

THE NEXT ACT | LIFE STORIES

THE COWBOY  
Bob Holder, 85

# Still in the saddle

AUSTRALIA'S OLDEST PROFESSIONAL RODEO STAR SAYS THE SPORT KEEPS HIM FIT AND THE COMPETITION STILL KEEPS HIM HUNGRY AFTER MORE THAN 70 YEARS



If you're that kind of bloke, you can be old at 45. I've heard men half my age whingeing about their knees or their back. I say, "Go away and do something useful. Just get on with life."

That's what I have always tried to do. I've been competing in rodeo since I was 14 and I'm still at it: in March, I won AUS\$18,000 in prize money for team roping, in which two riders use ropes to catch a steer around the horns or neck and the hind legs as quickly as possible.

That makes me Australia's oldest professional cowboy. I have competitions booked up for the rest of the year around the country. In December, I'm off to Las Vegas to take part in the World National Finals, a rodeo competition I've been going to for almost two decades.

A lot of people think rodeo's too rough for an old timer. But the physical part of it keeps me fit and the competition keeps me hungry. It also gives me something to focus on: at my 280-acre ranch in Cootamundra, New South Wales, I practise roping steer almost every afternoon when I'm not on the road. All of that keeps me feeling like I'm 45 because I love

what I do. My father was a great bronco rider, and he started teaching me when I was five years old. I love the people you meet on the circuit. I also love the wild horses and the challenge of having to conquer them. I don't care how wild they are, I just want to get on them.

almost seven months, competed with legends and was the first Australian to win prize money in professional rodeo in the US.

We started out in Texas, got as far north as Calgary, Canada and even competed in a rodeo in Madison Square Garden. The Americans really

tucker for dinner: meat or a nice stew. I also have a glass of whisky that I sip throughout the evening. It's a large glass but I only ever have the one.

You can't completely ignore ageing. I gave up bronco riding in 1963 after 18 years of competition because it was starting to get too physically demanding. I miss the thrill but roping still gets your heart thumping.

I get aches and pains now and again but get up and get into it. As long as you have things to do, why would you ever think of retiring? To die? To talk about other people and gossip? I don't want to talk about other people.

All I've ever wanted to do was get out and make life worth living. It's all been great. I love it. And I plan to live until I'm 150.

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Things were very different when I got into rodeo. The 1930s were one long depression, and life was tough. My father would travel to rodeos up and down the country by horse and cart, and he would teach me about the sport.

Rodeo has been good to me. I was one of the first four Australians to compete in the US. We sailed in 1959 on a ship called the Orsova, and it took three weeks. But it was worth every minute. I ended up staying

looked after us – they treated us like gentlemen.

Even today, I like to keep myself trim. I swim three times a week and weigh 11 stone 4 – exactly what I weighed back then. I eat a good breakfast – oats, toast and a cup of tea – and I just have a sandwich for lunch. But I do like a good bit of

This is the latest in a series of profiles of individuals who are redefining later life that will appear in FT Weekend Magazine. Read the whole series at [www.nextact.ft.com](http://www.nextact.ft.com).

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