

# BUCKING: IT'S IN THE GENES

**F**or a cowboy sitting atop a bucking bull or bronc, or participating in a steer roping event, it takes just a few seconds to achieve victory. Rodeo spectators get a brief glimpse at the talent of the competitors and the power and personality of the rough stock, but what they are seeing is the exciting culmination of years of preparation. While most rodeo fans know how long and hard the cowboys train to compete in rodeo events, few realize that it also takes years of time and effort to raise and prepare the animals for those few thrilling moments in the rodeo arena.

At one time, many animals used for rodeo events were purchased in sale barns. Finding a good bucking bull was frustrating for rodeo contractors, and often, they just got the luck of the draw. Contractors now realize that “orneriness” in a bucking animal is passed on from generation to generation, much like the desire to run is passed through the great Thoroughbred racing horses to their offspring. While for many years breeders tried to produce animals without the tendency to buck, modern rough stock contractors work hard to put the buck back into the bucking bull and the bucking bronc.

Today’s rough stock animals are bred for genetics with the specific goal of competing in the rodeo arena. They are considered athletes that are as vital an ingredient to a successful rodeo as are the cowboys. Like humans, they come in a wide range of shapes, sizes and colors, and, also like us, they display their own personalities and distinct talents, which make each unique in the rodeo arena. A bull will buck only if it possesses the innate desire and natural instinct to buck, turn and twist. Those traits, along with athleticism and heart, are pinpointed for the development of animal athletes.

Currently, of the 60 Professional Rodeo Cowboys Association stock contractors, nearly two-thirds operate some type of livestock breeding program. These programs produce some of the finest animal athletes in the rodeo arena today. The science behind breeding the best bucking animals has made the rough stock-raising business one that requires money and a great deal of patience, rather than just sheer luck. This translates into a surprisingly high cost for rough stock. Bucking bulls, for example, can range in price from \$10,000 to upwards of \$100,000, and, as the animal athlete develops a proven record in the arena, its value increases.

The toughest part about raising bucking horses is that it takes a long time to find out if a particular animal will become a champion. Colts and fillies are not bucked until they are approximately 4 years of age and still might not prove themselves to be bucking athletes. Rodeo events utilize two types of bucking horses, one for bareback riding and another for saddle bronc riding. Bareback horses are smaller, with a wilder bucking style, while the larger saddle bronc horses generally exhibit a more classic style of bucking that allows the rider to sit up in the saddle and get a rhythm with his feet forward from the horse's neck and back to the cantle of the saddle. Many saddle bronc horses are draft horse crossbreeds, which have the perfect classic bucking action. In either case, it takes years to identify and develop a champion animal.

Bulls often are started at an earlier age than bucking horses — around 2 years old — using younger, smaller riders. They come in many sizes and dispositions but ultimately might develop into 1-ton-plus animal athletes.

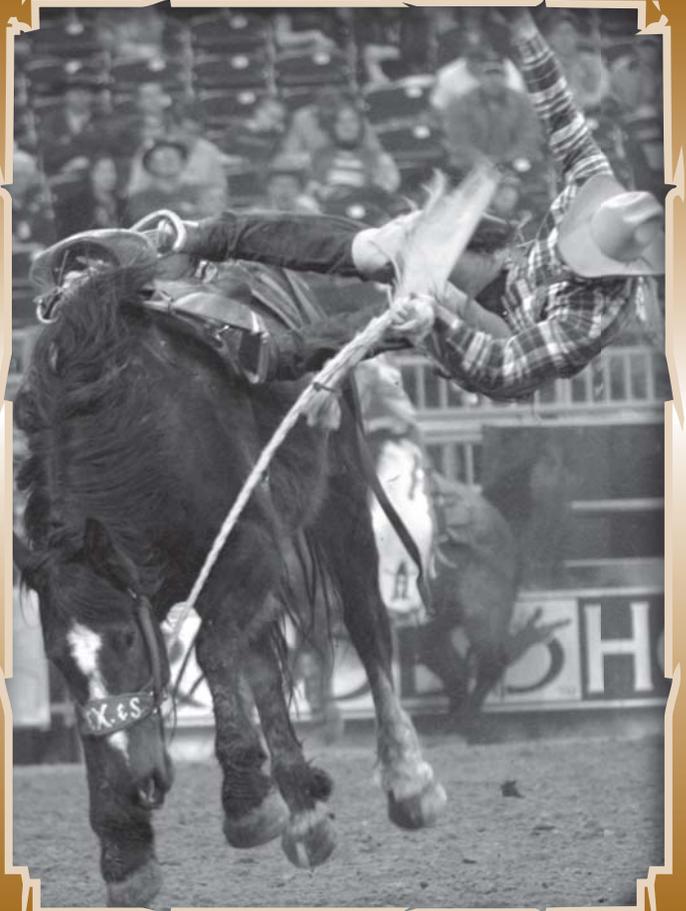
A bucking bull will spend years far from crowds and public view as it is groomed for the rodeo arena. Ranch hands use dummies as bull riders to see how the bull reacts to the weight and pressure. Only the best of these bulls will see the inside of a rodeo arena.

Those that show extreme talent at twisting, turning and tossing a cowboy on his derrière are those that will be groomed for stardom at top rodeos like RODEOHOUSTON™. Bulls, which can live into their teens, hit their rodeo prime around age 5 or 6, but might continue to buck past the age of 10. The best of these one day will become the patriarchs of special breeding programs.

These animal athletes are brought slowly into the rodeo environment. Contractors take their new bucking stock only into rodeo arenas with excellent footing and well-maintained bucking chutes and corrals. The contractors have a keen interest in protecting their investment in their athletes.

Naturally, the better the animal athlete performs, the more often it is hauled to rodeos. The more contact rough stock have with humans, however, the more spoiled they become, and the less likely it is they will behave cantankerously around the cowboys. For this reason, the animals are placed in open fields while back at the ranch. In these fields, they are able to spend as much time as possible without seeing humans.

The care and treatment of bucking bulls is a top priority for those who govern and participate in rodeo events. The stock contractor requires a backup group of horses and bulls



throughout the rodeo season, usually numbering in the hundreds. A horse or bull might buck only four to six times a month, and then be turned out to rest while another group of stock goes on the road. With the rotation of stock, each animal generally works an average of only 10 minutes a year.

While these animals are called rough stock, the process of creating top rodeo animals is highly refined, and successful efforts can create rodeo legends. Many rodeo fans remember Bodacious, the cross-bred Charbray bull affectionately known as the “world’s most dangerous bull.” Bodacious was known not only for his distinctive coloring — the “Yellow Whale” — but also for his signature head-snapping move that often could result in life-threatening injuries to the cowboys who drew him, generally in unsuccessful rides. Bodacious’ offspring still are being produced through the use of frozen semen.

No doubt, the rough stock contractors, using science, sophisticated breeding and training techniques, will continue to develop bucking animals that will provide thrills to rodeo audiences for years to come. 🤠