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The Horse Heaven Round-Up has been named Large Rodeo of the Year by the Columbia River ProRodeo Circuit. Lori Lancaster, manager of the Benton Franklin Fair & Rodeo, said this is the first time in the Kennewick rodeo's 60-year history that it has earned the honor. The cowboys who compete in the circuit chose the Kennewick event above several other renowned rodeos, including those in Pendleton and Ellensburg.

The large rodeo category is for rodeos that provide more than \$5,000 per event in prize money. Purses at the 2007 Horse Heaven Round-Up were \$7,000 per event, an increase over previous years. Edie Longfellow, the circuit secretary, said 14 of the circuit's 35 rodeos fall into the "large" category. "The largest is the Pendleton Round-Up," she said. Longfellow said changes at the Kennewick rodeo have increased its popularity among the cowboys. "They have done a lot of improvements," she said. "The hospitality is great and they always have really good stock there. The bucking horses are good, so they always have a lot of entries for that."

In addition, rodeo organizers are efficient about the schedule, allowing cowboys who don't make it to the main event to have enough time to drive to other rodeos that weekend. Lancaster said the annual rodeo, which is a Professional Rodeo Cowboys Association-sanctioned event, uses Washington stock contractors Flying 5 and Big Bend and contestants receive a free dinner each night and a cowboy breakfast during slack Tuesday morning.

Steve Lancaster, the rodeo's co-chairman, said the award was an honor. "We consistently receive comments about the high quality of the stock we use and the caliber of contestants our rodeo draws. We've been trying to raise the profile of the Horse Heaven Round-Up, and it's nice to receive recognition from the industry that we're on the right path."

The Horse Heaven Round-Up will be Aug. 20-23 in Kennewick.