

The Humane Society Institute for Science and Policy
Animal Studies Repository

1974

Special Report on Rodeo

Follow this and additional works at: https://animalstudiesrepository.org/sp_reps

 Part of the [Animal Studies Commons](#), [Other Anthropology Commons](#), and the [Sports Studies Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

"Special Report on Rodeo" (1974). *HSUS SPECIAL REPORTS*. 14.
https://animalstudiesrepository.org/sp_reps/14

This Report is brought to you for free and open access by the Humane Society Institute for Science and Policy. It has been accepted for inclusion by an authorized administrator of the Animal Studies Repository. For more information, please contact eyahner@humanesociety.org.



A SPECIAL REPORT ON RODEO

During the past several years, the "sport" of rodeo has been a controversial subject. Charges and counter-charges have been levied for and against rodeo with little or no scientific data to support those positions.

Special interest groups on both sides of the battleline have gotten into the act and had their say. On the one side has been the Rodeo Cowboys' Association, the International Rodeo Association, Collegiate Rodeo Associations, high school rodeo groups, "Little Britches" rodeo organizations, plus the many business enterprises that profit directly or indirectly from the umbrella of rodeo per se., i. e. merchants, hotel and motel operators, clothing manufacturers, trailer manufacturers, specialty manufacturers, etc.

On the other side have been citizens concerned over the impact of violence on their children and our society, psychologists, sociologists, humanitarians, ministers, social anthropologists and humaniacs. Some have been knowledgeable of rodeo in general and many have just been psychologically repulsed from an aesthetic point of view primarily.

As a national humane organization of prominence, The Humane Society of the United States felt compelled to launch an objective study of its own to gather facts about rodeo and the possible abuses to the animals involved during performances and behind the scenes. The president and board of H. S. U. S. felt that the facts should be gathered, as unprejudicially as possible, so the truth could have an unveiling and the public be informed of the realities of rodeo.

Robert C. Bay, D. V. M., then a member of the faculty of Colorado State University at Fort Collins, Colorado, was engaged to carry forward this study. The personnel selected to assist him in this study for the two summer periods of 1971 and 1972 consisted of junior and senior veterinary medical students, plus a part-time professional photographer. These people were instructed to be objective, gather pertinent data, document all information with pictures, if possible, or with witnesses. The team of participants was instructed to be fair, unbiased and objective in their fact finding ventures. Careful notes were taken, accurate records kept, and documentation established.

Flank or "Bucking" Strap Analysis:

For years, a controversy has raged over the use of the flank strap in rodeos used on equine bucking stock in the saddle bronc and

bareback bronc riding events. Humane organizations have argued that, at least, the strap was a harassment, a torment or annoyance to the horse and probably produced a degree of anxiety and some pain.

The R. C. A. et al, have contended that the strap was no more of an annoyance than a man's belt and that it did not make a horse buck - only buck "better;" that bucking stock bucked for the pleasure of bucking, etc.

The flank strap can, in no way, be compared to a man's belt. It is applied in the flank area and is cinched tightly by a heavy man holding on to a tension strap as long as possible as the animal is released from the bucking chute. This strap is, at least, a severe annoyance to the horse, applying pressure to sensitive lumbar nerves, the ingroinal canal area, and, on fairly frequent occasions, it involves the prepuce of the male animal.

A. Experimental Evidence:

1. Special anatomical dissections were done on two embalmed equine specimens with particular emphasis on the nerve fibers of the flank and ingroinal areas. In addition, special dissection attention was paid to the ingroinal canal, the spermatic cord and the prepuce.

The nerves, muscles, vessels were painted with luminous paint and detailed photographs were taken of the anatomy.

2. Close-up photographs were taken of the strap in actual use in several R. C. A. sanctioned rodeos.
3. 35 millimeter slides and 16 millimeter movies were taken of horses bucking with the flank strap applied in many rodeos. Pictures were also taken of the same animals still in the arena with the flank strap released.

4. A mare, formerly a bucking horse in "big time" rodeo was placed several times in a bucking chute and released to study her reaction to the situation without a flank strap applied. This was photographed. Under the same conditions with only a flank strap applied, the mare's reactions were photographed.
5. Two horses with known histories for calm temperaments were ridden saddleless by a ten year old boy in a rodeo arena. They were calm and gentle and typical safe kids' horses.

They were then, separately, put into a bucking chute and released several times and their reactions were recorded on film. Each went through several sequences of bucking strap applications and their reactions and behavior documented on film and written text.

B. Conclusions:

1. Most bucking horses that have been on a rodeo circuit are relatively gentle. The investigative team walked through the bucking horse stock in the holding pens with no fear of apprehension. Many were petted, examined for skin lesions, checked hooves, etc. They are, basically, no different than horse strings at dude ranches, riding academies, breeding farms, etc.

Horses come out of the bucking chutes bucking because:

- a. The pressure of the flank strap.
- b. The spurring of the cowboy. (50% of the contestant's score is for his "ride" on the horse with high spurring being a primary factor. 50% of the total score is on the performance of the animal.)

Note: Invariably, the horse stops bucking the second that the pick up rider releases the bucking strap.

2. The general language used by announcers and rodeo promotional people such as "wild broncs," "wild mustangs," "killer horses," is false and misleading. The majority buck because of the man-made devices and man's acts. There is no question that raw, unbroken stock bought at rodeo stock auctions, will buck from natural instinct for a time until "broken." Not many stay "unbroken" for very long on a rodeo circuit.

It is important to mention that a critical observer who is familiar with the natural bucking process of a horse, will quickly detect the rather unnatural bucking of a horse with a flank strap applied.

3. We have shown that gentle horses which are safe for children to ride unattended, put on a pretty good bucking display that would unseat the average cowboy when the bucking strap is applied to them.
4. Rodeo announcers and R. C. A. officials will make a great point of emphasizing to the public the fact that the flank strap is carefully padded with soft sheepskin wool. We have found that fleece lined flank straps produce more abrasions to the flanks of horses than an unlined flank strap.
5. There has to be discomfort and pressure pain to the bucking horse with the flank strap just from the plain and simple nerve anatomy of the area involved. The animal is reacting to rid himself of this tormenting device.

Note: Some rodeo propagandists have stated that horses are "flanked" by veterinarians to be cast. Some misguided veterinarians have "chimed in" that they use this method all of the time to control and take down livestock. They carefully do not use the term horse! Horses are not cast this way by any veterinarian. This technique is, however, used on the bovine species.

Roping Events: Team Roping, Steer Roping or Busting, Calf Roping or Busting

These areas of rodeo have been severely criticized by certain segments of the American public, and other countries of the free world. They are considered cruel, inhumane and unnecessary in rodeo performances.

Proponents of rodeo have contended that "it is preservation of the American heritage, "a reenactment of duties performed by the working cowboy on the working ranch, " "American he-man fun, " "preservation of the pioneer spirit of winning the West, " etc.

Steer roping or busting is not practiced in most states that allow rodeo competition and performances because of the obvious violence, inhumaneness to beast, and frequent injury, obvious even to the eyes of the lay spectator who easily detects broken legs, broken horns, and filled nostrils and eyes.

Many performers in rodeo feel that this event is abusive and cruel and should be outlawed in every section of the country.

Team roping is seen rather infrequently but is practiced in most states that host big time rodeos. As it was seldom observed, this event was not a major part of the study. Even so, it is our opinion that it has many elements of cruelty associated with it.

The calf roping or busting event is present in all rodeo performances. Due to the universal use of this event in rodeo, the numbers of animals involved in the actual performances, the slack time preliminaries, and the practice arena animals used for contestants to "perfect" their roping skills, it was considered a major problem area and was thoroughly investigated from many aspects.

The investigative team covered many, many rodeos in Montana, Wyoming, and Colorado. These included collegiate rodeos, high school rodeos, "Little Britches" rodeos, R. C. A. sanctioned rodeos, non-sanctioned "bush league" rodeos and practice roping arenas in an attempt to get a complete picture on the practice of calf roping in rodeo.

A. Experimental Evidence:

1. In addition to visual and filmed documentation of actual performances, injury pens were observed and photographed, stop watches and measured distances were used to determine calf speed, velocities and impact mass at the time the animal was busted.

2. Calves were bought that were of the age and weight prescribed by R. C. A. One of the animals was roped once and busted by a professional roper and member of the R. C. A. The animal was humanely killed and a certified veterinarian pathologist did gross and microscopic pathology of the tissue of the neck and thoracic areas.
3. A second calf was roped and tied four times by this professional roper and then killed and a pathological examination was made by the same certified veterinary pathologist of the same areas.
4. A third calf was bought, killed, embalmed and dissected in detail, including the areas of the neck and thorax that are most likely injured in calf roping.
5. Photographic, written and visual documentation was done of the roping, the pathological micropsy and the anatomical dissection. A pathological report of the gross and microscopic pathology was filed.
6. The tissues receiving careful pathological scrutiny were: the external carotid arteries, jugular veins, vago-sympathetic nerve trunk, the laryngeal cartilages, parotid gland, thyroid glands, trachea, esophagus, thoracic pluera, thymus gland, certain cervical and thoracic lymph nodes, skin, fascia, superficial cervical and thoracic musculature and supporting structures.

B. Conclusions:

1. No human being, with the slightest degree of compassion for animals, could bear witness to the roping events discussed above and not conclude that there is cruelty and injustice towards the roped "victims."

The R. C. A. has stated and written that there is less than 1% injury to animals in all of rodeo. They, of course, are talking about visible injuries that the spectator might, momentarily at least, have observed from the stands and worried about. Our figures,

covering hundreds of roped animals in dozens of rodeos, are 11-12%. And, I would remind the reader, that these are visible injuries, i. e. limping animals, animals who suffered concussions and could not get up for a time, animals with obviously broken horns, broken limbs and animals removed from arenas on sleds or other mechanical means.

It is the conclusion of this study that any animal roped even once suffers injury from the scientific point of view. The injury is not often externally visible, but an injury occurs regardless.

Webster's Dictionary - 1. "an act that damages or hurts." 2. "to harm or impair" 3. "to give pain."

Funk & Wagnalls Encyclopedic Dictionary - 1. "Harm, damage or grievous distress inflicted or suffered."

Dorland's Medical Dictionary - 1. "Harm or hurt; a wound or maim. Usually applied to damage inflicted to the body by an external force."

An animal roped and "busted" to the ground suffers from:

- a. Bruising with ecchymotic hemorrhaging in the subcutaneous tissues of the neck and shoulders.
- b. Dyspnea with resulting ecchymosis in the trachea.
- c. Hemorrhaging in the thymus gland.
- d. If the noose is snapped tight over the laryngeal cartilage area of the throat, there is bruising to the cartilage. This is very painful and cartilage has slow healing properties.

Note: Anyone who has ever received even a minor blow to the "adam's apple" or voice box knows how painful this can be. A "karate chop" to the larynx is almost a lethal weapon.

Necropsies prove that even one roping and busting of an animal produces the above pathology. The rodeo stock is roped many times and though most of these injuries will heal with time and nature's help, the injuries are occurring as a result of man's desire for money or pleasure.

When consideration is given to the hundreds and hundreds of animals subjected to this treatment in hundreds of practice arenas and roping schools in addition to the above, it is clear that roping events result in injury to thousands of animals annually.

2. By actual test, repeating the experiment dozens of times, we conclude that the average calf reaches a speed of approximately 27 mph at the time it is roped. Using the figure of a calf weighing 225 pounds as an average, the gravity forces (G's) equal 10 plus. We become very concerned when these "G" forces approach 4.

Note: R. C. A. rules state that it is illegal for a roping contestant to "bust" a calf. They do, however, allow a calf to be "busted" and most are, as this greatly assists the contestant in establishing better time. The calf is "busted" by the lariat being attached to the saddle of the horse. Consequently, a much more positive and violent "busting" results. Therefore, the cowboy escapes some bruising, but the animal is subjected to much more than it would be if the cowboy attempted the "busting."

3. In interviews with many ranchers in Wyoming and in Colorado, they stated that calves are too valuable to risk injury to them, so roping is held to a minimum. Holding pens, chutes, squeeze chutes and roping of the hind legs in a relatively small corral are the methods they describe using.

The point here is that rodeo does not necessarily depict the "working ranch" situation as so often advertised. To quote from the book entitled "Calf Roping" by Toots Mansfield, a seven times world champion, he states "calf roping as it is done today in the arena evolved from the duties of the working cowboy. Since it is

competitive, certain rules and regulations have had to be worked out; and, because rodeo must depend to a degree upon spectators, the calf roping event is considerably different from what a working cowboy must do at branding time. "

The "Hot Shot" or Electric Prod:

This device too has undergone scrutiny and controversy. By R. C. A. recommendations it is to be used "only when necessary." The I. R. A. suggests that it be used "sparingly." Proponents of rodeo have proclaimed its usage as being "humane" and have stated that "veterinarians use it and recommend its use for the movement of livestock."

It is undoubtedly true that the electric prod is an improvement over the pitch fork, the pointed stick, the whip, the scoop shovel or the kick by a pointed toed boot into the midsection of an animal, but it is hardly an ideal instrument for moving animals for a variety of reasons.

Conclusions:

1. The "hot shot" is not used "sparingly" or "only when needed" as I. R. A. and R. C. A. suggest. By visible observation and filmed documentation, this device is used at the discretion of the stock contractor's personnel. Regardless of the stock contractor, however, it is used routinely to agitate Brahma bulls and roping calves.
2. By the electronic measurements of the electrical engineering department of a major university and a major international electronic manufacturer's skilled engineers, even a two (2) battery "hot shot" initially delivers a voltage exceeding 8,000 volts! The amperage is low and the administered voltage tapers down rapidly, but the initial "shock" is high voltage.
3. The "hot shot" will, at times, "draw blood" and will always produce skin damage. The owner-operator of one of the largest feedlot operations in the world has stated that he practically forbids its use because of the damage to the hide and the "marking down" in value these hides get at slaughter time. Hide buyers and processors substantiate this statement.

4. One must film this use from behind the chute areas. The spectator is rarely, if ever, aware of its use.

The users are wary, and henceforth discreet, in the use of the hot shot and keep it concealed as much as possible. They are kept in coats, hip pockets, under shirt sleeves, behind chute boards, etc. and are generally, practically without exception, taped with black friction or electrician's tape to prevent the chrome to glint in the lights or sun and attract attention to it.

5. From "Safe Operating Room Practices" manual, the voltage discharged by one of these devices is three times the allowable voltage discharge that could cause cardiac arrest in a patient.

On a few occasions our investigative personnel have accidentally been the victim of this electrical gadget and have described severe pain, lasting for several minutes and even discomfort in the opposite appendage from the one receiving the direct contact.

Hostility of R. C. A. Officials, Performers, and Stock Contractors:

From our experience this is progressively getting worse. They, apparently, feel that they have something to hide, that rodeo is "their bag." They feel threatened from without and they want no exposure or interference.

We experienced a "tightening of security syndrome" increasing from 1971 - 1972. This extends down even to high school and "bush league" weekend rodeos.

Anyone roaming about in the corrals, chute areas or injury pens is suspect and likely to be challenged even with legitimate press credentials, etc. Injury pen surveillance is strictly forbidden and considered "off limits" to anyone not immediately recognizable as a rodeo sympathizer.

Conclusions and Recommendations:

There is little or no humane supervision at most rodeos. The American Humane Association has worked with the Rodeo Cowboys' Association and the International Rodeo Association to establish a nationwide code of nineteen rules pertaining to the humane treatment of rodeo stock. However, the A.H.A. makes no claim to supervise even a majority of the rodeos currently being held in this country.

Further, in spite of the role that the American Humane Association has been playing in association with the R.C.A. and the I.R.A., even they have stated through their Executive Director Rutherford T. Phillips that "we would be happy to see rodeos discontinued or outlawed."

Care of Rodeo Stock:

This area of rodeo has wide variations. The care and condition of the stock varies greatly with the stock contractor. There appears to be no minimum standards nor any supervision. There may or may not be a supervisory veterinarian. Even when there is one listed, we have never observed the stock being checked and, the animals with obvious ailments, being rejected for use in the competition.

We can state, emphatically, that this area of rodeo should be checked more closely and improved. We have observed the following conditions being fairly common in rodeo stock:

1. Most bucking horses suffer from neglect of their feet. Most hooves need trimming and cracking is very common.
2. Abrasions from the flank straps are rarely medicated.
3. Many animals are thin and, clinically, appear to be underfed and/or heavily parasitized.
4. Draining open wounds have been observed. They most commonly occur at the point of the hip over the tuber coxae.
5. Severe ringworm infections have been noted in calves and photographed.
6. Most holding pens contain no food or water. Most have no shade. Some have been so bad as to contain at least six inches of "muck" for the animals to stand in.

7. There is little "respect for life" displayed when the stock is loaded and unloaded. The stress factors are high.
8. Lesions produced by the raking of spurs over the neck, shoulder and costal areas of bucking horses are rarely treated.
9. The frequent loading, unloading, transportation - often over long distances - is not a happy fate for livestock. The changes of water, often feed, and the environment add to the stresses. Coupled with this the prodding, goading, the noise, the spurring, flank straps, lariats, hot shots, the heat, the insect pests, the dust, and viciousness of man competing for a prize, at the expense of the captive animal, and the stress factors soar!

Published by

THE HUMANE SOCIETY OF THE UNITED STATES
1604 K Street, N. W.
Washington, D. C. 20006