

# Let 'er Buck

By Nan McCreary

Rodeo fans, hang on to your hats, because it is going to be a bumpy ride in 2009 at RODEOHOUSTON™. This year's rough stock events will feature some of the biggest and boldest bucking broncs and bulls on the rodeo circuit.

"I expect it to be a blowout show," said Binion Cervi of Cervi Championship Rodeo, RODEOHOUSTON stock coordinator and rodeo producer. "We have selected the best quality animal athletes from all over the U.S. and Canada, and we guarantee that they will perform."

For many spectators, rough stock events — those wild, adrenaline-filled rides on broncs and bulls that rear, kick, spin and twist their way around the arena in an attempt to throw off their riders — are the big draw at a rodeo. But, while it is the cowboy who takes home the prize money, it is often the animal that is the star of the show. If it were not for these athletes, there would not be a rodeo.

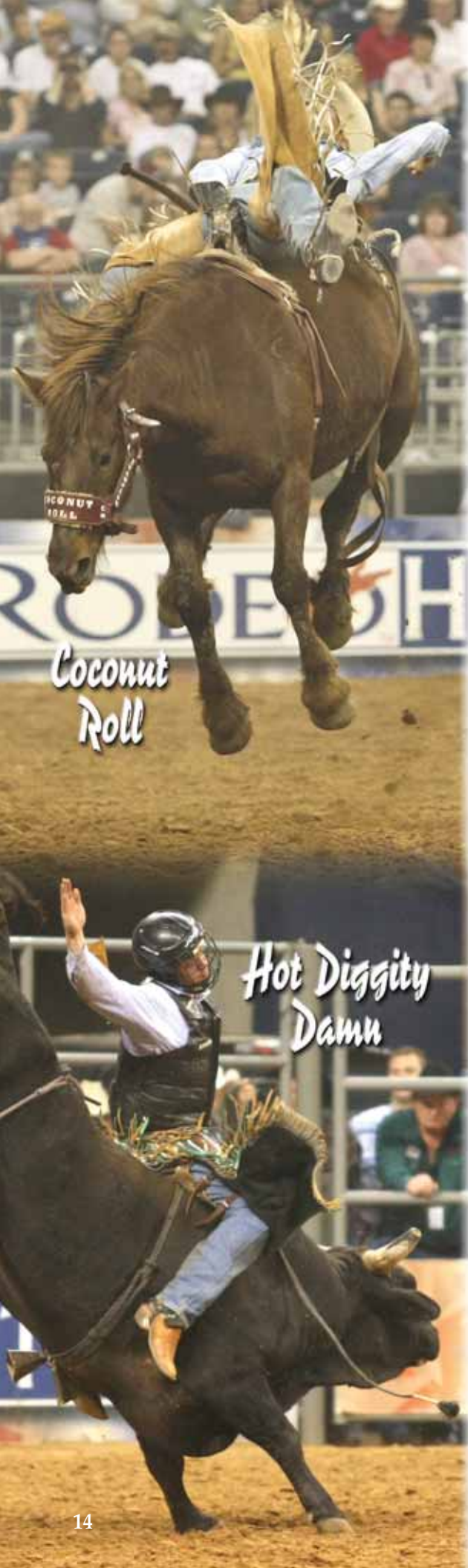
"The quality of the livestock is the key to success for the cowboy," said Cervi. In rough stock events, the skill of the animal accounts for half of the cowboy's score. While the rider is judged on balance and endurance, the animal is scored on strength, agility and consistency. In other words, the tougher the ride, the higher the score. Attitude and personality help, too. Whether rebellious and strong-willed, or friendly and gregarious, an animal athlete must not only challenge the rider, it also must appeal to the spectators. If the bronc or bull can kick high, buck powerfully and energize the audience, it is considered a winner.

At RODEOHOUSTON, the world's richest regular-season Professional Rodeo Cowboys Association rodeo, there is a lot on the line for the competitors. A cowboy or cowgirl who wins a RODEOHOUSTON BP Super Series Championship pockets \$50,000, plus previous go-round winnings. With a potential to take home \$60,000 to \$70,000 from one rodeo, cowboys want an animal with which they can win.

"We lease the wildest stock we can get for Houston," Cervi said. "We bring animals that are at the top of their game, because cowboys like stock that can roll up the big numbers." Cervi obviously knows how to pick them. In 2007, PRCA awarded RODEOHOUSTON Top Rough Stock Remuda of the Year for the best overall bucking bulls and horses.

Rough stock events originated in the Old West, when working cowboys relied on "horse breaking" skills to domesticate wild horses. Today, in spite of popular myth, rodeo broncs and bulls are not untamed, raging renegades hell-bent on ruling the range. Breeders say the best rodeo livestock have the heart, the desire and the athletic ability to buck. Bucking comes naturally to them; they will not buck unless they want to.

Today, the finest animal athletes in professional rodeo are products of highly specialized "born to buck" breeding programs, where bloodlines might go back for generations. "It's all about genetics,"



Cervi explained. "If the mother bucks, the colts will buck. I see characteristics passed on from one generation to the next, whether it's the way they buck or the way they perform."


A great bucking bronc or bull is a hot commodity on the rodeo circuit, selling for as much as \$40,000 to \$50,000. These animals are treated like rock stars. Their pens, chutes and equipment are designed specifically to ensure safety for the animals, and their feed contains high-quality nutrients that enhance their appearance and performance.

According to Cervi, today's rough stock is getting better and better in terms of bucking ability. "We've had great advancements in breeding," he noted. "In [2008's] Houston Show, a bareback bronc and rider in the finals scored 90 points out of a possible 100. A bull and rider scored 92."

The 2009 Show could be even more exciting. "We've selected stock from the best bloodlines," Cervi continued, "and all are proven athletes. They've performed in smaller rodeos, and are acclimated to travel, climate changes and the atmosphere of the arena. By the time they get to Houston, there's a 95 percent chance that they will perform."

Cervi said the broncs to watch this year are Coconut Roll, Brown Bomber and Mighty Mary. Coconut Roll is the mother of several great bucking horses, including Grated Coconut, who won the 2008 PRCA Bareback Horse of the Year award for the third straight year, and the fifth time overall. Coconut Roll has performed previously in Houston. Brown Bomber, another veteran, will be making his 13th appearance at RODEOHOUSTON. This superstar has made it to the National Finals Rodeo every year since 1995. Finally, Mighty Mary is a young bronc who made her first appearance at the 2007 NFR. Several cowboys have won rodeos riding her, including Cody DeMers, who scored 90 points with Mighty Mary in 2008.

Bulls to look for include Comet's Gold, Lucky Strike and Hot Diggity Damn. Comet's Gold, a young bull who made his debut at 2008 RODEOHOUSTON, comes to this year's Show unriden. In 2008, he bucked off all 16 cowboys who tried to ride him. Lucky Strike, one of the best bulls in the country, only has been ridden once in the last three years. Hot Diggity Damn is the son of Hot Damn, who retired after 2008 RODEOHOUSTON with more 90-point rides than any bull in history. Hot Diggity Damn and his rider won with a score of 93 at RODEOHOUSTON last year, and the big bull is considered by many to be a candidate for the PRCA Hall of Fame.

Show fans will love this year's rough stock events. Cervi Championship Rodeo is bringing the best animal athletes in the country to RODEOHOUSTON in March. The toughest rodeo cowboys on the professional circuit today will follow them to Houston. Rough stock is definitely where the action is, and there will be plenty of action in 2009 RODEOHOUSTON. 



*Lucky Strike*

