

# Bifurcated Skirts To Western Hats and Fancy Shirts

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While it has been suggested that rodeo may have been the first professional sport event in which women participated, the history of women's involvement in this activity is probably no older than that of golf, tennis, or basketball. For the independent and competent woman who pioneered the West, the horse was a symbol of that independence. And unlike their Eastern friends whose riding garb consisted of full skirts, fancy jackets, and veiled hats, ranchwomen very early adopted the bifurcated skirt which provided the necessary freedom for riding in the man's saddle. Since equestrian skills could be refined to a far greater degree when riding astride, it was only a brief time before these skills were being displayed in the public arena of rodeo. Early participation was limited to racing events, but opportunities gradually opened for women in almost all the events scheduled for men - bronco riding, steer roping, bulldogging, trick and fancy roping and riding, and Roman riding.

By the 1940s opportunities for women were declining in rodeos sponsored by the men's rodeo association, but in that decade the Girls' Rodeo Association was founded, heralding the beginning of a new era for women in the rodeo. The most popular event, and the most lucrative, was barrel racing, for this race was and still is frequently included as an event in rodeos sponsored by the Professional Cowboys' Rodeo Association. In All Girl Rodeos, however, women could also compete in bareback bronco riding, steer riding, calf roping, team roping, goat tying, and steer undecorating.

Today's female rodeo participant is not unlike her predecessors of the early 1900s. She is generally a woman who has grown up with horses, is used to a rugged outdoor life, and frequently comes from a family of rodeo contestants. Her financial future, unless she is a barrel racer, may not look particularly rosy. It is doubtful, however, that the pioneering spirit and dedication that have been the hallmark of rodeo women can be easily exterminated, and it is unlikely that Girls' Rodeo will disappear from the scene in the near future.