

# SOCO™

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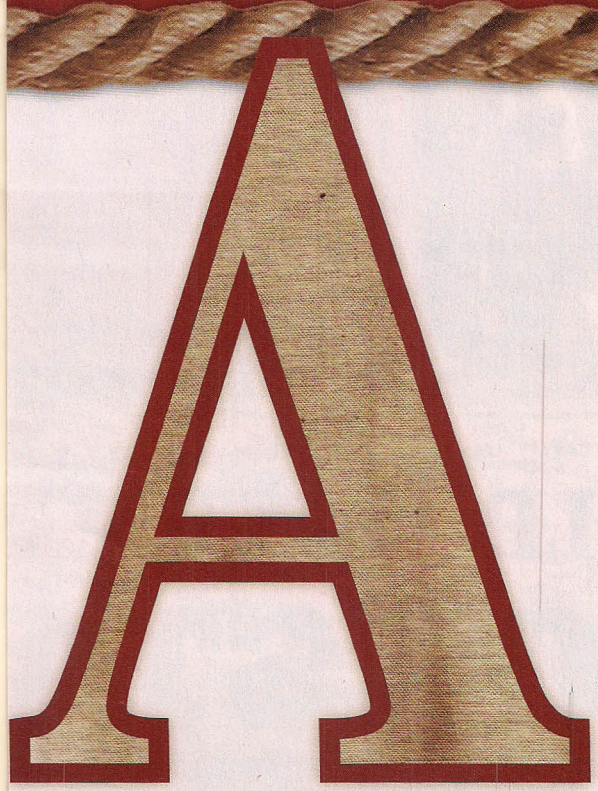


## IT'S THE WILD, WILD WEST— ON THE EAST COAST

by Kathy Anderson | photography by Lucki Schotz and Steven Chan



*Rope tricks, rodeo clowns, music, and western-style sport competition kept the capacity crowd on its feet and cheering for hours on end.*



cowboy laces up his chaps and prepares to jump astride a bucking bull. A cowgirl cinches up her western saddle and gallops around a barrel in a split-second race, her sparkling shirt twinkling in the sun. Another cowgirl secures a flag in her boot, then lopes around the arena on her horse, with Old Glory waving behind.

This slice of the American West came to life when professional rodeo cowboys and cowgirls saddled up to compete in barrel racing, team roping, bull and bronco riding, and steer wrestling at the fourth annual New England Wild West Fest and Professional Rodeo Cowboy Association (PRCA) rodeo at the Marshfield, Mass., Fairgrounds in June.

As an added attraction, the Wild West Fest launched the Miss Rodeo New England

pageant and crowned its first rodeo queen, Sharell Hunt from East Granby, Conn.

The “Nor’easter on horseback,” as she has been called by a few cowboys from out West, not only won the crown, she also captured the Horsemanship Award. With the win, Hunt becomes the official ambassador of the New England Wild West Fest rodeo and the regional spokesperson for the Spirit of the American Cowboy Foundation.

Hunt drove almost three hours from Connecticut with her mother, her boyfriend, her best friend, and her mare, Texas Kicking Star, to compete. “This was a dream come true,” said Hunt. “It was the best feeling in the world riding the victory lap around the arena waving to the crowd.”

Hunt, who trains horses with her mother, Lori, at their Connecticut WildFire Farm,



spent the weekend camped at the fairgrounds with her family. "It was good to get away from work at the farm," she said with a laugh.

The introduction of the first Miss Rodeo New England pageant not only added a bit of glamour to the dusty arena, it also brought rodeo queens back to the region. Massachusetts, Maine, and Rhode Island last crowned rodeo queens in 1988, Connecticut in 1989, and Vermont in 1994. The state queens are regional representatives of the parent organization, Miss Rodeo America, which is in its 56th year of turning out first ladies of professional rodeo.

The pageant opened the competition to young women between the ages of 19 and 25 from the New England states. Six cowgirls came to compete for the title and be

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judged on personality, speech, appearance, and horsemanship knowledge.

Competitors from Massachusetts included 19-year-old Kelly Landry from Attleboro, who was named Miss Rodeo Massachusetts and first runner-up to Miss Rodeo New England; 19-year-old Jaelyn ("Jackie") Trapp from Marstons Mills, who was second runner-up to Miss Rodeo New England; Kierstyn Ebbeling, 20, from Blackstone; and Bianca Gaudetti from Plympton. Michelle Morris, 20, who rode her mare, Valentine, and traveled four hours from Litchfield, Maine, was named Miss Rodeo Maine and Miss Congeniality.

Rope tricks, rodeo clowns, music, and western-style sport competition kept the capacity crowd on its feet and cheering for hours on end. In addition to the usual



**THE MISS RODEO NEW ENGLAND PAGEANT...**

**...ADDED A BIT OF GLAMOUR TO THE DUSTY ARENA.**

highlights of a rodeo, the Barnstable Barnburners, an equestrian drill team from Cape Cod, skillfully performed their routines in the arena while country music artist Sean Patrick McGraw keep the mood lively.

The rodeo attracted local contestants and those from as far south as Florida and as far west as Utah to compete for prize money. Winnings count toward their world standings, which help determine eligibility to compete at the National Finals Rodeo. The total payoff for all the events was \$50,168.

Though it may seem out of place in New England, professional rodeo has roots in Massachusetts. In 1936, after enduring years of insufficient winnings, cowboys refused to compete and walked out of the Boston

Garden when rodeo producer Colonel W.T. Johnson wouldn't promote their rodeo and add their entry fees to the prize purse.

According to newspaper reports of the time, the cowboys watched the event from the stands at the Boston Garden. Finally, when Johnson agreed to their demands, the cowboys formed the Cowboy Turtle Association, a formal organization that eventually became the Professional Rodeo Cowboy Association.

For all the fun of watching a rodeo, producing an event that involves bucking bulls and human beings in one arena has its elements of danger. "PRCA rodeos have strict rules of competition and rules and regulations for the care and treatment of rodeo an-

imals," said Mike Allison, executive director of the New England Wild West Fest. "Spectators are kept a safe distance from the arena. Our stock contractor, Sam Swearingen from the All American Rodeo Company, is responsible for the livestock and facilitates the performance."

The New England Wild West Fest is presented by Eaton Vance, State Street Corporation, and the Spirit of the American Cowboy Foundation, a Boston-based, nonprofit corporation dedicated to raising money for pediatric cancer research through western-themed events. The Wild West Fest, its signature fund-raising event, benefits the Jimmy Fund/Dana Farber Cancer Institute. ★