



CANADIAN PROFESSIONAL RODEO ASSOCIATION

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Lea Park Rodeo Gains SMS Equipment Pro Tour Status

One of the more unique stops on the Pro Rodeo Canada trail each year is the stunning river valley setting of the Lea Park Pro Rodeo. As we look ahead to 2023, it's exciting to announce that Lea Park will be an official SMS Equipment Pro Tour event next season.

"We've been thinking about it for a year or two and the time was right," noted Lloyd Gray, long time Lea Park committee member. "And the two big sponsors of the Tour [SMS Equipment and Flo Rodeo were key to our decision]. We'd like to thank them so much for what they are doing. Expenses are getting higher for contestants. We need to put more money in their pockets. Vehicle and fuel costs have gone up. All these things together helped us come to the decision, and being part of the Tour will lead to a better class of rodeo at Lea Park."

Gary also spoke to the longevity and commitment of those instrumental in keeping this long-standing event going, "It's in your blood. I was born and raised out there and have been involved in the rodeo for over 40 years. We have a super rodeo committee with veteran committee members and some good new young guys. And we have a beautiful rodeo grounds with the natural hillside and the river valley setting. It will be our 68th Annual Pro Rodeo next year... though the other day, I was given a Lea Park poster from the 1930's so they had a rodeo back then too."

Looking at the origins of the Lea Park event, the combined efforts of Judge Hines, E.A. Meiklejohn and Charlie Barnes produced one of the first rodeos in the area in 1927. The rodeo attracted cowboys from near and far. (Jack Shields from Round-Up, Montana won the saddle bronc riding in 1927 and 1928.) Admission to these early rodeos was 50 cents per person. The rodeo continued for three years under the management of the "Big 3" as they were called back then. Andy Gibson then promoted two rodeos, followed by producers V.C. (Vernie) and Dewey Hines. The last rodeo was held around 1934 with nothing staged again until 1955 when the Lea Park Rodeo again surfaced under the guidance of Dewey Hines and Gerald West. It has continued annually from that year to today. Traditionally the rodeos were held on Tuesdays and Wednesdays until 1960 when they were changed to Fridays and Saturdays. Lea Park became the first Saturday – Sunday rodeo in the early 1960's.

The iconic event has set several standards over the years. The popular Wild Ride was started here and is now being held at many rodeos throughout the country. Chute music was also a first that was introduced at Lea Park. One of today's traditions is the annual Dodge RAM truck raffle - which sells out each year and provides much-needed funds to help keep the event moving forward. And the transition to Pro Tour ranking is another step forward in many decades of success.

CPRA General Manager, Denny Phipps, is also happy about the news. "Lea Park Rodeo has long been an early season destination rodeo. The unique setting with a rock face, a creek weaving around the grounds and hillside seating, and now a move to Tour status will make it an important stop on the SMS Equipment Pro Rodeo Tour. (To be part of the SMS Equipment Pro Tour, a rodeo must have \$8,000 added prize money in each of our major events.) Lea Park was what I always considered my hometown rodeo and I have seen it evolve over the years. Now to see

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Lea Park step up the prize money and increase opportunities for the contestants is exciting. This move will not only impact the races for Canadian and World Championships, but also the Pro Tour Championship which concludes at the Tour Finale in Armstrong, B.C. on Labour Day Weekend.”

With the donation of committee and volunteer time, dedication and work, as well as outstanding community support, Lea Park is proud to be staging the 68th Lea Park Pro Rodeo June 9, 10 and 11, 2023.

For a complete schedule of CPRA events, and a list of SMS Equipment Pro Tour rodeos, visit www.rodeocanada.com

The Canadian Professional Rodeo Association (CPRA) with headquarters in Airdrie, Alberta is the official sanctioning body for Professional Rodeo in Canada. The CPRA approves 55 events annually with a total payout exceeding \$5.7 million. The organization oversees the SMS Equipment Pro Tour Finals each fall in Armstrong, BC, holds their premiere event - the Canadian Finals Rodeo (CFR) - at Westerner Park in Red Deer, AB in early November and endorses the Maple Leaf Circuit Finals as part of Canadian Western Agribition in Regina, SK. Follow the CPRA on Twitter @prorodeocanada and Instagram @prorodeocanadaofficial, ‘Like’ Canadian Professional Rodeo Association on Facebook or online at RodeoCanada.com.

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