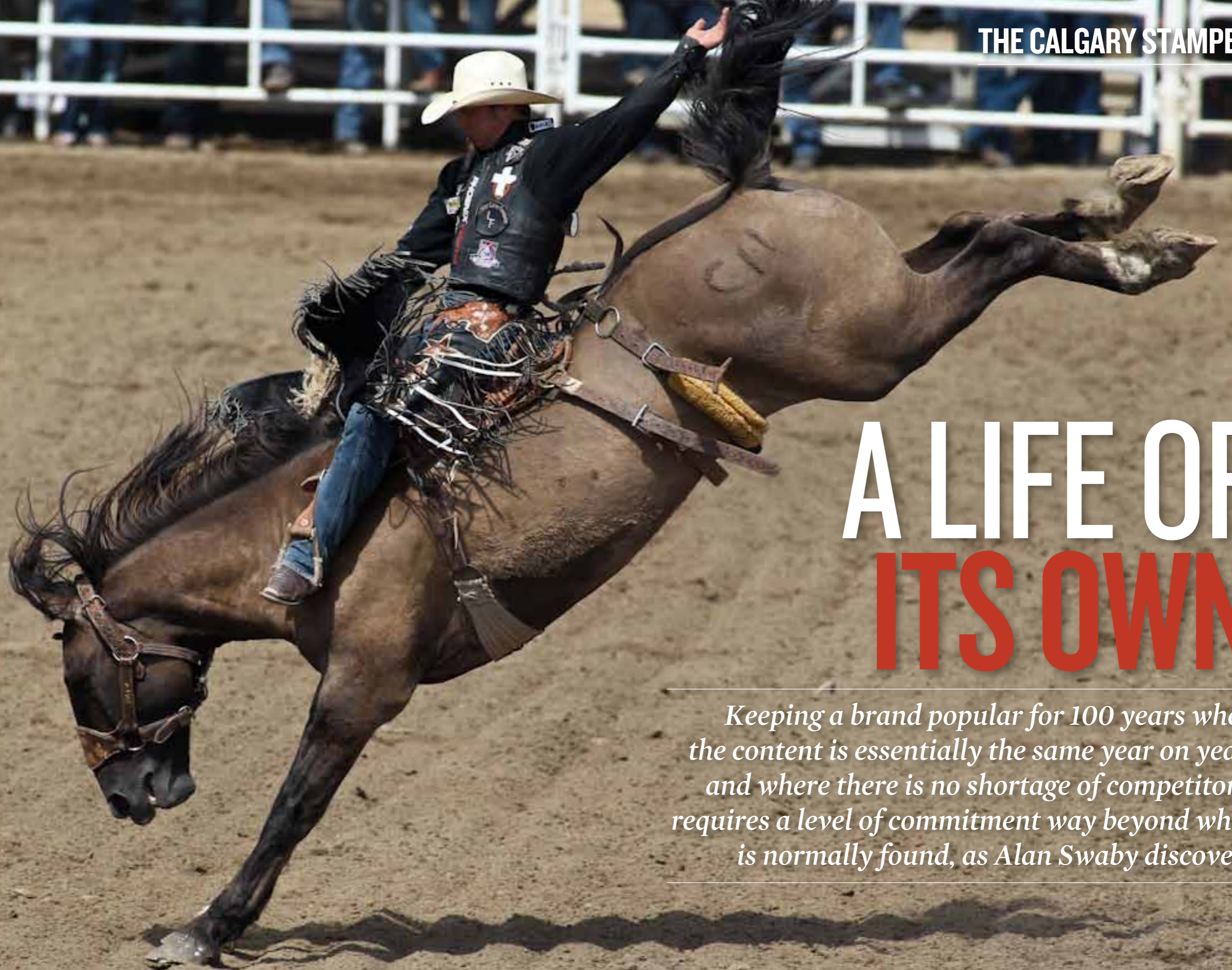


THE CALGARY STAMPEDE

A LIFE OF ITS OWN





A LIFE OF ITS OWN

Keeping a brand popular for 100 years when the content is essentially the same year on year, and where there is no shortage of competitors, requires a level of commitment way beyond what is normally found, as Alan Swaby discovers

Despite living in a mercenary world, there are often individual acts of altruism that take us by surprise and remind us that not everyone is fixated on self-aggrandizement. When these voluntary acts involve a whole city, that's something special. And when it happens year after year ... well, you get the picture.

This, in a nutshell, is The Calgary Stampede. A Wild West extravaganza that will this year celebrate its 100th anniversary. "It's a very special, iconic event," says Michael Casey, president & chairman of The Calgary Exhibition & Stampede, to give it its full title. "In terms of stature, it ranks alongside the world's great happenings such as the Rio Carnival and the German Oktober Fest. But it probably wouldn't happen at all if it were not for the whole hearted support of the entire community and the thousands of volunteers each year who give their time."

When Casey says volunteers, that's exactly what he means. No expenses to cover costs, just the satisfaction of being part of the show with the added incentive that after volunteering your services for four years, you get to be a shareholder of the organization. Not that that will earn you any dividends; only the privilege of voting at the annual general meeting. This year the volunteers number 2,200 in 47 different committees organizing various aspects of the show. "On average," says Casey, "volunteers give 10 to 15 hours of their time every month and probably don't see much of their families during the 10 days of Stampede."

For those brought up on a diet of US



The rides at night



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CONGRATULATIONS TO THE CALGARY STAMPEDE ON THEIR 100TH YEAR.

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FORWARD TOGETHER.

Western films, it's easy to forget that Canada also has a history of roaming cattle herds, miles of fenceless prairies and of course cowboy round ups. The six-shooter might not have been so prevalent during the opening of Canada's west but for all intents and purposes, the droopy moustachioed cowboy in the mid-western United States would not have looked out of place in mid-western Canada.

In fact, it was an American trick roping artist and vaudeville act Guy Weadick who created what was to become the Stampede as it's known today. Agricultural events in Calgary dated back to the 1880s when the town had a population of just 2,000. In 1908, Weadick performed there and then returned in 1912 to create the first wild frontier show with the financial backing of what's known as the Big Four – four wealthy local ranchers who each put up \$25,000 to build the facilities and bankroll the prize money.

Right from the outset, excitement has always been the hallmark of Stampede. Bucking broncos, rodeos, chuck-wagon

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Bucking bronco rider

“IT'S A VERY SPECIAL, ICONIC EVENT. IT RANKS ALONGSIDE THE WORLD'S GREAT HAPPENINGS SUCH AS THE RIO CARNIVAL AND THE GERMAN OKTOBER FEST”

CS
Calgary Stampede

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The riders line up



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chariot races – throughout the day and evening there is a full program of events to keep spectators on the edge of their seats.

These days, Calgary boasts a population of 1.2 million and is said to be one of the fastest growing cities in Canada. Agriculture is still important but except for the 10 days of the Stampede in July, when western clothes are virtually compulsory, you are more likely to see smart suits on the streets thanks to the predominance of research organizations, IT companies and executives from the head offices of numerous oil & gas companies.

The whole Stampede enterprise is a not-for-profit operation with surpluses being used to expand and upgrade facilities or plowed back into the community. “Stampede has only been able to continue for 100 years,”

explains Casey, “with the backing of the citizens so continued success requires each successive generation to be fully behind the event. One way we do this is to invest in the order of \$2 million every year in programs aimed solely at young people.”

Although the Stampede consumes the city of Calgary completely during ten days of July, the facilities on almost 200 acres of prime downtown real estate along the

banks of the Elbow River are very much a 365 day a year operation. “The entire enterprise generates around \$120 million a year,” says Casey, “of which approximately 60 percent comes from Stampede ticket sales and sponsorship. The balance comes from hundreds of other events – sometimes as many as three a day – which constitute a very significant driving force for the Alberta economy.”

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The range of activities is enormous, from trade shows and conventions – both large and small – to professional ice hockey and concerts. Some of the ongoing activities have their own management teams but overseeing everything is a permanent staff of 310 who maintain everything while liaising with individual users of the park’s facilities.

Up until now, Stampede has been able to manage capital expenditure either from financial reserves or from grants contributed by one or other of the three levels of government – local, regional, national. But the management committee is two thirds of the way through an ambitious program of upgrades and expansions which has required the organization to go out on its first private capital campaign aimed at raising \$120 million to fund three major projects – one of which will be a new \$25 million home for the School of Youth Dance.

As such, one of the most busy of Stampede’s full time staffers is Jim Bellingham, construction manager for capital projects. Bellingham has been with Stampede for 35 years and there is no-one closer to the changes that have taken place over the years. “When I arrived,” he says, “there was the 90



Stampede Park showing the site of the Agrium Western Event Centre



Full cowboy regalia

year old Agricultural Hall, the Big 4 Building and the main grandstand had just opened. Over the years they have all been improved and expanded. The BMO Center (Bank of Montreal) exhibition and banqueting center that opened in 1978 is now on its third expansion and a further two are planned for the future. But one of the overriding aims of the management committees has been to make Stampede

Park a year round facility for the people of Calgary.”

From a construction point of view, Stampede couldn’t come at a worse time – smack in the best summer working months. Instead, Bellingham has to finish whatever he is doing by July and can’t get started on anything new until the event is over.

Nor is there much spare space to work in. “We have to treat each project as though it were happening downtown,” says Bellingham. “When the show ends this year we shall break ground on the new Agrium Western Events Centre that features a

**2,200
VOLUNTEERS**

**In 47 different
committees organizing
various aspects
of the show**

250ft x 125ft performance space, bleachers and a public concourse running around the top. To ensure good viewing from every seat, the building will have a single span roof structure. As much as possible, components will be pre-assembled off site because the only space available to us is within the building’s own footprint.”

The new Agrium Western Events Centre was made possible through matching \$25million in grants from both the Government of Canada and the Government of Alberta.

In fact, with over 100,000 visitors each day during the ten-day Stampede,

**“ONE OF THE OVERRIDING AIMS OF THE
MANAGEMENT COMMITTEES HAS BEEN TO
MAKE STAMPEDE PARK A YEAR ROUND FACILITY
FOR THE PEOPLE OF CALGARY”**

\$120 MILLION

Capital program to fund three major projects

space just can't be wasted and good traffic management is essential. With the biggest prize money of any outdoor rodeo event, Calgary attracts the best and wants to keep them returning year on year. It might not be one of the more glamorous jobs, but one of the many committees is responsible for ensuring there is enough parking and stabling space for the countless contestants who each have their own little entourage based around a mobile home and their own herd of animals. The general public won't see any of this work, but Bellingham and his team are constantly upgrading stabling facilities and fine tuning the grounds to separate contestants from spectators.

This year, Stampede will celebrate its 100th anniversary, so watch this space for more details when they are released 100 days from the opening day. Whichever way you look at it, such resilience has been a remarkable achievement thanks entirely to the maintenance of Stampede as a local event with international appeal. **BE**

For more information about
The Calgary Stampede visit:
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