

Communication from Public

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Comments for Public Posting: The Humane Society Veterinary Medical Association published an expert review of rodeo practices by Peggy W. Larson, DVM, MS, JD in January of 2015, which concluded that rodeos are inherently cruel and that it is also impossible to create a humane rodeo. Please see attached PDF to read the article or read it here: https://www.hsvma.org/rodeos_inherent_cruelty_to_animals The LA Times has also published an article about the underreported animal injuries and deaths at rodeos that are directly related to rodeo events and not "random aneurysms or heart attacks" as the chairman of the Professional Rodeo Cowboys Association implied despite not being able to provide a single piece of data to back up that claim. <https://www.latimes.com/california/story/2022-12-07/rodeo-casualties-for-animals-that-are-ridden-and-roped-broken-backs-legs-and-skulls> It's easy to determine which side of this rodeo ban ordinance is being biased and deceptive when you look at who stands to benefit if their "side" wins. The Western Sports Industry Coalition is comprised of businesses that profit off of the commodification, exploitation torture and slaughter of nonhuman animals. If the ordinance doesn't pass, they stand to benefit financially, if it does pass, they will lose money. Whereas animal advocates, veterinary experts, nonprofit animal welfare orgs, animal rights activists and everyone else against animal cruelty have nothing to gain personally if the ordinance passes besides the heartwarming feeling of knowing their compassion and effort helped prevent more animals from being senselessly killed, being tortured, suffering immense fear and pain at least within Los Angeles. And if the ordinance doesn't pass, it is the animals who lose.. they lose their health, their safety and their lives. Culture is never an excuse to commit senseless violence. The WSIC can claim the animals love it, but it's blatantly obvious no animal ever wants to feel fear, discomfort nor pain, and they certainly don't want to die. Anyone who believes they care about the welfare of animals knows there is no way to "humanely" torture or kill an animal. This vote should be a no-brainer, move LA forward as a society that values kindness and empathy, and vote to ban rodeos, not just the tools, but the barbaric violent "sport" itself.

Rodeos: Inherent Cruelty to Animals

January 15, 2015

by Peggy W. Larson, DVM, MS, JD

During the course of my lifetime, I have been a farmer, a bareback rodeo bronc rider, a large animal veterinarian, a medical researcher, a meat inspector, a state veterinarian, and a prosecutor. I have also worked as a media consultant on animal welfare issues including rodeo and PMU (pregnant mare's urine) horses. Based upon my extensive large animal experience, I have concluded that rodeo events are inherently cruel.

Calf Roping

The cruelest rodeo events are the roping events. In calf roping, baby calves are used. If they were not in the rodeo, these calves would still be with their mothers on pasture. Weighing less than 300 pounds, they are forced to run at speeds in excess of 25 miles per hour when roped. The reason they run at such high speeds is that they are tormented in the holding chute: their tails are twisted, their tails are rubbed back and forth over the steel chute bars, and they are shocked with 5000-volt electric prods until the gate opens. They burst out of the chute at top speed only to be stopped short – or “clotheslined” – with a choking rope around the neck. They are often injured, and some are killed.



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It is also the case that rodeo calf ropers must spend a great deal of time practicing in order to become proficient. Calves sold to practice pens are roped over and over until they are injured or killed. Dr. T. K. Hardy, a veterinarian who was also a calf roper, was quoted in Newsweek, stating that calf roping is an expensive sport, and that two or three calves are injured per practice session and must be replaced.

Many rodeo insiders also believe that calf roping is cruel. These include such notables as Dr. Robert Miller (rodeo veterinarian), Chuck King (Editor of Western Horseman), John Growney (stock

contractor), Keith Martin (San Antonio Livestock Exposition Director), Cotton Rosser (stock contractor) and Monty Roberts (horse trainer).

Steer Tripping

As with calf roping, steer tripping—commonly called “steer busting”—puts a rodeo animal at extreme risk of injury or death. Steers weighing approximately 700 pounds are forced to run at top speed while the roper throws the rope around the steer's horns. The roper then flips the rope over the right side of the steer, while turning his galloping horse to the left. Within a split second, the steer's head and neck are jerked 180 degrees or more, causing the animal to be violently tripped, rolled and dragged for approximately 30 feet. That's a 700-pound body being dragged by the neck, with the horns digging into the dirt. Sometimes the horns fracture. The stress to the neck is enormous. The roper's intent is to make the steer sustain a violent fall and subsequent dragging sufficient to stun the steer. The purpose of the stunning is to enable the roper to tie the steer's legs for a score. If the steer is not sufficiently stunned in the first attempt, he may be tripped and dragged repeatedly in the same run until he remains down.

These steers are usually very thin, often with sores on their backs and hips. They appear to be depressed, not lively. They are used so often that their injuries do not have enough time to heal. As with roping calves, tripping steers may be used over and over again in practice sessions. When they are crippled from repeated abuse and injury, they are sent to slaughter.

Steer Wrestling

Steer wrestling also causes injuries and deaths to the animals. In this event a steer is forced to run at top speed while a contestant leaps from his horse, grabs the horns of the steer and twists his neck until he falls to the ground. In one case involving a rodeo steer in Connecticut, the steer did not fall when the rider jumped on his head. The competitor then violently twisted the steer's head, again. When he fell, the steer suffered a broken neck.

Bull Riding

Bull riding may appear less harmful, as the bulls are so large. However, in order to enhance the bull's performance, cattle prods are often used repeatedly to shock the bulls as they stand trapped in the bucking chute. Bucking straps and spurs can cause the bull to buck beyond his normal capacity and his legs or back may thus be broken. Eventually, when bulls cease to provide a wild ride, they too are sent to slaughter.

Rodeo-Related Injuries Evident at Slaughter

As a pathologist and former meat inspector, I believe my colleagues when they report horrendous injuries to rodeo cattle. Dr. C. G. Haber—a veterinarian with thirty years of experience as a USDA meat inspector—says, "The rodeo folks send their animals to the packing houses where...I have seen cattle so extensively bruised that the only areas in which the skin was attached was the head, neck, legs, and belly. I have seen animals with six to eight ribs broken from the spine and at times puncturing the lungs. I have seen as much as two and three gallons of free blood accumulated

under the detached skin."¹

A career USDA meat inspection veterinarian, Dr. Robert Fetzner, Director of Slaughter Operations for the USDA Food Safety and Inspection Service, stated in our phone conversation on September 9, 1998, "Lots of rodeo animals went to slaughter. I found broken ribs, punctured lungs, hematomas, broken legs, severed tracheas and the ligamenta nuchae were torn loose." Torn nuchal ligaments are essentially broken necks and this is the sad fate of many roping calves.

Bronc Riding

Bronc riding, both saddle and bareback, causes rodeo horse deaths. It is not uncommon for horses in these events to crash blindly into fence posts around the arena or into the holding fencing and chutes. Bucking horses must be spurred over the shoulders on each jump or buck in order for the rider to qualify. The spurs cause blunt trauma to the shoulders which don't have time to heal properly before the horse is ridden and spurred in another rodeo. The bucking strap can also cause chafing to the flank area which increases the discomfort to the horse. The irritation of the spurs and the bucking strap often cause the horse to "run blind" and fail to see fencing, posts or chutes.



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Rodeo Transport

Rodeo animals are constantly in transit. Horses and cattle are shipped from one rodeo to the next, often in double-decker trailers. These trailers are very dangerous because the horses often fight during transport and fighting may also occur when bulls are shipped.

Dr. Temple Grandin of Colorado State University works with the cattle industry on humane handling of its animals. In several phone conversations, she referenced a case in which a bucking horse suffered a badly broken front leg. Instead of humanely euthanizing the suffering animal, the rodeo chose to ship the horse, her leg dangling, across two states in a transport truck along with other horses. She died before she could be killed at the slaughterhouse. Dr. Grandin also stated that transport injuries and fighting are major causes of injuries in shipped horses.

The Effects of Normalized Rodeo Violence on Children

Rodeo not only injures and kills many animals, but it exposes children to sanctioned animal abuse. As a former prosecutor, I saw many criminals that had a history of animal abuse. Children who attend rodeos witness riders and ropers dominate and injure animals. They see the spurs, the cattle prods and the ropes. They see brutal riders winning prizes. Animal abuse can become acceptable to them. Acknowledging this link, Planned Parenthood has stopped using rodeo in its national fundraising efforts because of their concern for children and for the animals.

Mutton Busting for Kids

Rodeo now also promotes small children riding sheep—this event is called “mutton busting.” Four- to six-year olds are sometimes forced by their parents to ride sheep at rodeos. Some kids are crying from fear. Some kids are injured and suffer broken bones, head injuries and abrasions. The potential for injuries is so great that parents are required to sign a waiver absolving the rodeo from legal action in the event of injury.



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Children and Rodeo Tobacco Marketing

Rodeo promoters have used children to distribute free samples of tobacco products—mainly chewing tobacco—to rodeo attendees. When Bozeman, MT was selected to hold the National Collegiate Rodeo finals, the tobacco industry wanted to use children to pass out tobacco samples at the event. However, when Bozeman city officials denied permission, rodeo promoters went elsewhere.

Anti-Rodeo Legislation

A number of cities across the country have passed ordinances eliminating rodeo's most common devices—the electric prod, spurs and the flank strap—all of which use pain to force the animals to "perform." These include Pasadena (CA), Fort Wayne (IN), Pittsburgh (PA), Leestown (VA), and the state of Rhode Island. It is no accident that where these devices are eliminated, rodeos disappear. Internationally, both the UK and the Netherlands have banned rodeos outright.

Numerous animals – including calves, steers and horses – are routinely injured and killed in rodeo events. If desired, many rodeo videos can be viewed publicly via YouTube.

In my opinion, and based on my extensive training and experience, it is impossible to create a humane rodeo.

1. The Humane Society of the United States, interview with C.G. Haber, 1979.



Dr. Peggy Larson was born on a North Dakota grain and cattle ranch. She studied veterinary medicine at The Ohio State University, earned a Master's in Comparative Pathology at UC Davis, and a law degree at Vermont Law School. After law school, Dr. Larson clerked as a state prosecutor. As an associate professor, she taught at one of the Vermont state colleges and she has also worked as a media consultant on a variety of animal issues. Her veterinary patients have included ranch cattle and horses, swine, sheep, dogs and cats. She recently retired from the spay/neuter practice she established in 1991. Dr. Larson currently uses both her veterinary and law degrees to investigate animal cruelty cases and to serve as an expert court witness.

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