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By **BRIAN PORTER/Managing Editor**

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Kaila Mussell doesn't get all the hullabaloo.

When she arrives behind the chutes at Mesquite's Resistol Arena, you might take her for a competitive barrel racer. You would be wrong.

"I'm not exactly where I want to be," the 28-year-old Stephenville cowgirl said. "I'm working my way back after two years."

Mussell has endured a dislocated shoulder and a knee surgery. She's back riding horses. Her weekly trips into Resistol Arena, though, take her straight to the bucking chutes.

She is the only female competing in saddle bronc riding in the PRCA. She collected a payout two weeks ago and last weekend was narrowly edged out of the money.

"It is a tough sport," Mussell said. "Saddle bronc riding is more technical." The Women's Professional Rodeo Association offers bareback riding, but Mussell had to turn to the Professional Rodeo Cowboys Association to compete in saddle bronc riding.

"I wanted to ride saddle broncs," she said. "For the most part, the guys are good about it. They look at it as if I'm another competitor."

She views herself as a throwback into an earlier era in rodeo when women competed in saddle bronc competitions. She would compete in the WPRA if it were offered, but doesn't mind the notoriety from competing in the PRCA.

"I like the novelty part of it," she said. "It would be great to have more women compete. To be honest, I like the attention."

Mussell scored a 76 aboard a Mesquite Championship Rodeo bucking horse known as One Sock, earning third place in the two-go two weeks ago. She finished fourth and just short of a payout aboard Ringo on Saturday.

Not only is she the only female bronc rider in the PRCA, she is the first cowgirl to place in regular saddle bronc competition n or for that matter any event other than barrel racing -- at the Mesquite Championship Rodeo.

Just competing isn't the aim.

"I'd like to make the Texas Circuit Finals this year and then get back in the swing of things," Mussell said. "I'm out here for the same reason as the other bronc riders. I want to compete, do good and win."

With her injuries healed, Mussell seems to be making strides. She entered the saddle bronc riding competition 18 times at the Mesquite Championship Rodeo before breaking through for a payday two weeks ago and then nearly repeated the feat on Saturday.

"The guys don't hassle me," she said. "They know I love this event and love to compete. We all share a love of the sport."

She may even be able to give a few riding tips.

Mussell began competing in rodeo as a barrel racer in Canada. She also rode steers and made an appearance at the Calgary Stampede as a trick rider in 1999.

"After that, I decided I wanted to ride broncs," she said. "I knew it was tough and there was a chance I could get hurt."

There were reasons she could succeed. Her father rode saddle broncs and she seemed to have his passion for the event. She also has a feel for the history of rodeo.

"Not a lot of women are competing in this event, I guess I'm the only one," she said, "but they used to in the early 1900s."

She's hoping maybe a few girls see her compete at Mesquite and other Texas rodeos on her way to the Texas Circuit Finals and that one day it won't be a novelty.

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