

SADDLE BRONC RIDING

✓ IF IT GOES RIGHT

THE rider tries to last eight seconds on a specially bred bucking horse, holding onto a single rein with one hand only. He is judged on style and spurring action.



✗ IF IT GOES WRONG

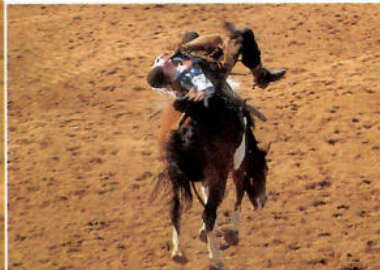
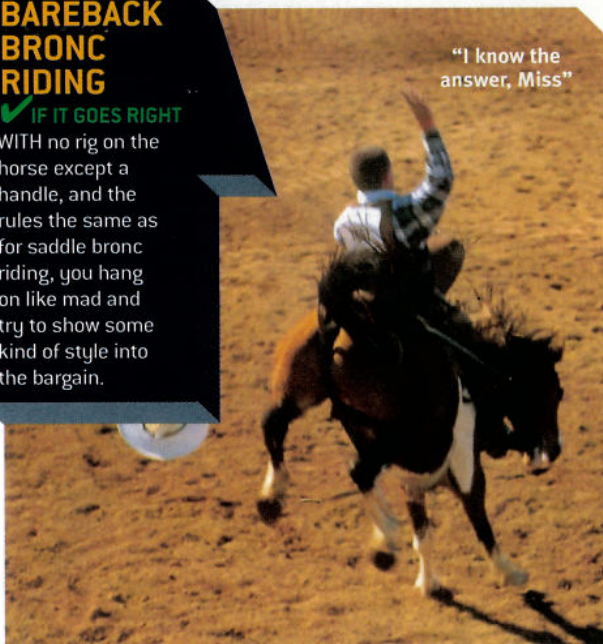
YOU'LL be disqualified if you touch the horse or equipment with your free hand, or if after three seconds you're spitting out arena dirt and wondering if your hips have snapped. At Mt Isa, the riders seem less in danger of coming off than being snapped in half while riding. Cowboys are jerked back and forth at eye-buggering speed, free arm waving in unnatural angles from the body. It's like seeing a film with some of the frames missing.

BAREBACK BRONC RIDING

✓ IF IT GOES RIGHT

WITH no rig on the horse except a handle, and the rules the same as for saddle bronc riding, you hang on like mad and try to show some kind of style into the bargain.

"I know the answer, Miss"



✗ IF IT GOES WRONG

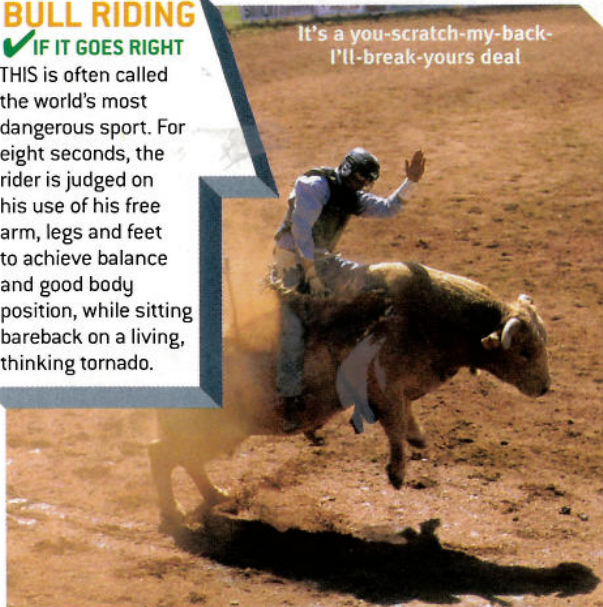
"IF YOU'RE right-handed and the horse bucks you off on the left-hand side, that's called being hung-up," says champion barebacker Tony Hecksher. "You can't get out, because you've rolled over on your hand and the horse is dragging and kicking at you. The pick-up team [guys on horseback who take you off when you're done] has to get you back over to the other side so you can let go. It's bad news."

BULL RIDING

✓ IF IT GOES RIGHT

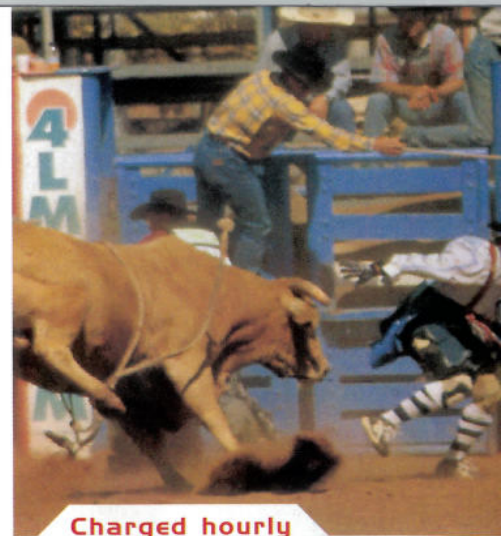
THIS is often called the world's most dangerous sport. For eight seconds, the rider is judged on his use of his free arm, legs and feet to achieve balance and good body position, while sitting bareback on a living, thinking tornado.

It's a you-scratch-my-back-I'll-break-yours deal



✗ IF IT GOES WRONG

THE rider is trampled, gored and generally rearranged until the bull gets bored. Spectators get an extra dose of adrenaline in Mt Isa, when a bull slams his rider to the ground, wheels and charges the fence, scattering clowns, judges and commentator. Later, a black monster named Mafia manages to buck all four feet off the ground at once. The rider lasts four seconds, then gets thrown away like a dirty rag.



Charged hourly

CRAIG "ROPER" HOLLAMBY / RODEO CLOWN

WHAT is your job title?

Protection bullfighter.

Is that what everyone calls you?

It sort of varies. Some of them I can't say. Generally it's "rodeo clown".

What do you do?

I jump in front of the bull and stop the cowboy getting hit when he comes off.

At what point do you know you have to do that?

When the cowboy's down and the bull's just going for him, I take the hit for the cowboy.

Is that why you wear that absurd get-up?

Yeah. The bull can see the clothing flying around a bit; but really, I've got to get in the bull's face so it's looking at me and not the rider.

Why do you do it?

Because it's fun. There's an adrenaline rush.

Is it well paid?

Yeah. It varies anywhere between three or four hundred for a small show, up to about \$3000.

How long have you been doing this?

Ten years.

What is your opinion of bulls?

If I'm on the ground underneath him, I'm not too impressed with him. But generally I do like working with them.

What goes through your mind when you realise you have to jump in front of an annoyed bull?
"F-k."

Would you describe bulls as clever animals?

Oh, very. The older bulls know how to get you. They've worked out how the rider gets off. The older they are, the smarter they get and the more cunning — and the more victories they get.

At what point do you know it's time to retire?

If you can't be there in time to save the cowboy.

How long have you got to get there in time?

Split seconds.

Where are you during the bull ride?

I pretty well stay on the chutes because we're not supposed to get in the way. If a bull sees us he'll stop bucking sometimes, so we've got to sit back against the chute. Then as soon as the rider is coming off or is in trouble of any kind, we're in.

How many clowns per bull?

It varies from rodeo to rodeo, but it takes two of you to work a bull in most situations.

Do you ever fancy doing something less dangerous, like accounting?

Occasionally I go away for a couple of weeks, but then I start thinking, "Jesus, I feel a little bit out of it."

Ivan Smith