

## Oklahoma Rodeo Celebrates Western Traditions

Rodeos are hugely popular sport events in the Western states of America, where horseback riding, livestock animals and fancy rope skills are featured.

Thousands of cowboys and cowgirls compete to see who has the best rodeo skills. They celebrate the cowboy traditions and culture that is rooted in the West.

Rodeos are also big business for those states. Many of the participants are from families who have been in the industry for several generations. The competitions bring in about \$250 million dollars of revenue each year.

VOA Learning English recently attended a rodeo in Oklahoma. The Elk City Rodeo of Champions began entertaining crowds 77 years ago. The three-day event is the third-largest rodeo in the state. About 14,000 people attend each September. About 300 people compete in the events.

All the action at the Elk City Rodeo took place outside. It began with a daring skydiver who floated into the middle of the arena with a huge U.S. flag. Then the crowd stood for an a capella version of the National Anthem.

The competition kicked off with bareback bronc riding. A bronc is a horse that bucks, or jumps and kicks high to throw off its rider. A bareback bronc rider has to stay on top of the bucking horse for eight seconds to qualify for judging.

Rodeo cowboys are not the only performers that face danger in the arena. Rodeo clowns, called bullfighters, have a very risky job as well. The clowns are trained to distract the bull when a rider falls off. This helps keep the rider from being trampled on. Bullfighter Justin Rumford calls it “playing with the bulls.”

The audience on Friday night cheered for their favorite riders and ropers, laughed at the clowns, and rocked to country music at the Elk City Rodeo of Champions under the stars.