

This crazy, addictive rodeo life



Photos Olivia Rutt

Bradley Ingersoll, 22 years old, from Whitecourt, Alberta.

By Olivia Rutt
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Your hand is secure. You can feel the muscles of the bull underneath your legs, hoping the bull will stay calm in the chute. You breathe. You clear your mind and nod.

The gate flies open and everything happens at once. The bull is out, bucking, and it takes everything in you to stay on. Those eight seconds are the longest eight seconds of your life. Then it's over, whether you stay on or get bucked off, it is over.

The rodeo is one of those crazy extreme sports that came out of the necessity of breaking horses and rounding up cows back in the old Wild West. Now there is a lot of money to be made as it attracts the bravest young men and women from all over Canada and the US to compete in different events.

Bull riding, bareback bronco riding, and saddle bronc riding are all stressful events when you are watching them from the bleachers. The bulls weigh over 1,500 pounds and have the strength to crush bones. The trick is to stay on the thrashing, bucking beast for eight seconds. You have to hang on tight and move with the animal. As I sat there watching my first rodeo I had to wonder, what makes someone want to do this?

"I probably started when I was eight or

nine," said Tyler Speers, a 19-year-old bull rider from Blue Ridge. "It was just something I wanted to try and it turned out that I liked it."

The riders from the different events all had the same line: "I just wanted to try it." There is an attractive quality about the rodeo, something unspoken that lured the riders to just try it out and to stick with it.

"My uncle used to ride when I was younger and I looked up to him so I decided to do it myself," said Bradley Ingersoll, a 22-year-old bull rider from Whitecourt.

Ingersoll's first ride was on a junior steer. "I fell off real quick and it made me want to start again," he said. "It was such an adrenaline rush."

"The town that I grew up in used to have a July 1st sports day every year which included a rodeo. It was a big deal in our area. My dad always wanted me to stay and watch the ball games and stuff," said Hoss Clow, a retired bareback bronc rider turned rodeo announcer. "I snuck away and used my bottle money for the entry fee. It was probably \$5. I rode the calf for about five or six seconds and I have been hooked on rodeo ever since."

Sometimes family can be the helping hand; other times, the right circumstances led people to the ring. For Shaylynn Auger, a post on Facebook looking for rid-

ers in the Mayerthorpe rodeo happened to be the right circumstance. She had never been to a rodeo before but she thought, "Why not?"

"I didn't make my eight seconds the first time but I was hooked," said the 17-year-old. "I kept telling myself that I have to do this again."

Of course, with all things extreme, so are the injuries. Fatalities in the circuit can happen. One just has to look at the famous Lane Frost, who died from a pierced heart from a broken rib in 1989, to know that this sport can be dangerous.

"I broke my face in 2011. The whole right side of my face," said Ingersoll. "I hit heads with the bull."

Auger has not broken anything but she has pulled muscles and has been stepped on. Speers broke two vertebrae last year that kept him out for a whole season.

"I didn't get into bull riding much. I rode three bulls. The first one hurt me. The second one really hurt me. The third one damn near crippled me, and I decided I wasn't riding bulls," said Clow of his bull-riding career. It was an easy switch to bareback bronc riding. The injuries were not as bad but he still was tossed around in the chute.

For Emma Munday, a 12-year-old who is just starting out in the rodeo circuit, her first Wild Pony Race got her



Emma Munday, 12 years old, from Whitecourt, Alberta.

bucked off, rolled on, and stepped on.

"Everyone thought I broke my neck because of the way I landed. Then the pony went back and stepped on my chest," she said. "The second time I did the wild pony racing, I almost didn't do it because I thought I'd break a bone or something."

"It is easier not to watch," said her mother, Sharlene Munday. "Watching the horse trample your daughter is a little disconcerting. I was thinking 'Oh my goodness, I just signed a waiver to let all this happen.'"

"But you're proud of your girls; they still have their hats on and are laughing. They were the youngest girl team, and to see them go in there, dig their boots in, and hang on was truly a good life experience because they learn to just dust it off and keep on going. And that is life," she added.

One thing that all riders agree on is that you have to work past the injuries and to get back up.



Tyler Speers, 19 years old, from Blue Ridge, Alberta.

"Eight seconds is a lot of work and you do get hurt. But you just have to get back up and ride," said Auger. "I thought it was very addicting. The moment I'm on I just want to stay on."

"You try to keep yourself focused and mentally prepared for what is about to happen. You have to clear your mind, and try not to have any bad thoughts," said Speers.

No two rides are the same, no two bulls or horses are the same. But the thrill of getting on them and staying on them has Auger hooked.

"For those eight seconds I don't remember what I'm thinking," said Auger. "The only thing I remember is when I am in the chutes, and I'm looking down, and I just nod."

"I didn't ride a lot of horses for eight seconds. But I had fun trying," said Clow. He once rode a horse called Stompin' Tom, who was voted the bucking horse of Canada that year. "I was 17 years old. I think I made four seconds, but it was the

best four seconds of my life. That horse was just amazing."

Auger wants to get into bull riding. Right now, she is in events for female riders which include ladies cow riding. However, she wants more.

"It is hard in general for women to get into bull riding. There are some stock contractors who won't allow women to ride on their bulls," she said. "It is very frustrating. I know I am capable."

For the guys, the rush of it all makes them come back for more. It is scary for them, sure, but that's what made Clow love it. "It was the adrenaline, the rush, eh? Sure, you're scared; you're crazy if you're not scared."

That feeling will stay with them. The pride that gives you a pat on the back saying you did it.

Ingersoll wants to keep riding for as long as possible. "The adrenaline rush is awesome and you just feel like you're number one."



Shaylynn Auger, 17 years old, from Whitecourt, Alberta.