



A cowboy takes a wild ride during the action at the 2006 Elizabeth Stampede. - *Lincoln Rogers*



Cowboy's choice: the Elizabeth Stampede

PHOTOS AND ARTICLE
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Opinions are like noses ... everybody has one. But when opinions by people in the know start stacking up year after year, it is time to take stock of what they're saying.

In the case of the Elizabeth Stampede Rodeo, cowboys from the Mountain States Circuit have voted it their circuit's "Best Small Rodeo of the Year" for seven years running. It's not hard to figure out why. All you have to do is ask them.

"It's a circuit rodeo to begin with," commented Mo Forbes, a National Finals Rodeo caliber saddle bronc rider from Kaycee, Wyo. "It's close to home and it adds good money. It's a good place to come for horses," continued the Stampede titleholder from 2005, happy to talk before this year's Sunday matinee performance.

"The crowd is great and they feed you great at the hospitality tent. It's just a good atmosphere to be in." That atmosphere in 2006 consisted of 12,000 people walking through the gates of the three-day event, a figure noteworthy because the small town's population only numbers about 1,500 (according to 2000 census figures). Its drawing power is a testament to the high-quality rodeo action occurring every year inside the arena rails. The ticket-buying fans know it, and so do the cowboys.

"We come here every year ... I like the stock," said Kelly Timberman, a 2004 PRCA World Champion bareback cowboy from Casper, Wyo. "I'm here to get on good horses, and I think Burns Rodeo Company is probably one of the best stock contractors. People come out to watch good livestock, and cowboys themselves come out to get on good livestock. So it makes an overall great performance and a great rodeo."

"Since it's just 1 1/2 hours from home, that helps a lot," was one motive for attending provided by Jarrod Ford, a Greeley, Colo., bull rider. "I get to be home doing what I want for most of the day," he said with a smile. Ford is one of the top-ranked PRCA bull riders in 2006, and he makes the stop in Elizabeth every year for a number of reasons. "It's decent added money, it's a neat little rodeo, and it has good hospitality," he concluded while warming up behind the chutes for Friday night's Radical Bulls event.

"I like it a lot," agreed Cameron Castleberry, a 24-year-old fellow bull rider from Gillette, Wyo. Castleberry competed at the Elizabeth rodeo for the first time in 2005, winning the bull riding title. "Any chance I get to ride a Hal Burns bull, I take it. They always buck and they're pretty dependable."

"The crowd here is phenomenal," added Timberman. "You've got stands on each side of the arena. It's not a huge arena, just enough size where the stands are kind of close in with the rodeo contestants and the action. That makes it kind of exciting. And they're loud and fun too," the bareback rider finished with a grin. Timberman's older brother, Chris (also a bareback rider), liked the rural Colorado rodeo as well.

"We like Hal's (Burns Rodeo Company) stock. He's got good bucking horses. That's one of the big reasons we come," revealed Chris, who won the 2005 Elizabeth Stampede title and finished first in 2006's Sunday matinee performance. "There's good money added here and the rodeo committee and the hospitality here is just outstanding. They really look after us and take care of us," he shared with conviction. "They do what they can for us to get us here and help us out."

With so many cowboys praising the hospitality of the small-town rodeo, it is fair to say the abundant free food and beverages, plus the contestant-friendly atmosphere behind the scenes, are major reasons why more and more top-name cowboys are starting to circle the event on their calendars every year.

"The number one reason to come to a rodeo is added money," explained Forbes on the topic of what draws a cowboy to a particular rodeo. "You're out here trying to make a living and you want that added money. But when you come here and the committee has it set up for you, it just makes it so much easier for you. And it makes you darn sure look forward to it next year and want to come back."

Elizabeth Stampede organizers appreciate the cowboys' recognition of all the effort put into making the small rodeo the best it can be.

"It's a small rodeo, but it has a lot of tradition to it," said Tom Stockton, president of the award-winning rodeo. "It has a great arena surface (and) we take extremely good care of the contestants. Everybody just wants to be here."

By the time 2007 rolls in, don't be surprised if the cowboys of the Mountain States Circuit have voted the Elizabeth Stampede "Best Small Rodeo of the Year" for the eighth time. When a rodeo wins an award so many times in a row, it becomes more than just an opinion.

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