

Bulldogging—

Nip of Steer's Lip Started It

The cowboys call it bulldogging because Bill Pickett, the cowboy who invented it, used to bite the lip of the steer, bulldog fashion, to encourage it to fall down.

But in the rule book it's called steer wrestling, a title that's a more accurate description of the skill as it's practiced today.

Pickett pounced on his first steer from horseback in a fit of temper, after the intractable critter refused to be driven into a corral. The promoters of the wild west show he was working for, back in 1903, thought it was a great stunt and Pickett performed it as an exhibition for several seasons.

Years before it evolved into a contest event, the cowboys quit biting the steer. But the name stuck.

Steerwrestling is probably the most scientific skill among rodeo's five standard events. Jumping a big steer that outweighs him nearly four to one and twisting him down in nine seconds or less looks like a job for a pretty stout hand.

A strong man makes it easier, of course, but the doggers who win the most money are those that make the best use of timing and balance.

There's hardly a man around that's strong enough to tip over a 750-pound steer by sheer heft, even if you give him the afternoon to get it done. And, when the complication is added of stopping the steer from a dead run before it's twisted down, it's apparent that it takes some knowing how to do the job quickly.

The trick is to come off the horse just right, with the cowboy's feet dropping from the stirrups at a 45-degree angle to the steer's charge. He digs in with his heels, pushes down on the left horn and up on the right to get the steer off balance as he brakes him to a stop.

If it all goes right, the steer will slow down in a broad curve. Just before it stops, the dogger tilts its head back to keep the critter from getting set solidly on all four feet. Then he reaches around

for a hold under the steer's nose for more leverage, twists the head up farther and falls backward.

If he's done it all right, the steer will fall cleanly on his left side, with all four legs free. But usually it isn't as easy as it looks.

The first hazard is the houlihan, knocking the steer down by the weight of the man's jump from the saddle. Besides being against the rules, which require the steer to be stopped before he's thrown, it's a good way to court suicide.

The houlihaned steer usually somersaults on top of the steer wrestler.

Then there's the dog fall, when the steer goes down with his legs under him, has to be let up and thrown again. But probably most exasperating is the rubber-necked steer who stands solidly upright ignoring the straining steer wrestler completely as though it were natural for steers to relax with their heads upside down.

Then, some steers won't stop at the steer that sets up, stopping quickly as the cowboy jumps, letting him bounce on the ground like a lonsided medicine ball. Or the steer that ducks in front of the dogger's horse, causing a wild melee that could break the legs of all three creatures involved.

Then, some steers won't stop at all, but hang the cowboy hanging on their horns right into the wall.

It's often a wonder they don't bite the steers any more.

of these boys ride in rodeos the year around and get more practice in six months than the old timers sometimes got in six years. "Coming out of the chutes that often and with that much tough competition, it stands to reason that any good horse is going to be ridden sometime."

Although he admits "that lots of good bucking horses are goin' to the canneries before they're really tried out," Copenhagen is optimistic about the future.

"Maybe breeding's the answer. But as long as there are kids who want to try them, there'll always be plenty of good bucking horses."

It would take approximately 15 years to see but one performance of all of the nearly 500 professional rodeos approved each year by the Rodeo Cowboy's Association. They are held in 34 states and Canada and as many as 40 different contests are held on the same day.

CALIFORNIA HAS 63
California is the biggest rodeo state, with 63 rodeos there approved by the Rodeo Cowboy's Association in 1957. Next is Texas with 51 and third is Colorado with 32.

LITTLE TELEVISION
Rodeo remains the only big time professional sport that can't be seen regularly on television. Rodeo Cowboys' Association limits network telecasts to two a year.

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Raising Buckaroos Can Be Profitable

Eventually many rodeo men agree, the high price of proven buckers will more than offset the financial risk of breeding them. To support their theory they point out that rodeo gets bigger every year and the demand for good saddle broncs grows with it.

The answer may come this season. The whole sport is waiting to see the season-long performance of some horses bred to buck five summers ago by stock contractors Ken Roberts, Mavetta, Kans., and Bob Ramsey, Sacramento, Calif., who set out independently to solve the problem of scarcity.

Although they are getting scarce the broncs are not getting any easier to ride. Deb Copenhagen, the man who won more money riding the saddle broncs the last two years than anyone else has been riding as a pro for 10 years.

"The buckin' horses are as tough today as they ever were," he says. "But the bronc riders are getting tougher every year and it's hard for a horse to build up a reputation like they did in the old days."

Five-time bronc riding champion Casey Tibbs agrees. In "Midnight's day" he points out, "A good horse—even a hater one didn't work near as much. These old horses weren't exposed to competition more than about 15 times a year."

"There are five times as many rodeos today and five or six times as many good bronc riders." Most

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