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Heather Larson has taken her dream on the road as she pursues her goal of bareback bronc riding on the rodeo circuit.

Bucking odds for her dream

By Treena Khan
Staff Reporter

HEATHER LARSON'S lifelong dream only lasted six seconds, but it's one she wants to relive over and over for years to come.

The 26-year-old Headingley horse wrangler is thumbing her nose at the "cowboy way," now being the only woman in Canada to ride bareback broncs on the rodeo circuit, six seconds at a time.

"All I know is horses. I've always wanted to ride bareback," said Larson, taking a break from her stable duties at the Camp Assiniboia Mennonite camp recently, where she has cared for the two dozen horses since 1992.

"I always do what I want to do."

It's that brazen spirit that shielded the petite Ontario farm girl from the barbs and snubs of cowboys who weren't willing to let her into the rodeo chute when she decided to pursue her big dream last year.

"A lot of cowboys don't want women involved. I don't know why," she said, with a trace of exasperation. "They didn't want me to get hurt."

Cowboys wouldn't lend her their rigging equipment when she wanted to try it at local rodeos, she said. In Canada, women don't compete in bareback horse events. They ride steers, like the young cowboys, and barrel race.

"Women shouldn't have to ride steers. It's a junior event," she said.

Even in the U.S., there are men who don't want women in bareback bronc riding, said Sue Kekich, a director with the Women's Pro-Rodeo Association. But there are about 200 women in the U.S. who share Larson's passion.

"It is really hard on a person's body, man or woman, and the men probably don't want to see women get hurt. It's not so much a redneck thing," Kekich said.

So, after trying her hand at steer riding in Manitoba exhibitions in 1994, Larson decided to go to the U.S. to make her mark, signing up for a weekend bareback-riding school for women in Idaho.

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