



(At right) A three year old Hereford Bull consigned by B & C Cattle Company out of Miami Texas was the high seller for \$11,500 at the 46th Annual All Breeds Commercial Range Bull Sale. Here we see Ralph Means from Fort Worth Texas taking a bid on him. (Left) The Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo features a big



roster of Horse Shows including the National Cutting Horse Association Novice Horse competition. Noe Silva from Kerrville Texas and his quarter horse Fancy Little Olena keep a steer dodging and weaving in the arena.

Photos/ANGELIQUE FAWNS

Pure excitement at Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo

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They say everything is bigger in Texas. And it's true!

To take a vacation from our sheep, pigs, horses and cows on our farm, my husband and I chose to go see the sheep, pigs, horses and cows at the world's largest livestock show. The Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo!

Running from February 25 to March 17, this three week mega event is an agricultural extravaganza of concerts, competitions, livestock shows, a carnival, and the best barbecue Texas has to offer. It's like the Royal Winter Fair on steroids with the Canadian National Exhibition thrown in on the side.

This event is MASSIVE. Luke and I were just two of the 2,506,238 people that attended this year.

One thing that amazed me about this event is how well run it is. Though there were approximately 70,000 people at the Rodeo in Reliant Park on Tuesday March 26, I never once felt crowded or claustrophobic. (I normally hate big venue events; I can't stand being in a crush of people.)

There is plenty of room everywhere. Every thorough fair is wide, the food stands are spaced out, and I noticed that even the cows in the Reliant Center had more room than you typically see at most fairs. We didn't have to wait in line for anything and there was always plenty of seating if you wanted to eat a burrito or drink a massive \$10.00 beer!

More than 28,000 volunteers help the rodeo run smoothly, and because of the enormous scale of the show, there are shuttles to take you everywhere. (The walk from the Reliant Center to Reliant Arena alone would take more than half an hour.)

The first thing I had to do when we walked into the immaculately kept grounds was try one of the Rodeo's famous deep fried turkey legs. For \$8, a smiling lady gave me a very Medieval looking hunk of meat. When I asked her how I supposed to eat it, she said "Why, ya'll gonna get messy. That's how."

It was very tasty, and yes very messy. If deep fried turkey legs aren't your thing, you can try just about anything deep fried there. Oreos, cookie dough, pizza, pickles... you name the food, it seems someone there was selling it hot and greasy.

Hopping onto a shuttle we did the trek to Reliant Arena to see the National Cutting Horse Association Competitions. This was wild. I have never seen such agile horses or focused riding. Cutting is when a rider and horse team cut a steer out of a group of cows and then prevents the steer from running back to the group.

Some of the riders competing had earned more than \$6 million lifetime at this sport! Though I don't think I will be trying cutting anytime soon, I did sit on a \$5,000 Sean Ryan cutting saddle. I may be spoiled for life; this was the single most comfortable saddle I have ever perched on.

A note for those who are shopaholics, I didn't find any great deals in the vendor booths. Most things were quite expensive. The average pair of cowboy boots seemed to be \$1,000, and even the clothes, tack and hats were pricey.

A big highlight for my husband was the 46th Annual All Breeds Commercial Range Bull Sale. Not only did we enjoy the amazing free hamburgers, but there was a plethora

of stunning cow flesh on display. I was particularly impressed with the Brahman Bulls. Due to the hot and dry conditions in Texas these bulls are very popular. Brahman cattle look like a cross between a camel and a cow with the most remarkable big ears.

The first cow to go through the auction was also the high seller for the day. B & C Cattle Company sold an impressive 3-year-old Hereford Bull for \$11,500.

Cattle weren't the only animals for sale at the show; more than \$2 million worth of lamb and goat was sold, \$1,504,150 for barrows, \$1,556,900 poultry, and \$1,740,600 in school art.

The Mission Statement of the Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo says it "was organized for charitable, education and scientific purposes to encourage and promote the breeding, raising and marketing of better livestock and farm products..."

A big emphasis is placed on giving children the opportunity to show livestock and earn scholarships. The Rodeo first opened in 1932 and has contributed more than \$330 million to scholarships, research, and youth agricultural programs.

This year's Rodeo also boasted a very impressive musical lineup. George Strait, Alan Jackson, Mary J. Blige, Kenny Chesney, Bruno Mars, The Band Perry, the list just goes on and on.

We bought Chute seats (\$200 a person) to see the rodeo on Tuesday, March 26, and the Gary Allan concert. The 2013 RODEOHOUSTON BP Super Series is an international invitation-only rodeo which features the world's top 40 cowboys and cowgirls in seven events.

The athletes competed for \$1.68 million in prize money doing Tie-down Roping, Bareback Riding, Team Roping, Saddle Bronc Riding, Steer Wrestling, Barrel Racing, and Bull Riding.

Wow is all I can say. This was the single most amazing concert/rodeo experience I have ever had. When you buy Chute Seats, you get a season's pass to the whole show, discount carnival tickets, dinner before the concert, free drinks and the best seats in the house.

We saw the rodeo from right behind the bucking chutes, and when it was time for the concert, we were given camping type chairs to sit right on the dirt in front of the stage!

A big tent is set up across from the stadium for dinner and we enjoyed a fantastic steak with beans, salad and open bar. (We were also given four free drink tickets each to use at the rodeo and concert.) Our seats had access to a free food area with a bar.

So after the excitement of watching the best rodeo performances I have ever seen, (the bull riders could actually stay on the bulls for the full 8 seconds...) we were treated to a concert experience. Being one of perhaps 40 people allowed to go sit right by the stage in the dirt was superlative. Gary Allan put on a wonderful performance.

There are quite a few hotels within walking distance of the Houston Livestock and Rodeo Show, so having four free drink tickets and open bar with dinner was not a problem.

For the rest of our trip, we enjoyed visiting Lake Conroe a 21,000 acre lake in Montgomery County just north of Houston, but the Rodeo was definitely the highlight of our trip.