
With the Santa Anita Racetrack as a Rodeo backdrop, Joaquin Barron-Hernandez of Division 5 swerves through the cones, trying to maneuver quickly and precisely. [See article.](#)



PHOTOS: FRANKLIN A. HOLMAN

Bus Operators Sweat Through Tough Rodeo Competition

By FRANKLIN A. HOLMAN

(July 22, 2003) Sweat dripped from their brows and buses replaced horses as operators saddled up to compete, last Saturday, not in a bronco bustin' contest, but in the 28th Annual MTA Bus Rodeo.

"We have a lot of outstanding drivers, but this group represents the top notch, Deputy CEO John Catoe said as he watched the competition. "Everybody is good, but then you have those that are great. These are our great operators and mechanics that are demonstrating their skills today."

Nipon Pasaphunthu of Division 3 races through the competition sporting a new paint job on his Metro Rapid.



Knowing they represent the best, operators still felt the tension of the competition as the crowd settled in their seats to watch.

"I just try to calm down and not get nervous; I try not to let the

competition get to me,” Operator Joe Acosta said as he waited for his name to be called to compete.

“The competition is good today,” 2002 winner Dan Keosababian said as he looked at the group of operators beside him. “If you mess up early in the course, it can rattle you.”

Preparing for Salt Lake

The 11-obstacle course helps prepare the winner for the competition in the APTA International Rodeo, which takes place in September at Salt Lake City.

“The obstacles challenge skill level and every type of movement operators would use on the street,” Rodeo Coordinator Frank Cecere said. “All the obstacles are within a 2-3 inch clearance from the bus, so they have to be right on.”

Many were on point, but Mark Holland — previous two-time Rodeo winner — was right on. He finished Saturday’s event as a three-time winner with a score of 634. Holland will represent MTA at Salt Lake City.

After the final contestant completed the course, operators could set aside the competitive spirit, relax and join in the other Rodeo festivities.

Judges are dwarfed by the maneuvering coaches.



“The Rodeo emphasizes the safety and the skill of our operators,” Catoe said as a bus finished the competition and fans cheered. “The second issue is fun — to get our employees and their families together to celebrate what operators do.”

With their families and coworkers gathered at the table, operators told jokes and remembered good old times over lunch.

“What makes it a successful Rodeo is the camaraderie between operators,” Cecere said as the emcee announced the next competitor. “They get to see old friends — people they started working with years ago that they lost touch with. They all meet again here at the Rodeo.”

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