

NEW HAMBURG

Bronco-busting spurs her on

Injuries fail to deter only Canadian woman on U.S. rodeo circuit

By Joel Rubinoff Record staff

She's sprained her back, dislocated her hip, broken her collarbone and fractured her skull.

And still she comes back for more.

"It's the adrenaline," says Heather Larson, a 27-year-old New Hamburg native who says she is the only Canadian woman competing in the professional bronco rider cowboy circuit south of the border.

"But you lie on the ground quite a bit."

And then, she's quick to point out, you climb back on the bucking horses and bulls she rides without a saddle and hang on for dear life.

"There's people who have suffered worse injuries than me and they keep coming back," points out the five-foot-one Winnipeg resident, in town this week to visit a Kitchener relative.

"I guess I always just wanted to do it."

Ranked, she says, as one of the top 15 women riders worldwide, she began riding two years ago in the Profession-

"Once you start, you've just got it. You just want to keep on riding.

"It's actually no different than bungee jumping or parachuting out of a plane."

After riding smaller, less flamboyant steers on the Girls Rodeo Association circuit in Canada, she decided to turn her attention to full-fledged bucking horses and bulls.

And since there was no avenue for women to do it in Canada, she packed her spurs and headed south.

Determined to make it to the top, she has faced off against the world's best — and toughest — bronco-busters in frantic six-second competitions, developing the technique that has placed her in the sport's upper

echelons.

"I try to hold on," says Larson, who works as a guide and instructor on a Manitoba riding ranch in the off-season.

"It's an easy thing to give up on, so if you don't have the drive, you're not going to do well. Things come with experience"

al Women's Rodeo Association after developing a fondness for horses while growing up on her parents' New Hamburg farm.



"It (rodeo-riding) is actually no different than bungee jumping or parachuting out of a plane."

Heather Larson

Attending Waterloo-Oxford District Secondary School in Baden, she worked at local boarding stables, gave riding lessons and assisted in a riding program for the disabled before deciding to make a career of her passion.

"A lot of people say it's like a disease," she says of her decision to go professional.