



Local country musician Jake Houston is launching his boot company, Houston Boot Company, at the 100th Reno Rodeo.

the economic impact was \$57 million dollars of non-local spending. ... We were just chatting with some folks at the Row, informally, last week. And as far as who puts heads in beds—they like to talk about ‘putting heads in beds’—it’s probably Hot August Nights that brings the most, but we’re not a lightweight, for sure.”

This year, the rodeo association is expecting between 120,000 and 140,000 people to attend the 11-day event. And those people will spend money on more than just admission, including at the vendor booths—many of which will be run by local artisans. Among them for the first time will be local country musician Jake Houston, who’s launching a new bespoke bootmaking company.

Walking the line

Houston, who’s known about town for his country music singing and guitar playing, has been tooling leather for about four years now.

“A friend was teaching me,” he said. “I wanted him to make a guitar strap for me, and he said, ‘Well, how ’bout I just teach you instead?’ So that was a new and interesting thing for me. I took that and started making belts and stuff for folks.”

Houston set up a small vending area inside the Golden Jackal and spent about six months selling belts before deciding he was ready to branch out.

“And I thought I could either make saddles or make cowboy boots,” he said. “And I have a lot of weird tastes in footwear. I wanted a pair of stingray boots.”

“I’ve worn cowboy boots my whole adult life, mostly as a child as well,” Houston said. “I grew up in Carson City and Dayton, so pretty rural areas—and we did rural kinds of activities.”

He figured he’d try making a pair.

“After trying my first pair and kind of getting stuck not really knowing what to do, I went to the Sole Emporium Shoe Repair by Trader Joe’s,” Houston recalled. “I introduced myself and told them I was a leather worker and wanted to learn how to make boots. They don’t make any footwear there. I was more interested in the idea that maybe by repairing them you could see how they’re made better. They let me come in, like, once a week for a few months.”

He ended up working for Sole Emporium for more than a year after that and purchasing a wealth of machines for making shoes from one of his coworkers. With it, and with advice solicited from bootmakers around the country, Houston learned the craft. Now, he’s launching Houston Boot Company at the 100th Reno Rodeo. At booth 684 in the rodeo’s South Exhibition Hall, he’ll be taking orders for his bespoke boots, which take a minimum of 40 to 50 hours per pair to make—and he’ll be running a special on pairs of custom brown or black boots with a simple, three-row stitched design for \$775. He hopes that the rodeo will provide him with enough work to establish the company—and himself—as a purveyor of what he considers a Western art form.

“Especially in a city now that’s growing so much, with such a unique past, with rodeo and ranch work and the West—I think it’s important to keep Western culture and art alive,” he said.

The boots he makes are a bit of both.

“That’s probably what I like so much about it,” Houston said. “For me, it’s creative—and I can do things artistically that someone could wear out on a cattle drive every day and have it last and not fail. ... And I love the American West. I think out of any era of history it is the most unique and coolest, to me. I love it. It’s important. It’s important to keep around, so I’m trying to do my part. ... There’s something to be said for it. I think there’s always a place for it.” □

Learn more about the Reno Rodeo, running June 20–29, here: renorodeo.com.

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