

# Animal Welfare

**prca**  
PRORODEO®

The care and treatment of professional rodeo livestock



# table of contents

- 3** animal welfare
  - 6** events
  - 8** equipment
  - 10** stock contractors
  - 12** professional judges
  - 13** PRCA's commitment
  - 14** PRCA rules
  - 15** fact versus fiction
  - 18** summary
  - 19** background
- 

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“The PRCA sets the standard for humane care of rodeo animal athletes ... rodeo remains a healthy, humane, family-oriented sport.”

— Dr. Jennifer Schleining  
Equine Veterinarian  
Ames, Iowa

# Animal Welfare

“The AVMA recommends that all rodeos adopt, implement, and enforce rules to ensure humane treatment of rodeo livestock.”

— excerpt from AVMA position statement supported by PRCA

In the sport of professional rodeo, cowboys share the limelight with horses, bulls, calves and steers. For a cowboy to compete at the highest level, the rodeo animals also must be in peak condition. Both are athletes in their own right. The very nature of rodeo requires a working relationship, and in some events a partnership, between the cowboys and animal athletes.

Professional Rodeo Cowboys Association (PRCA) athletes value their animals, as do the PRCA stock contractors that provide the livestock for the rodeos. Like most people, PRCA members believe animals should be provided proper care and treatment. The PRCA and its members value their animals and staunchly protect them with specifically created rules.

Consistent proper treatment of animals by PRCA members in and out of the arena has been well documented by veterinarians who have witnessed the health and condition of the animals first hand. “The PRCA sets the standard for humane care of rodeo animal athletes,” said Dr. Jennifer Schleining, a Ames, Iowa, equine veterinarian, about the PRCA. “And in my professional opinion, rodeo remains a healthy, humane, family-oriented sport.”

The PRCA supports the position statement of the American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) regarding the welfare of animals in spectator events. The statement reads in part, “The AVMA recommends that all rodeos adopt, implement, and enforce rules to ensure humane treatment of rodeo livestock.”



In 2003, the American Association of Equine Practitioners (AAEP) awarded its Lavin Cup to the PRCA in recognition of the association's contributions to the health and welfare of the horse. Like a well-conditioned athlete, an animal can perform well only if it is healthy. Any cowboy will tell you he takes home a paycheck only when the livestock is in top form. Stock contractors, the ranchers who raise and provide livestock to rodeos, also have an obvious financial interest in keeping the animals healthy. Simple logic dictates that no sensible businessperson would abuse an animal that is expected to perform in the future.

Many if not most of the PRCA's approximately 10,000 members have more than an economic tie to animals. Nearly all have lived and worked around animals for most of their lives, and they possess a high degree of respect and fondness for livestock.

Stock contractor Harry Vold of Harry Vold Rodeo Company in Avondale, Colo., said he holds a special place in his heart for his animals.

"We like to keep our horses around forever," said Vold. "It's like an old folks home, and it can get costly, but they've earned their keep."

Hundreds of veterinarians compete in professional rodeo.

"I believe they participate because they have a deep interest in rodeo competition and the animals involved," said Corey. "If any mistreatment was going on, they wouldn't participate."

Anyone who attends a PRCA rodeo can be assured that the greatest care has been taken to prevent injury to animals or contestants.

PRCA members are bound by the not-for-profit corporation's bylaws and rules, which include a section that deals exclusively with the humane treatment of animals. The association's rules and regulations include more than 60 rules dealing with the care and treatment of animals. Anyone who violates these rules may be disqualified, and the judges report these violations to the PRCA Headquarters, which may levy fines.

Professional rodeo judges, who are responsible for the enforcement of all PRCA rules, believe in these humane regulations and do not hesitate to report violations. Becoming a PRCA judge involves extensive training in the skills needed to evaluate livestock and to judge rodeo events, as well as testing of that knowledge and the rodeo. PRCA rodeo judges undergo constant training and evaluation to ensure their skills are sharp and that they are enforcing PRCA rules, especially those regarding the care and handling of rodeo livestock.

In 2003, the American Association of Equine Practitioners (AAEP) awarded its Lavin Cup to the PRCA in recognition of the association's contributions to the health and welfare of the horse.



PRCA PHOTO BY SUTTON RODEOS

When not performing at rodeos, bucking horses enjoy grazing on large ranches owned by stock contractors, similar to the Sutton Ranch in Onida, S.D.

PRCA PHOTO BY KIRI STEINKE



**PRCA rules regulate all equipment used, including these bareback riding riggings.**

One of the many PRCA rules that protect animals authorizes the judges to disqualify and fine a contestant on the spot for unnecessary roughness. Fines double with each additional offense.

“If a guy uses unnecessary roughness when flanking his calf, he’s automatically disqualified and fined,” said PRCA judge Tommy Keith of Elbert, Colo. “And the judges definitely call it. This doesn’t happen too often because very few guys are willing to risk getting disqualified when thousands of dollars are at stake.”

Not all rodeos operate under guidelines as strict as the PRCA’s. The PRCA sanctions about 30 percent of the rodeos held in the United States. Another 50 percent are sanctioned by smaller rodeo organizations, and about 20 percent are not sanctioned. Although the various rodeo organizations are separate organizations, the PRCA hosts a periodic rodeo industry conference to network on rules and animal welfare issues. This outreach effort has resulted in most rodeo-sanctioning associations adopting and enforcing regulations regarding the care and treatment of animals, though some may not be as stringent as the PRCA’s rules.

# Events

Rodeo action poses little risk to the animals. A current survey conducted at 198 rodeo performances and 73 sections of slack indicated the injury rate for animals is so low that it is statistically negligible.

Of the 60,971 animal exposures, 27 animals were injured, according to the data compiled by on-site veterinarians. That translates to an injury rate of less than five-hundredths of 1 percent — 0.0004, to be exact.

Every veterinarian who took part in the survey indicated that the animals were well cared for, and the livestock areas and competition grounds were in good condition.

The survey's results showing extremely low animal injury rates in professional rodeo were consistent with data gathered through other informational surveys over the years.

Also, the animals perform for less than a minute in any rodeo event. The horses and bulls used in the roughstock events buck for only eight seconds. The timed events don't last much longer and all have time limits of a minute or less.

## Roughstock events

Three of rodeo's most physically challenging events — saddle bronc riding, bareback riding and bull riding — rely on horses and bulls that can kick high and buck powerfully. While critics of these events have said some of the equipment — the flank strap, prod and spurs — compel the animals to buck, veterinarians and others familiar with the behavior of large animals know otherwise.

"These are not animals who are forced to buck and perform in the arena," said Dr. Eddie Taylor, the attending veterinarian for La Fiesta de los Vaqueros, a PRCA rodeo in Tucson, Ariz. "In fact, if a flank strap is drawn so tight as to be uncomfortable, the horses and bulls will likely cease to buck or not perform to the best of their ability. The best rodeo livestock are those with a natural inclination to buck for the purpose of unseating a rider."

The bucking horses are not wild, but they also aren't saddle-broken. According to veterinarians, animals buck naturally and some are impossible to ride. The horse's bone structure and well-muscled hindquarters enable it to buck and kick high.

PRCA stock contractors, who spend a lot of time and money to breed and buy top bucking animals, know better than anyone that only a small per-

"It's highly improbable that a man could injure a steer during steer wrestling."

— Dr. Doug Corey



PRCA PHOTO BY RONI SILVESTER

Specialized breeding programs produce today's bucking horses. These mares and foals live on Mike Cervi's ranch in Sterling, Colo.



PRCA PHOTOS BY MIKE COPEMAN

In tie-down roping, the livestock weighs between 220 and 280 pounds. All animals are inspected prior to competition to insure only healthy animals participate.



Bucking bulls are extremely valuable, as well as talented athletes that tip the scales at nearly one ton.



Equine veterinarians say rodeo's bucking horses are well suited for rodeo competition.



PRCA rules require tough Corriente steers in the steer wrestling event.

centage of animals have the desire to buck. Today, a number of breeding programs are in place specifically to breed bucking animals.

"It's part of them," said Ike Sankey of Sankey Rodeos in Joliet, Mont. "Their mother bucked; their daddy bucked. They like people, but they like to buck. The horses and bulls enjoy what they're doing, and if you hurt them, they won't do it anymore."

Rodeo contestants and stock contractors, who have a substantial investment in the animals, share a similar philosophy, which includes a sincere regard for the talent of the animals and the need for quality and humane care for them.

"I can't think of anyone in the bull-riding fraternity who has anything but the greatest respect for the bucking animals," said PRCA rodeo producer Jerome Robinson, a former bull rider. "As far as mistreating the animals, I've never seen anyone mistreat one."

And remember, most bulls weigh more than 1,500 pounds, compared with the 150 pounds of the average bull rider. And bulls have a hide that is up to seven times thicker than human skin.

### Roping events

Rodeo's three roping events—tie-down roping, team roping and steer roping—have origins in everyday ranch life. When cattle on a ranch need medical attention or other care, a rope is really the only way to catch them.

In competition, the roping events showcase the talents of both the contestant and his horse. To successfully compete in any of the three, the contestant needs not only well-honed roping skills, but also a well-trained and intuitive horse. Roping in the competition arena closely resembles what the animals would undergo routinely on a ranch.

Economics dictate that livestock owners ensure the health and welfare of their cattle. This applies not only to timed-event stock in the roping and steer wrestling events, but also to cattle on ranches that are handled with similar methods for sorting and branding.

"I personally have not seen a serious neck injury to a tie-down roping calf in my 16 years as attending veterinarian at Tucson's La Fiesta de Los Vaqueros and other Arizona rodeos," said Dr. Taylor.

PRCA rules, stock contractors, judges and the cowboys all play integral parts in assuring that roping stock are treated humanely.

In tie-down roping, a calf must weigh between 220 and 280 pounds.

PRCA rules also stipulate the calf must be strong and healthy, and PRCA judges inspect the animals to ensure that no sick or injured livestock is used.

Most calves don't compete more than a few dozen times in their lives because of weight and usage restrictions and the fact that calves grow so rapidly.

Steers are used in the remaining two roping events, and the tough and robust Mexican corrientes are the animals of choice for team roping and steer roping because of their endurance and strength. The steers used in team roping have a 650-pound limit.

PRCA rules stipulate that the horns on the steers used in team roping and steer roping must be protected during performances. Also, steer-roping cattle must be inspected two weeks before an event to make sure they're fit.

### Steer wrestling

Steer wrestling is a one-on-one match between an animal weighing at least 450 pounds and a man who more than likely weighs less than half that amount.

"It's highly improbable that a man could injure a steer during the steer wrestling event," said Dr. Doug Corey, a large animal veterinarian from Pendleton, Ore.

A cowboy who hopes to win at steer wrestling must employ finesse. Steer wrestling involves careful positioning and leverage to enable the animal to be placed on its side.

# Equipment

Veterinarians say rodeo gear is safe, including the flank strap, spurs and electric prod. Each piece of equipment has a specific purpose and PRCA rules governing its use and placement.

Not one of the veterinarians contacted for this report described the flank strap as dangerous, painful or cruel. Some, in fact, have testified before legislative bodies that the flank strap does not injure animals. And all agreed the prod presents no danger to an animal's health. Many experts said they find the prod to be the most humane method of herding and moving animals.

## The flank strap

Bucking animals are born, not made, and the flank strap cannot magically turn a placid animal into a championship buckler, according to experts. When placed on an animal naturally inclined to buck, the flank strap simply augments the bucking action, encouraging a bucking bronc or bull to kick high with its back feet.

PRCA rules stipulate that flank straps must be lined with sheepskin or Neoprene and must utilize a quick-release fastener. No sharp or cutting objects may be placed between the strap and the animal, and the sheepskin-covered portion must be placed over both flanks and the belly of the animal. The straps never cover the genitalia or fasten so tightly as to cause pain.

Equine experts, both with and without ties to rodeo, agree on use of the flank strap.

“The flank strap produces mild pressure on the flanks, but not so much as to hurt the animal,” said Dr. Doug Corey, a large animal veterinarian from Pendleton, Ore. “It might be compared to wearing a snug belt. Bucking is simply the horse’s action to rid itself of a foreign object.”

The flank straps used in rodeo are never tight enough to immobilize or cause pain, and they don’t injure an animal. A horse has 18 ribs, which protect its kidneys. The flank strap is placed behind the rib cage, eliminating any chance that the strap might injure the kidneys.

“The flank straps cause absolutely no harm to the horses or cattle, fitting much like a snug belt around our waist,” said Dr. Jim Furman, a mixed-practice veterinarian in Alliance, Neb.

Dr. Ben Espy, an equine veterinarian who practices in both San Antonio, Texas, and Lexington, Ky., said, “The flank strap does not interfere with any of the external genitalia that are actually in between the back legs, not in the flank area where the strap is.”



PRCA PHOTO BY DAN HUBBELL

**All flank straps used on bucking horses must have a quick release mechanism for easy removal.**





Only blunt spurs, like this one used in bareback riding, are allowed in PRCA competition.

PRCA PHOTO BY KIRI STEINKE

### The prod

The prod, powered by flashlight batteries, is used to move animals on ranches and, on occasion, to move the animals into the chutes at professional rodeos.

PRCA rules only allow using the prod “as little as possible.” The prod may only be used to move livestock if it is stalled in the chute or if it is at risk of injury. The rules also state that the prod can be used only on the animal’s hip or shoulder areas, where nerve endings are not as dense and the sensation is weaker.

A horse’s hide is almost three times as thick as human skin, and the hide of a bull is virtually seven times thicker. A horse’s hide might be compared to the thickness of leather used in a woman’s purse, and bull’s hide is similar in thickness to the sole of a shoe.

The prod produces low voltage, but virtually no amperage. The prod causes a mild shock but does not cause burns because amperes, not volts, cause burns.

“Sometimes it is necessary to touch a animal with an electric stock prod to get it to go where you want it,” said Dr. Furman. “The prod is not a damaging stimulant, but rather an effective way to move the animals where they need to be in a timely fashion. Cattle prods are what I would call humane encouragement.”

According to Dr. Jeff Hall, a large animal veterinarian in Logan, Utah, “This type of prod does not harm the animals. It provides a mild electrical sensation that leaves no prolonged effects. In working with cattle for more than 30 years, I personally have been shocked with this type of device on several occasions. This type of shock was annoying but produced no lasting or harmful effects.”

### Spurs

A variety of spurs are used in rodeo, each with a different purpose, but all are dulled to avoid any harm to the livestock. Timedevent contestants often use spurs to cue the horse to speed up or turn. In saddle bronc and bareback riding, the spurs enhance the contestant’s leg action while rolling over the horse’s thick hide. Bull riders’ spurs assist them in gripping the bulls, which have loose hides.

In the saddle bronc riding and bareback riding events, PRCA rules prohibit the use of sharpened spurs, locked rowels (the star-shaped wheel on spurs) or rowels that lock. Specifically, acceptable spurs have rowels that are blunt and are about one-eighth of an inch thick so they will not cut the animals.

The rowels must be loose so they will roll over the horse’s hide, rather than dragging or cutting. Bull riding spurs have loosely locked rowels to aid in gripping the loose-hided animals, but the rowels are still dull.

Two books Sisson’s *Anatomy of the Domestic Animal* and Maximow and Bloom’s *Textbook of Histology* — indicate that the hides of horses and bulls are much thicker than human skin. A person’s skin is 1 mm to 2 mm thick. A horsehide is about 5 mm thick and bull hide is about 7 mm thick.

A horse’s hide is almost three times as thick as human skin, and the hide of a bull is virtually seven times thicker.

# Stock Contractors

**H**orses and cattle are the No. 1 priority for rodeo’s ranchers. When someone spends \$25,000 on a new car, you’ll rarely see the owner intentionally damage it. An investment like that usually has the owner nervous about even the smallest scratches, dents and dings.

In terms of expense, a top-performing rodeo animal is like that car. A good bucking horse can cost more than \$15,000, while some rodeo bulls sell for more than \$40,000.

Obviously, the owners of such animals aren’t going to do anything to jeopardize their investments.

But even if an animal isn’t valued in the tens of thousands of dollars, no stock contractor wants harm to come to any livestock. A stock contractor’s livelihood depends on the welfare of each and every one of those animals.

“It’s how I make my living,” said Ike Sankey of Sankey Rodeo Company in Joliet, Mont. “That’s why the animals’ well-being is No. 1.” Many stock contractors have hundreds of animals and thousands of dollars worth of equipment.

“Today, rodeo is an investment,” said veteran contractor Harry Vold of Harry Vold Rodeo Company in Avondale, Colo. “It’s most important to take care of these animals. In fact, we probably take better care of them than people not involved with rodeo.”

The money, however, isn’t the only reason these contractors take good care of their animals. “My reason for being in the business is not necessarily to make money. There are a lot of other things I could be doing,” Sankey said., “but I enjoy being around these horses and bulls. That’s why I’m in this business.”

Many of the bucking animals live into their 20s, which is old for a horse or bull. A strong relationship grows between many of the animals

Healthy, well-cared for animals are the center of the successful rodeo production. Quality animals draw good cowboy to the rodeo which in turn draws the audience.



and the stock contractors and their families.

“Each of the animals has its own personality, and we get to know them well,” said Sankey. “When they retire, they live out their lives on one

**Ike and Roberta Sankey of Sankey Rodeo Company survey their herd of award-winning bucking horses.**

PRCA PHOTO BY TROY SCHWINDT



PRCA PHOTO BY MIKE COPPMAN



**Nightjacket, a valuable stallion on the Claire, Mich., ranch of Jim Zinzer of J Bar J Rodeo Company, competed at the Wrangler National Finals Rodeo, ProRodeo's Super Bowl that showcases the sport's top stock and cowboys.**

of my ranches. When they pass on, we bury them on my property.” It’s a misconception, however, to think rodeo animals can be treated like house pets. These are not cuddly, affectionate dogs and cats that come running at the sound of their names. They are tough ranch animals.

Veterinarians will tell you that animals belonging to professional rodeo stock contractors receive better care than many house pets or non-rodeo ranch stock.

“The rodeo animals I have been involved with are in as good condition as any horses I have worked on,” said Dr. Doug Corey, a large animal veterinarian from Pendleton, Ore.

“I have seen animal caretakers go hungry due to time spent feeding, watering, bedding and tending to the stock following performances,” said Dr. Jennifer Schleining of Ames, Iowa. “Contractors invest hard-earned money, resources and time building a reputable business in providing quality rodeo stock. Healthy, well-cared for animals are the center of the successful rodeo production. Quality animals draw good cowboys to the rodeo, which in turn draws the audience.”

PRCA stock contractor Bennie Beutler of Beutler and Son Rodeo in Elk City, Okla., said his reasons for taking good care of his livestock are both economic and sentimental.

“If you don’t take care of them and overdo it, they won’t perform,” said Beutler. “And you like those animals; you have your favorites.”

A solid indicator of the care these animals receive is in their age. Several PRCA stock contractors boast bucking horses in the 20-plus age bracket, equivalent to about 75 years for a human.



# Professional Judges

Professional judges officiate every PRCA rodeo. Their responsibilities also include making sure the animals receive proper care and treatment. Judges who are aware of animal abuse by any PRCA member are required to report the violator to the PRCA infractions department.

Violators may be disqualified on the spot and fined by the PRCA. “We have the backing when we turn someone in,” said judge Larry Davis of Adrian, Ore. “That’s really important.”

Not everyone can become a PRCA judge. PRCA members interested in becoming a PRCA judge undergo extensive training in the skills needed to evaluate livestock and to judge rodeo, as well as several other areas. To become approved, judges undergo testing of their knowledge of animal evaluations and the rodeo.

In addition, PRCA rodeo judges undergo continued training and evaluation to ensure their skills are sharp and that they are enforcing PRCA rules, especially those regarding the care and handling of rodeo livestock.

PRCA judge George Gibbs of Maxwell, Iowa, emphasizes that most rodeo livestock are treated well. If he thinks an animal is being mistreated, he and his colleagues won’t hesitate to report the violation.

“I know I can speak for all the judges,” Gibbs said. “We take it seriously. One of our most important responsibilities is to make sure that rodeo is done humanely.”

Mistreatment of animals at PRCA rodeos is virtually non-existent, according to the judges. Everyone involved in professional rodeo makes an effort to ensure that the animals are treated well.

“One of our most important responsibilities is to make sure that rodeo is done humanely.”

— George Gibbs, PRCA official



PRCA PHOTO BY SUSAN LAMBETH

PRCA professional officials not only score all rides, but also inspect all of the livestock before each rodeo.

# PRCA's Commitment

**A**nimal Welfare is a major and ongoing initiative of the PRCA. Not only does the association have rules to ensure the proper care and treatment of rodeo livestock, but is also has an Animal Welfare Committee to review all PRCA animal-related policies and issues. The association also organizes educational seminars for veterinarians and rodeo industry members. To coordinate its animal welfare efforts, the PRCA employs an animal welfare coordinator to oversee internal and public educational programs.

The PRCA's Animal Welfare Committee meets regularly to discuss animal welfare issues, review rules and make recommendations regarding animal welfare to the PRCA Board of Directors.

Veterinarians' opinions are a vital component of the PRCA's animal welfare program. The PRCA relies on the American Association of the Equine Practitioners, the American Veterinary Medical Association and the American Association of Bovine Practitioners to provide expertise. The

PRCA Animal Welfare Committee is chaired by Doug Corey, DVM the 2007 President of the American Association of Equine Practitioners and the membership of the committee includes two other veterinarians with rodeo expertise. Veterinarians play a big part in each rodeo with the PRCA rules requiring a veterinarian on-site. This allows PRCA committees to work closely with local veterinarians on animal welfare programs and for the PRCA to gather valuable information on rodeo livestock through veterinarian conducted livestock injury surveys that continually show a very low rate of injury.



PRCA PHOTO BY CINDY SCHONHOLTZ

All PRCA-sanctioned rodeos must have a veterinarian in attendance. Dr. Doug Corey evaluates a tie-down roping horse.

Animal welfare  
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of the PRCA.

# PRCA rules

The PRCA has more than 60 rules to ensure the proper care and treatment of rodeo animals included in its official rules and regulations. While the rules and regulations are too numerous to list here, several of the safeguards for the proper treatment of animals in the rules and regulations are listed below. For a complete list of the rules and regulations dealing with the proper care and treatment of animals, please send your request to PRCA Animal Welfare, PRCA, 101 Pro Rodeo Drive, Colorado Springs, CO 80919 or email [animalwelfare@prorodeo.com](mailto:animalwelfare@prorodeo.com).

- A veterinarian must be on-site at all PRCA-sanctioned rodeos.
- All animals are inspected and evaluated for illness, weight, eyesight and injury prior to the rodeo, and no animals that are sore, lame, sick or injured are allowed to participate in the event.
- Acceptable spurs must be dull.
- Standard electric prods may be used only when necessary and may only touch the animal on the hip or shoulder area.
- Stimulants and hypnotics may not be given to any animal to improve performance.
- Any PRCA member caught using unnecessary roughness or abusing an animal may be immediately disqualified from the rodeo and fined. This holds true whether it is in the competitive arena or elsewhere on the rodeo grounds.
- Weight limitations are set for both calves (between 220 and 280 pounds) and steers (450-650 pounds).
- The flank straps for horses are fleece- or neoprene-lined and those for bulls are made of soft cotton rope and may be lined with fleece or neoprene.
- Steers used in team and steer roping have a protective covering placed around their horns.
- The use of prods and similar devices is prohibited in the riding events unless an animal is stalled in the chute.
- A no-jerk-down rule provides for fines if a contestant jerks a calf over backwards in tie-down roping.
- All rodeos must have a conveyance available to humanely transport any injured animal.
- Chutes must be constructed with the safety of the animals in mind.



Horn wraps are among the safety equipment required for rodeo livestock.

# Fact Versus Fiction

A lot of misinformation and misconceptions surrounding rodeo and its treatment of animals have been circulated over the years. The truth differs greatly from the perceived truth.

**Fiction:** Rodeo animals are treated cruelly.

**Fact:** The PRCA and its members value their animals. Through its rules and actions, the PRCA is committed to making sure that rodeo is as safe as possible for the animals and the cowboys. On-site rodeo veterinarians agree that the animals are treated well. Dr. Jennifer Schleining of Scottsdale, Ariz., said, “Veterinarians have a vested interest in and a responsibility to ensure the humane treatment of animals. As such, I can confirm that the animal athletes involved in PRCA-sanctioned events are humanely handled and well cared for.”

**Fiction:** The injury rate for rodeo animals is exceptionally high.

**Fact:** The injury rate in rodeo is extremely low, less than five-hundredths of one percent (0.0004). The findings are based on a recent survey involving 60,971 animals in 62 rodeos and 27 total injuries. Also, studies indicate the timed-event cattle experience little or no stress as a result of rodeo activity.

**Fiction:** Rodeo livestock buck because a flank strap, often with sharp objects in it, is tightly cinched around the genital area of the horse or bull.

**Fact:** Experts say professional rodeo’s bucking animals enjoy what they do. Bucking animals are born, not made, and a flank strap cannot magically turn a placid animal into a championship buck. When placed on an animal naturally inclined to buck, the flank strap simply augments the bucking action, encouraging a bucking bronc or bull to kick high with its back feet.

Flank straps used on horses must be fleece- or neoprene-lined. The flank strap used on a bull may be a soft 5/8-inch cotton rope. PRCA rules that govern flank straps do not allow any foreign or sharp objects. The flank strap is never pulled tight enough to cause injury or pain.

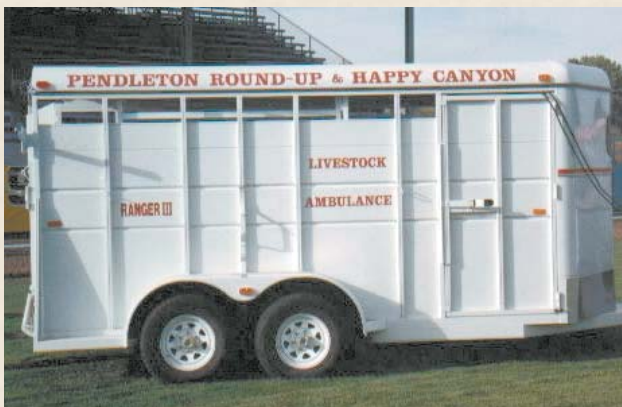
Placed around the equivalent of a human’s abdominal area, the flank strap is a “signal” to the animal that it is time to buck and, when tightened, is likened in feeling to a snug belt. It does not touch the genitals. In fact, many of the top bucking horses are mares.

“The flank strap is never intended to cause any discomfort to the animal, nor have I ever seen any evidence of injury to a bucking animal caused by this strap,” stated Dr. Ben Espy of San Antonio, Texas, who has cared for rodeo live-



PRCA PHOTO BY KYLE PARTAIN

Flank straps used on bucking horses must be fleece- or Neoprene-lined.



PRCA PHOTO BY DR. DOUG COREY

PRCA rules require a means to transport injured livestock must be available. Some rodeos, like Pendleton, Ore., have a specially equipped livestock ambulance.

stock.

**Fiction:** The spurs used in rodeo hurt the horses and bulls.

**Fact:** The hides of both horses and bulls are five to seven times thicker than human skin. The spurs allowed in PRCA-sanctioned rodeos have dull rowels, which is the wheel of the spur. Contestants who violate rules regarding the spurs face fines, suspension and/or disqualification.

In both bareback riding and saddle bronc riding, the rowel must be loose and roll across the hide of an animal. This action generally only ruffles the animal's hair. An important fact to remember is that human skin is approximately 1-2 mm thick and horsehide is approximately 5 mm thick.

In bull riding, the spurs are loosely locked and are generally used to grip the bull's loose hide, which is approximately 7 mm thick.

**Fiction:** PRCA rules do not adequately protect the animals.

**Fact:** Professional rodeo judges take their responsibility to report any violators seriously, and the PRCA administration and Board of Directors are equally conscientious about imposing and upholding fines. Although the PRCA is the largest and most respected rodeo-sanctioning body in the world, its rules apply only to the nearly 700 rodeos sanctioned annually by the association.

Most other rodeo-sanctioning organizations abide by rules similar to the PRCA's. Unfortunately, unsanctioned events do take place. The PRCA has no control over those events and urges anyone who witnesses improper treatment of animals to report the offending action to local animal welfare agencies.

**Fiction:** Rodeo participants and owners do not care for their animals.

**Fact:** A common sentiment voiced by PRCA stock contractors is that their animals are almost like members of their family. The livestock represents more than their livelihood, and caring for animals is a way of life for these specialized ranchers.

Of course, rodeo is a business, but many stock contractors say they form a relationship with their animals.

**Fiction:** Rodeo animals are mistreated outside the competition arena.

**Fact:** The PRCA strives to ensure that its animals receive proper care and treatment before, during and after every rodeo performance.

Horses and cattle travel to rodeos in trucks that are specially designed for their protection.

Association rules stipulate that animals may not be confined in vehicles more than 24 hours without being unloaded, properly fed and watered.

Virtually all PRCA stock contractors unload their stock more often. Horses and cattle don't ride together and are separated at the



Spurs used in roughstock events must be dull. Shown are the bareback (top) and bull riding spurs.



PRCA officials must be members of the association for five years and pass a written test before judging a PRCA-sanctioned rodeo.

PRCA PHOTOS BY MIKE COPMAN



PRCA PHOTOS BY SUSAN KANODE



All rodeo livestock, including this pickup horse, are valuable to their owners and receive the highest standard of care.

Rodeo livestock are accustomed to traveling and are unloaded, fed and watered often.

rodeos to prevent injury.

“ProRodeo animals are carefully sorted according to temperament for transport to and from rodeos to avoid injury,” said Dr. Eddie Taylor of Scottsdale, Ariz. “Upon arrival at a rodeo, the animals are placed in large holding pens, provided with fresh feed and water, and monitored frequently for any health concerns.”

**Fiction:** Animal rights groups are against rodeo because it is not safe for animals.

**Fact:** Animal welfare is one of the most important initiatives for the PRCA. Animal welfare is very different from animal rights. Animal welfare is entirely about making sure that animals who are an integral part of our lives are treated fairly, humanely and well-cared for. In contrast, animal rights extremists, if taken to the

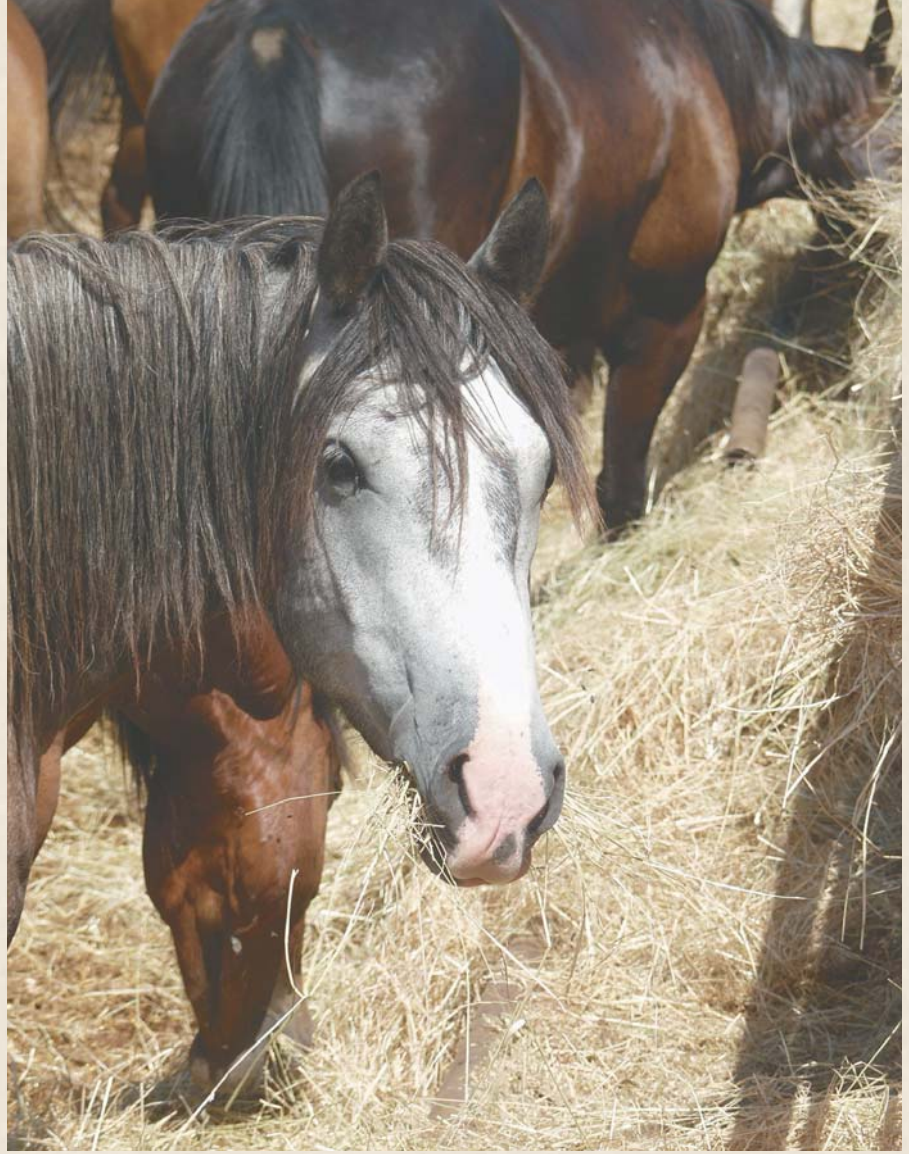
letter of their arguments, believe that animals should not even be pets and should roam freely.

**Fiction:** Rodeo livestock are forced to perform through the use of hot shots.

**Fact:** Cattle prods are used to aid in moving the livestock. Under PRCA rules, the prod is used only on hip and shoulder areas, where nerve endings are less dense. Representatives of many state and county animal welfare agencies

PRCA PHOTO BY SUSAN KANODE





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# Summary

**Veterinarians attest that rodeo livestock are provided the finest care and treatment. These animals are an important and valuable part of professional rodeo.**

**T**he PRCA and its members are committed to promoting the proper care and treatment of the animals used in rodeo. As an association, the PRCA has been very proactive in establishing rules and regulations governing animal welfare and in creating veterinary advisory groups to assist in the association's efforts in this important area.

The PRCA prides itself on implementing the highest standards for treatment of rodeo livestock in the business, as well as encouraging other rodeo associations to adopt similar standards. The animals involved in PRCA-sanctioned events are afforded proper care and treatment through a comprehensive, award-winning animal welfare program and the enforcement of animal-related rules and regulations.

For more information, please send your request to the Animal Welfare at PRCA, 101 Pro Rodeo Drive, Colorado Springs, CO 80919 or [animalwelfare@prorodeo.com](mailto:animalwelfare@prorodeo.com), or call 719-593-8840. Additional information on the PRCA and its animal welfare initiatives is available at [www.prorodeo.com](http://www.prorodeo.com).

# Background

- Bennie Beutler. Beutler operates Beutler & Son Rodeo Company in Elk City, Okla. He is serving as a stock contractor representative on the PRCA Board of Directors, and he was PRCA Stock Contractor of the Year in 1997. Four of his horses and one bull have earned yearend bucking stock awards.
- Doug Corey, DVM. An equine practitioner in Pendleton, Ore., Dr. Corey has provided leadership to the PRCA in veterinary issues. He currently serves as chair of the PRCA Animal Welfare Committee and the President-elect of the American Association of Equine Practitioners. Dr. Corey earned his DVM degree at Colorado State University.
- Ben Espy, DVM. Dr. Espy is an equine veterinarian who practices in San Antonio, Texas, and Lexington, KY. He has been the official show veterinarian for the San Antonio Livestock Show & Rodeo for five years. Dr. Espy earned his DVM degree at Texas AM University.
- Jim Furman, DVM. Dr. Furman is a mixed practice veterinarian in Alliance, Neb. Dr. Furman earned his DVM degree at Colorado State University.
- George Gibbs. Gibbs has served as a professional rodeo official with the PRCA for more than 20 years.
- Jeff Hall, DVM, PhD. Dr. Hall is a veterinary toxicologist and serves on the faculty at Utah State University. He has extensive experience in rodeo, including as a contestant and on-site rodeo veterinarian. Dr. Hall earned his DVM degree at Oklahoma State University.
- Tommy Keith. Keith has served as a professional rodeo cowboy with the PRCA for more than 20 years. He is a former bull rider.
- Jerome Robinson. Robinson is a former PRCA bull rider who has become a successful rodeo producer in Ft. Collins, Colo.
- Ike Sankey. A former PRCA contestant, Sankey has built one of the most successful bucking horse breeding programs in the rodeo industry. He was named PRCA stock contractor of the year in 1999. Sankey Rodeo Company is based in Joliet, Mont. Sankey has had three horses earn PRCA Saddle Bronc of the Year honors. In addition, Sankey qualified for the National Finals Rodeo as a competitor four times.
- Jennifer A. Schleining, DVM. Dr. Schleining is a equine veterinarian in Ames, Iowa, who has had extensive involvement with rodeo animal care throughout the United States. Dr. Schleining earned her DVM degree at Iowa State University.
- Eddie Taylor, DVM. Dr. Taylor, an equine veterinarian in Scottsdale, Ariz., has been the on-site veterinarian at the La Fiesta De los Vaqueros in Tucson, Ariz., for 16 years. Dr. Taylor earned his DVM degree at Oklahoma State University.
- Harry Vold. Vold, who has been named PRCA's Stock Contractor of the Year 11 times, is known as a pioneer of rodeo bucking stock breeding programs. He runs Harry Vold Rodeo Company out of Avondale, Colo. Vold's company has had six horses and two bulls earn year-end bucking stock awards.

“The PRCA sets the standard  
for humane care of rodeo animal  
athletes. And in my professional  
opinion, rodeo remains a healthy,  
humane, family-oriented sport.”

*Dr. Jennifer Schleining  
Ames, Iowa  
equine veterinarian*



PROFESSIONAL RODEO COWBOYS ASSOCIATION

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