



Isa Rodeo beckons to the world

WHAT do bull riding, Beccy Cole and barrel racing all have in common, asks Jessica Reid? They're all part of the headline events at this year's Xstrata Mount Isa Rotary Rodeo!

The biggest rodeo of its kind in the Southern Hemisphere, the countdown has well and truly begun to the Isa Rodeo festival, which kicks off on Wednesday, August 5 and culminates in three days of rodeo action from August 7 to 9.

The Outback town's 20,000-strong population almost triples, with travellers from around Australia and the world for the adrenalin-pumping thrills and entertainment of one of the world's best rodeos.

Swaggering cowboys, locals and visitors all donning an unspoken uniform of Akubras, jeans and RMs will pack Kalkadoon Stadium at the purpose-built Buchanan Park complex for an action-packed program of rodeo events.

And with a huge \$200,000 prize pool, it's no wonder the event

attracts its fair share of cowboys.

The cream of global talent from countries including the USA, Canada, New Zealand and Japan, as well as some 600 of Australia's top rodeo stars are being lured to the annual event, now in its 51st year.

The program of events is essentially a showcase of the skills learned and used on Outback cattle stations, like when farmers capture wild horses for station work or when calves are roped for branding and doctoring.

Favourite events include saddle bronc riding (where the rider must synchronise his spurring with the horses bucking, while attempting to stay on for eight seconds); rope and tie; steer (cattle) wrestling; wild horse racing; bareback bronc riding and team roping. Wild horse racing, ladies barrel racing (a rider guides her horse around a clover-leaf pattern of drums), ladies breakaway roping and junior events are also highlights.

But the most popular and thrilling event would have to be bull riding.

This fast and unpredictable sport is not for the faint hearted, even if you're only watching from the grandstand.

As the gates open and the bull and rider are released into the ring, the rider has to hang on for his life for a long eight seconds, while the bull tries furiously to buck him off.

Both the animal and rider are judged in the event – the rider on his style and strength to stay upright, and the bull on its ability to buck the rider before the buzzer rings.

The inevitable falls and close escapes promise to keep the crowd on the edge of their seats for the entire event.

Away from the ring the fun continues with social events including Mardi Gras, a Rodeo Queen Quest and Bull Pit, while internationally-acclaimed rock band Hoodoo Gurus and country music star Beccy

IF YOU GO:

- Xstrata Mount Isa Rotary Rodeo website: www.isarodeo.com.au (for tickets and event info)
- Access: Qantaslink flies direct to Mount Isa from Brisbane and Townsville www.qantas.com.au; Skytrans www.skytrans.com.au and Regional Pacific www.regionalpacific.com.au fly several times a week from Cairns to Mount Isa.
- Accommodation and holiday ideas: www.adventureoutback.com.au
- Mount Isa 85 years: www.celebrateisa.com.au



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Cole will head the entertainment line-up.

Mount Isa's first rodeo was held in 1959 when an ambitious young Rotary Club decided to put the town on the map. Surely they had no idea back then that the event would one day be known around the world and Mount Isa would be recognised for something outside of its booming mining industry.

To learn more about the history of the rodeo, take a stroll along the Isa Rodeo Walk of Fame at Mount Isa's own Rodeo Drive to see the names of legendary rodeo riders and champion stock.

But it's not just the cowboys and rodeo events that make Mount Isa the special destination that it is today.

The city itself is celebrating its own milestone this year – 85 years since the Mount Isa Mines and community was established in 1924.

Today the vibrant and progressive city is a far cry from the network of miners' camps that once dotted the area (see the black and white photo).

Come earlier or stay after the rodeo to take some time to explore the city and region. Why not include a visit to Outback at Isa where you can check out the Riversleigh Fossil Centre and see first-hand the workings of an underground mine with the Hard Times Mine Tour? Other highlights in the region include beautiful Lake Moondarra and the region's twin jewels, Boodjamulla (Lawn Hill) National Park and the

fascinating and World Heritage-listed Riversleigh Fossil Fields.

Accommodation in Mount Isa ranges from camping to self-contained apartments and comfortable hotel and motel rooms. You'll need to get in quick to secure your bed as accommodation books out very quickly.

So throw on your Akubra, grab your RMs and head out west to experience the dust and drama of one of the country's most iconic and memorable events.

Situated in north-west Queensland, Mount Isa is easily accessible with direct flights from Townsville, Cairns and Brisbane or a 900km road trip inland from Townsville along the Overlander's Way.

