let up and rethrown. As the tie is completed the judge records the time it has taken. The contestant then must remount his horse and ride it forward to prove that the tie will hold to the judge's satisfaction. If the animal kicks free before the judge rules a 'fair tie' no time is given for the run. There are strictly enforced provisions for the welfare of animals used in the event. If the animal is pulled backwards off its feet the roper is disqualified and fined. If the rope horse drags the animal after it is roped there is an automatic disqualification and a further fine. The fine is increased for subsequent offences ensuring that only properly trained horses are used for roping and tying. The optimum weight for animals in roping and tying is specified by the APRA as 115 kilograms. At the top level winning times are around 10 seconds to rope, throw and tie the animal, taken from when the barrier is released.

Team Roping

(Photo courtesy of Kenyon Sports Photos)



The only true team event in rodeo, two ropers - a 'header' and a 'heeler' - work as a team to catch and control a steer. As the steer leaves the chute - with a head start before the barrier is released - the header ropes it around the neck, horns or head. The header then turns the steer while the heeler moves in and ropes both hind legs. Improper catches to the head or horns result in a disqualification, and a five second penalty applies if the heeler only ropes one leg. The time is recorded when both catches are made and the horses are facing each other with no slack in the catch ropes. At the top level of competition the event winning times are around eight seconds.

Bareback Bronc Riding

(Photo courtesy of Kenyon Sports Photos)



Developed in the rodeo arena bareback riding is the supreme challenge - riding a rough horse without a saddle or a rein. The high spurring action of the bareback rider produces some of the wildest and most exciting rides in rodeo. A bareback rider 'starts' the horse out of the chutes with his feet over the break of the shoulder. If he misses the start - called the 'mark out' - he is disqualified. The ideal spurring action is with the rider leaning backwards with his heels starting in front of the horse's shoulder. Then, with toes turned out, he jerks his feet almost up to the wither as the horse bucks, snapping them back into position in front of the shoulder and ready for the next jump. The higher and wider the 'gap' - the risk the bareback rider takes in throwing his feet up and away from the horse before he snaps back to the shoulders - the better the score. In bareback riding the contestant has no control over the horse - there is no halter or rein - and he is judged on his spurring technique. The bareback rigging is a leather pad with a special handhold attached. Bareback riding is generally considered the most physically demanding rodeo event, with possible injury to arms, shoulders and necks from the stresses on their riding arm - the one holding on to the rigging - and will strap or bind it to reduce the strain and possible injury.

Bull Ride

(Photo courtesy of Kenyon Sports Photos)



Born of the roughriders boast that he can 'ride anything with hair on', Bull Riding is the ultimate test of courage and strength. It is the most dangerous event in rodeo - not only from the ride itself but from a rodeo bull after the eight seconds ride. This can be all the more dangerous if the bull rider has bucked off or is injured and defenseless on the ground. A successful ride on a top bucking bull seems theoretically impossible. Their strength and agility, weighing up to a tonne or more, puts the odds firmly with the bulls. The fact that bull riders do regularly make qualified rides on these spectacular animals is a tribute to their skill and - above all - their intense concentration and 'focus'. A top bull rider needs strong legs, upper body control and lightning fast reflexes - there is no time to think. Bull riders are not required to spur, and simply use their feet to pull themselves back into position or to hold themselves upright on a spinning bull. Bucking off 'into the well' - on the inside of a spinning bull - invites an immediate attack by the bull and is very dangerous. The rider tries to sit 'over his hand' during the ride. If he leans back he may be whipped forward as the bull bucks and is in danger from the bull's head and horns. Seasoned bucking bulls seem to feel and watch a rider's every movement and know exactly what to do to throw him if he gets even a little out of position. The judges look for a bull rider using a combination of free arm, legs and feet for balance to keep him in the best body position during the ride. Spurring is not required but extra points are awarded for the use of the feet including the way they are used in response to the bull's twist and turns to hold the body upright. The equipment used in bull riding is a plaited rope, with a handhold inserted, pulled tightly around the bull and held in place by the rider's grip. A bull rider is disqualified for touching the animal or his equipment and bucking off - a regular hazard in this tough event.

Steer Wrestling

(Photo courtesy of Hutchins Photography)



Perfect timing and team work between a steer wrestler and his helper, a mounted 'hazer' is the key to fast times in this event. There is also the ability of his horse to 'rate' the steer and place the contestant just right for his leap and catch. It is the 'hazer's' job to keep the steer running straight and not veer away. As the horse pulls alongside the steer, the contestant leans from his horse, leaving his foot in the stirrup, and grasps the steer's horns. Once he has a hold, he uses his feet and body to stop the steer's forward momentum and, once it is off balance, applies leverage on the horns to throw it on its side. While strength is an asset - the best steer wrestlers are usually big men - timing and coordination are also essential. Winning times are usually under five seconds from when the barrier is released, with four seconds or better commonplace.

Saddle Bronc Riding

(Photo courtesy of Kenyon Sports Photos)



The 'classic' contest between man and horse - saddle bronc riding has its origins deep in history. When man first captured and tamed wild horses as a means of transport, for hunting and farming and as a companion - the contest began. Some horses would not submit easily to being handled or ridden and the legends of the outlaw bucking horse became part of folk lore. Now, saddle bronc riding is a stylised, highly skilled, rodeo event. It is considered the most technically difficult rough stock event and still holds pride of place as the premier event on most rodeo programs. Every ride begins with the contestants feet turned out and over the break of the horse's shoulder as it leaves the chute. The rider synchronises his spurring in time with the horse's bucking action. A perfect action, earning highest points, is with the feet starting in front of the horse's shoulder then - with a long sweeping 'stroke' - to the back of the saddle, or 'candle' as the horse bucks. The rider must then snap his feet back to the shoulder, turning his toes out to try and get some purchase to get his timing right. Most points are scored for the spurring action from the shoulder to the girth, with extra points for a 'full lick' back to the candle. A rider is disqualified for touching the animal or equipment with his free hand or if he loses a stirrup or the single rope rein. And, of course, there is no score if he bucks off. Equipment used in saddle bronc riding is the standard contest saddle and a plain head collar with a single rope rein held in one hand.