

By Greg Hudson | Illustration by Brad Yeo

COWBOY ECONOMICS

If you were in Calgary for the Stampede this year, you may have heard a local radio station promo: "Welcome to Calgary. That smell in the air? That's the smell of money." An entire economy – estimated by some to be around \$350 million in spinoffs – grows out of those 10 wild days in July. Most businesses symbiotically live off the Greatest Outdoor Show on Earth, while others don't do as well as you might think.

AT COWBOYS, CHRISTMAS MIGHT AS well come in July. "A million dollars a day wouldn't be too far off," says Paul Vickers, president of Penny Lane Entertainment, which runs a group of nightclubs including Stampede staples Cowboys and Coyotes. Despite a lineup that wraps around the building, inflated cover charge and overpriced drinks, bar patrons aren't dissuaded. It's definitely the place to be seen. It's also the place to work for 500 temporary staff, who can make anywhere from **\$2,000 to \$20,000 in tips**. "The Stampede is like a ski hill, and we're the après ski of the whole hill," says Vickers.

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THE STAMPEDE RAISES ITS own cattle (its livestock operation is located near Hanna), but because it's such a large rodeo, it also subcontracts to ranchers who lease out their stock for the 10 days. Now, getting a rancher to talk about money is about as easy as making eight seconds on an ornery bull. "They pay well," says rancher Wayne Vold. "They pay awful well," says Cessord rancher Bruce Sunstrom. How well is well? Jim Pippolo, general manager and rodeo administrator for the Canadian Professional Rodeo Association figures it's about **\$500 per head, per use**. Smaller rodeos likely pay around **\$200 per gate**. But the pay is nothing compared to the Canadian Finals Rodeo, which can sometimes pay **\$1,000 for the use of each animal**.

NOTHING HOLLERS STAMPEDE like the omnipresence of western decor: makeshift wooden fences, window paintings and cut-out Marlboro Man silhouettes. Enter Gaps Pro Shop, Blazing Saddles and half a dozen other businesses responsible for making Calgary look like one big western movie set. Gaps Pro Shop adds cowboy flair to larger events, charging up to **\$50,000 for some posh gigs**. Owner Gill Boyd says the Stampede accounts for 30% to 40% (**\$350K to \$400K**) of his company's annual revenue. Competitor Blazing Saddles decorated 300 restaurants this year, making it by far its busiest Stampede.

HOEDOWNS DON'T PLAN THEMSELVES. Someone's got to pick the venue, plan the menu and book the band. Companies who want to impress leave the hard work to the professionals. Event planning company E=MC2 crammed 10% of its annual projects into those 10 days. With nine events staged, averaging **2,000 guests each at \$100 to \$200 a head**, E=MC2 easily billed upwards of **\$250,000** during the Stampede. CEO Jocelyn Flannigan notes that for the Stampede, as opposed to, say, Christmas, the budget doesn't change. The bills just go towards big name acts, instead of sautéed shrimp.

ONE OF THE REASONS STAMPEDE is so successful is because it's easy to participate. Even a Bankers Hall CEO can don a cowboy hat, plaid shirt and a pair of jeans. Cowboy assimilation translates into big bucks at Lammle's Western Wear & Tack. The Calgary-based company sells over **20,000 pairs of boots, 25,000 pairs of jeans** and over **30,000 cowboy hats** in the days leading up to, and during, the Stampede, says Shelly McBride, marketing director at Lammle's. Figuring that the cheapest pair of boots cost \$100, jeans are priced at \$50 and the same goes for a hat, Lammle's pulls in \$5 million for playing dress-up. That's a conservative number by our estimates because we're sure there are at least two oil and gas CEOs who bought new \$800 snakeskin boots this year.

WITH ALL THOSE CARS PILING INTO Calgary, you'd think that illegal parking infractions would go up along with greenhouse gas emissions. But that's not so. According to Dale Fraser, general manager of Calgary Parking Authority, during the Stampede there was a decrease in the number of tags issued. July saw a **12% drop** in issued tags compared to other months. "That's not to say there isn't illegal parking during that time," Fraser says, "but we have a genuine interest in trying to provide a hospitable image during the Stampede."

DURING THE STAMPEDE two cans of Budweiser are sold every second. Total amount sold: **\$8,640,000**

