A calf roped and busted even once suffers injury from the scientific point of view.

As the crowd cheers from the grandstands, a white-faced calf charges out of the gate into the rodeo arena, a cowboy on horseback in hot pursuit. The cowboy’s lariat circles in the air and drops over the calf’s head. As the lariat tightens around the calf’s neck, the animal is flipped 180° into the air and slammed to the ground. The crowd roars its approval.

An investigatory study of rodeo roping events, conducted for The Humane Society of the United States, has found that in calf roping, a 225-lb. calf is usually traveling at approximately 27 miles per hour at the moment it is lassoed. The resulting force exerted on the calf’s body is enough to injure the calf, sometimes severely.

Under the direction of a veterinarian, the investigators attended rodeos in Montana, Wyoming, and Colorado over a two-year period. They documented visible injuries to a significant number of animals used in those rodeos. The injuries were indicated by broken limbs, dazed or unconscious animals, flank sores, open wounds, abrasions, spur marks in the neck and shoulder areas, and broken horns.
injury for pleasure and profit. These practices take place day after day should be subjected to pain or concluded, as an example, that a point of view.

animals, like man himself, are sen­

for the study were provided by veterinary medical students, a for­

mer rodeo performer, clinical spe­

and a physiolo­gist.

Rodeo promoters, sponsors, and trade associations would have the public believe that little injury takes place. But no rodeo group has yet presented any scientific data to refute the results of the HSUS study. In announcing to its membership Technical data and assistance...HSUS is also opposed to team roping (one steer, two cowboys), and steer busting—should be banned in every state. As a step toward that goal, HSUS offi­
cials testified before the Colorado Legislature in April 1973 in support of bills that would ban roping and bursting of any animal in rodeos. Both bills had been introduced by Sen. Ted Strickland (R-Westmin­
ster) who has since been appointed lieutenant governor. "There are no events in rodeo performances that are more injuri­
ous to calves and steers than those events employing the act of roping. "HSUS President John A. Hoyt told the Colorado Senate State Affairs Committee. "Indeed, the nature of the events should convince any sensitive per­ son that animals so roped are being subjected to torment, pain, and inj­ury."

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consider their calves too valuable to risk injury to them by roping. To prevent the injuries that can occur in roping, many of these ranchers reported moving calves into holding pens, chutes, or other small enclosures before roping the hind legs.

HSUS investigators observed visible injuries to as many as 11-12% of the animals in some steer busting events.

The horns are often dug into the ground and sometimes broken in the process. The key objective of the bust is to render the steer im­mobile and stunned, in order that three feet can be easily tied. Con­sequently, it is to the contestant’s advantage to have the steer momentarily knocked unconscious when he hits the ground. HSUS investigators observed vis­ible injuries to as many as 11-12% of the animals in some steer busting events. Because of the obvious violence and frequent injury to the animal, steer busting is conducted less frequently than other rodeo events. Nevertheless, it is authorized by both national rodeo associations. It is outlawed only by the state of Texas.

HSUS is also opposed to team roping, which features one cowboy roping a steer by the head or horns and another cowboy roping him by the hind legs. The steer, conse­quently, is stretched in two direc­
tions. This can result in torn liga­ments and injured muscles. But it is all part of rodeo. Yet, in the face of such activities, an article in the July-August 1973 Saturday Evening Post stated that rodeo is "a performance of man and mount that becomes a ballet in itself because the minds and mus­cles of both have learned how to work together in an admirable part­nership." How anyone could image a calf or a steer being flipped into the air and slammed to the ground as ballet is difficult to understand. The Humane Society believes cattle roping events conducted for entertainment—calf roping, team roping (one steer, two cowboys), and steer busting—should be banned in every state. As a step toward that goal, HSUS offi­
cials testified before the Colorado Legislature in April 1973 in support of bills that would ban roping and bursting of any animal in rodeos. Both bills had been introduced by Sen. Ted Strickland (R-Westmin­ster) who has since been appointed lieutenant governor. "There are no events in rodeo performances that are more injuri­ous to calves and steers than those events employing the act of roping. "HSUS President John A. Hoyt told the Colorado Senate State Affairs Committee. "Indeed, the nature of the events should convince any sensitive per­son that animals so roped are being subjected to torment, pain, and inj­ury."

HSUS’s position was supported editorially by the Rocky Mountain News, one of the West’s most pres­tigious newspapers. HSUS’s testimony was presented in a hearing room packed with rodeo participants and fans, who claimed that a ban on calf roping would cause the demise of rodeos.

"Nobody wants to see these ani­mals hurt, but that’s how we make our money," one speaker said. "And we all want to make money." The committee said they would take the bills under consideration, but, in light of the overwhelming presence of rodeo supporters, it seemed unlikely that the bills would ever again see the light of day.

In praising Strickland for his courage in introducing the bills, Rocky Mountain News columnist Craig Barnes said an issue that had been overlooked at the hearing was kindness. Said Barnes: "Perhaps a goal even nobler than the pursuit of truth is keeping people from doing wrong, and inexorably the two are linked. We all want to make money."

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As a so-called “bucking bronco” leaves the chute, a cowboy cinches a flank strap so tightly around the horse that the horse is sure to buck. HSUS charges that this strap both injures and torments the animal.

Yet, rodeo proponents continue to claim that livestock would get even rougher handling on ranches. Even their claims about rodeo events being Old West traditions are phony, as most of the events have been developed solely for the purpose of entertainment.

One of the most disturbing aspects of rodeo is that it gives children who participate an insensitive outlook on animals. Through Little Britches rodeo groups, high school rodeo groups, and collegiate rodeo associations, children and youth of all ages are taught to treat animals inhumanely in the name of competition. Such an atmosphere of violence may be psychologically damaging to children.

HSUS’s persistent efforts to change rodeo activities have brought the entire rodeo industry to the defense. The large turnout of rodeo supporters at the Colorado hearing is typical of the forces that the rodeo industry can rally through its associations. Security at rodeo performances is now extremely tight. This extends down even to high school and “bush league” weekend rodeos. It is almost impossible for an outsider—even members of the press—to enter the chute areas and corrals in which injuries or the use of electric prods and other mechanical devices might be observed.

The two largest national rodeo associations, the Rodeo Cowboys Assn. (RCA) and the International Rodeo Assn. (IRA), are extremely powerful. They employ the techniques of professional public relations firms, distribute regular communications to their members, and rally mass support when any aspect of rodeo is being challenged. One of their primary defenses is that they have strict rules that must be followed by any rodeo they sanction. What they do not mention is that only approximately 30% of all rodeos conducted in the United States are sanctioned by either association.

There is little or no humane supervision at most rodeos. Although RCA and IRA claim that the American Humane Assn. (AHA) supervises rodeos, AHA is able to send supervisors to only some 10% of them. Whereas AHA Executive Director Rutherford T. Phillips stated that AHA “would be happy to see rodeos discontinued or outlawed,” AHA has failed to publicly disavow the misleading protective role in which the rodeo associations have cast it.

Not all rodeos have veterinary care available for injured animals. Conditions such as overgrown or cracked hooves, open wounds, skin infections, malnutrition, internal parasites, and improper loading and unloading of animals receive little or no attention. Only the most valuable animals receive adequate care.

HSUS learned of an incident involving extreme neglect to a bucking horse that was severely injured during a 1973 Independence Day rodeo in Pocatello, Idaho. The horse was dragged out of the arena without the aid of a sled. As the horse was dragged through the gate, its rear legs became entangled in the fence. As several spectators booed their disapproval, the horse was pulled by its tail until it was freed. With no veterinarian being in attendance, a rodeo official broadcast a plea for one. A non-practicing veterinarian who had been in the grandstands answered the call and diagnosed the injury as a broken back. He advised the

The spectacular aspect of steer busting is the flipping of the steer, which is accomplished by letting the lariat drop below the steer’s buttocks (left), and the cowboy’s riding off at a 45° angle, causing the steer to be jerked around (center), and flipped to the ground on his side (right).
rodeo stock contractor, who owned the horse, that the horse should be destroyed and that he could not do it because he was not a practitioner.

The following morning, the horse was discovered to be still alive and unattended. A police officer responded to a call and loaned his weapon to a rodeo employee, who then placed the shot poorly, resulting in a slow death. As soon as HSUS learned of the case, it sent an investigator to the scene. As a result, HSUS has charged the stock contractor with cruelty to animals under Idaho statutes.

Rodeo supporters claim that rodeo animals are trucked from one town to another and used almost daily. In addition to the animals seen by spectators, rodeo performers use other animals for practice in preparation for performances. These animals are subjected to constant risk of injury, without even the scrutiny of spectators to protect them from flagrant abuse. "The truth of the matter is that most of the animals, whether they be bucking horses or calves or steers being roped, are subjected to pain practically every time they are used," HSUS Director Robert F. Welborn told the Colorado State Board of Agriculture in June 1973. "This pain may be transitory, or it may be the result of an internal injury that will continue." "In addition to pain, the animals are subjected to constant fear and torment," Welborn said.

Fear and torment are the key factors in causing otherwise gentle horses to buck, thereby producing the widely advertised "bucking broncos." The HSUS study concluded that rodeo horses and bulls buck because of (a) pressure of the flank strap, a heavy leather strap cinched tightly around the animal's flanks, applying pressure to sensitive lumbar nerves, to the inguinal canal area, and, occasionally, on the prepuce of the male animal, and (b) digging into the animal's flesh by the cowboy's spurs.

Part of the investigators' study of the flank strap involved cinching flank straps around two horses known for their calm temperament. Both horses bucked. The investigators also released a former rodeo bucking horse from a bucking chute several times without a flank strap. The horse did not buck.

The bucking horse is simply attempting to rid himself of a tormenting device, the study concluded. Contrary to the claim of rodeo associations that a fleece-lined flank strap protects the animal, the study team found that fleece-lined flank straps produced more abrasions to the flanks of horses than did unlined flank straps.

HSUS is determined to put an end to all cruelty at rodeos. But the opposition to reforms is well organized and fierce. Every little town that depends on rodeos to draw tourists and every manufacturer of rodeo apparel or equipment will be fighting change.

Said Rocky Mountain News columnist Barnes of rodeo: "It isn't going to be easy to put a rope around a tradition like that and drag it off into history. And it isn't going to go without kicking and bawling and raising dust. It is ironic that man, the only living creature capable of reason, sets out to torment, injure, and kill other creatures as though they were created only for his amusement. The Humane Society of the United States believes all creatures have a purpose and a value of their own and that it is man's responsibility to respect all forms of life.

As long as any animal is exploited for the sake of entertainment, the HSUS goal of obtaining respect for all forms of life will be nothing more than a goal. It is time to make that goal a reality.

YOU CAN HELP!

1. If a rodeo is scheduled for your community, write to the sponsors to protest.
2. Before the rodeo takes place, get your local humane society to conduct a public education program about the cruelties of rodeo. It should include the following:
   A. Articles and editorials in local papers. (Write to HSUS for copies of this report and glossy photographs to give editors and reporters.)
   B. Appearances on interview or talk programs on radio and TV.
3. Write to local officials (mayor, city manager, city council members, etc.), governor, and your state legislators to inform them of the cruelties of rodeo. (Enclose a copy of this report.) Ask them to prohibit performances of rodeos that permit roping of animals and the use of devices to make animals react violently.
4. Send a contribution to HSUS to assist in its public education program to inform the public about the cruelty of rodeos.

Additional copies of this report are available at 3¢ each from The Humane Society of the United States, 1604 K St., N.W., Washington, D. C. 20006.