



RODEOHOUSTON

K I C K T H E D U S T U P

In the melting pot that makes up the big oil and gas city of Houston, you can walk into nearly any high rise—or even courtroom—as February comes to a close, and find the world’s finest-dressed donning cowboy boots; it’s Go Texan Day. Each year Go Texan Day ushers in festivities that mark the Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo. For Houstonians the rodeo isn’t just an event—it’s the season after Christmas.

In 1931, seven businessmen sat down at Texas State Hotel with lunch and a problem to solve. The grassy fields and friendly climate of the greater Houston area made it ideal for cattle production, but when it came time to sell, cattle were being sent to the Midwest. The gentlemen knew there had to be a way to bring the cattle trading industry to Houston—and so the first Houston Fat Stock Show was born.

The first year the show lost money, but it accomplished its goal of drawing attention, and establishing H-town as a viable place for cattle trade. It continued to evolve, adding a parade, horse shows, and a rodeo. In 1942, for the first time, the show featured a performer. Gene Autry, known as the singing cowboy, changed the game, making the rodeo a tourist attraction and putting Houston on the map as a destination city.

In the early 60s, the Houston Fat Stock Show officially became known as the Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo. A few years later the show moved to Astrodome Park, allowing attendance to nearly double. The iconic bow-legged H logo made its first appearance around then too.

On February 27, 1970, Elvis Presley’s performance set record-breaking attendance of more than 43,000 people. With events being added, attendance growing year after year, and the venue bursting at the seams, the Rodeo partnered with the NFL to build NRG Park. Last year 2.38 million people graced rodeo grounds for the festivities.

So what’s all the hype that makes Rodeo a season? With more than \$25 million awarded to scholarship programs, and events leading up to the rodeo starting months before, it takes more than 32,000 volunteers to make the Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo happen. For Houstonians serving on one of the Rodeo’s 108 committees, the excitement starts buzzing early.

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The Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo evolved into a celebration of agriculture. Today a \$10 ticket will get you into NRG Park, where you can find everything from art exhibits to world-class shopping. The Adventure exhibit offers a fun way for kids

and adults alike to learn about agriculture, with activities like a milking station and even a birthing center—where 22 lambs, 18 calves, and 47 piglets were born last year.

The rodeo itself still partners up with a performer each night for top-notch entertainment. If you think you’ll get there just in time for the music, just hold your horses. The clowns and dust and cowboys thrashing around are the March Madness of South Texas. That’s right—fill out your bracket before you take your seat! Judged on darts, dives, twists, and rolls, your favorite rider might just take home an extra \$50,000. You

don't want to miss “mutton bustin” either. With 5 and 6-year-olds bucking on the back of a sheep, you might witness the next viral video, live.

“Are you going to Cook-off?” If you answer “no” to that question, you might have a hard time making friends—or you might get offered a ticket! The World’s Championship Bar-B-Que, known to Houstonians simply as “Cook-off,” began in 1974. Celebrating the consumption side of agriculture and putting the best barbeque scientists to the test, Cook-off draws 250,000 people each year. President and CEO of the Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo, Joel Cowley touts, “Only in Texas can you throw a barbeque and a quarter of a million people show up.”

For three days prior to the opening day of the rodeo, the parking lot of NRG Park is flooded with more than 250 tents, each representing a team of barbeque experts vying for your taste buds’ approval—oh, and the World Championship title! While entry to each tent is invitation-only, you can buy tickets to meander the grounds and enjoy music, dancing, and of course, chopped beef.

Barbeque isn’t the only consumer side of agriculture that’s celebrated at Rodeo. Each year, in November, wineries from around the globe submit their best to the Rodeo Uncorked! International Wine Competition. The winners are then featured at the Roundup and Best Bites Competition. Tickets to Roundup sell out quickly, but if you’re lucky enough to snag a ticket, be sure to come hungry. The event also features select dishes from nearly 100 eateries, and attendees get to be the judge.

If you miss Cook-off and can’t make it to Roundup, don’t you worry—you can still taste the winning wines in the Champion Wine Garden. Vendors speckled throughout the venue offer everything your taste buds desire. Last year, rodeo-goers scarfed down more than 814,000 tamales, 52,000 funnel cakes, and 110 pounds of chocolate-coated bacon.

Joel Cowley said it himself, “Pair a star entertainer with a great rodeo and the combination is magical.” From Gene Autry to Elvis, the rodeo/music combination known as RodeoHouston continues to feature crowd-drawing talent each year. RodeoHouston’s list of highest attended concerts includes Luke Bryan and Blake Shelton, but you won’t just find country stars. Pitbull, Maroon 5, and Bruno Mars are in the top 10—taking three of the top five spots as artists who performed on Go Tejano Day.

Designed to honor our people and history, in addition to Go Tejano Day, the rodeo hosts Black Heritage Day, Armed Forces Day, and for the first time this year, First Responders Day. The lineup this year will not disappoint, with headliners including, Jason Aldean, Darius Rucker, Kenny Chesney, and Kid Rock.

As Mr. Cowley put it, “If someone who grew up in Houston went to a rodeo anywhere else, they’d be disappointed.” Not only has the Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo grown to be the largest rodeo in the world, but it also captures the spirit of Houston—a city where people of all nationalities come together to make big things happen. Cowley summed it up well when he said, “It’s amazing how an idea takes hold and, with leadership and ingenuity, it grows into something that no one can ever imagine.”

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PHOTOS COURTESY OF **HOUSTON LIVESTOCK SHOW AND RODEO**

