

Best of the Best Timed looks to draw 200 contestants

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Event free for the public to attend

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Walt Eddy is not your typical promoter full of bluster and noise. Nevertheless, the unassuming idea-man of Gallup's Best of the Best Timed Event Rodeo gets the job done.

"I was born into the Western lifestyle," Eddy said in a recent interview. "My mom had started Trice's Western Wear (1954 - 2000) before I was born. One of my first promotions was a customer appreciation roping event where our prizes were donated by suppliers. By 1988, I was involved in the National Team Roping Competition at Red Rock Park, which continues today. We had around a thousand participants this year from outside the area."

Eddy also manages similar events in Moab, Utah; Flagstaff, Arizona; and Las Cruces; as well as one at the Fairgrounds in Albuquerque.

His idea for the Best of the Best Timed Event Rodeo was a direct response to the National Jr. High Finals Rodeo Association's choice to move its event to a more eastern location, on a rotating basis.

"The city had agreed to implement the upgrades mandated by the NJHFRA, but wanted the group to guarantee Gallup six more years of events, which they refused," Eddy said. "The cost to the city without the guarantee would have been too high without this guarantee."

"The Best of the Best was designed to keep rodeo, especially for younger contestants, in the forefront of the many activities Gallup offers to its residents and visitors," Eddy said. "While most New Mexico cities have one or at the most, two annual rodeos, Gallup this year will host seven in the period between Memorial Day and Labor Day, peak tourist time. And these are all major celebrations of the traditional Western lifestyle based in our small town."

From a modest start of 70 riders in its first year, to 142 last year. As of June 14, 120 contestants have entered from 11 states, and the book does not close until June 17, allowing a little more time for more mail-ins and online registrations.

Eddy expects the total this year will be anywhere from 180 to 200 contestants.

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The payouts have increased as well, with \$14,000 in added prizes for riders and ropers from the 6th to 12th grades. More interesting to locals, perhaps, is that a local car dealership has guaranteed the gate receipts, which means spectators pay nothing to get inside the arena.

In addition to barrel racing, breakaway roping, calf roping, goat tying, pole bending, and team roping, there are also specialty events in parent/contestant team roping and parent/contestant co-ed ribbon roping. Head to GallupBest.com for full details, including incentives for the junior high contestants, or call (505) 863-1272.

Each day will start at 9 am and continue until about noon, while horses and riders will take a break until the evening performance from 6 - 8 pm. Saturday will feature a junior looper contest for those handy with a rope, and who meet the age requirements of 6 - 12. There will also be a short-go on Saturday to determine the final payouts.

The third annual event, scheduled for June 22 - 25, will allow these cowboys and cowgirls an extra shot at glory on horseback, as well as a chance to walk away with some extra cash. No qualification is required by the participants, but athletic ability is kept at a high level by the \$250 entry fee in each event, knocking out most wanna-be's before they even saddle up.

Dish Network Channel 231 will also be in attendance at this year's event, filming in and around Gallup, as well as parts of the rodeo itself.

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