Ada Ferrell, 7, has been riding since before she could walk. When Ada was only 2 weeks old, her mother, Adrienne, would hold Ada in her arms so the two could ride horses together. By the age of 4, Ada was competing in rodeo events.
Few 4-year-olds can even ride a bike, let alone manage a sheep or horse.

But Ada Ferrell is not like most kids. She’s been competing in riding events since she was a preschooler and currently takes part in about 25 events per year.

Ada’s father, Ben Ferrell, owns Glory Days Rodeo Company in Wright City, and she has found a passion for the messy, dusty world of rodeo.

Ada competes in several events, including calf riding, barrel racing and mutton busting, which is the same as calf riding but with sheep. Ada is not only one of few girls who compete in the male-dominated sport, but she’s also a champion in mutton busting and has placed as high as second in barrel racing.

For a long time, it’s been rare to find women competing against men when it comes to bull riding. Lynn Jonckowski became the first woman in professional rodeo to participate at the same level as men when she competed at the 1992 Men’s World Bull Riding Championships in Scottsdale, Arizona.

Misconceptions about the number of women in rodeo are unfortunately common. A few years ago, Maggie Parker, a rodeo competitor from Michigan, was touted by the Daily Telegraph and a few other outlets as the “only female professional bull rider.” Although the claim is false, it still pops up as the top two results when “woman bull rider” is typed into a Google search.

Currently, women have a small number of rodeo events that are available on the professional level. Barrel racing, breakaway and team roping are usually the only events female rodeo competitors have to choose from.

It wasn’t until 2015 that the National High School Rodeo Association allowed girls to compete.

None of this concerns Ada. Once that gate opens and the round begins, she bears down for the run.

Ada is a prime example of someone who does what they want for the sheer thrill of it. For at least six seconds, everyone watches this 7-year-old girl as she shows the crowd that their perceptions are irrelevant. All Ada has to do is have fun — and hold on tight.

— Mike Tish
Ada participates in about 25 events each year. She usually competes against nine or 10 other kids, mostly boys. She is already a champion mutton buster.

Above: Ada Ferrell watches her fellow competitors and waits for her turn at a Glory Days Rodeo event.

Right: Ada participates in about 25 events each year. She usually competes against nine or 10 other kids, mostly boys. She is already a champion mutton buster.
BELOW: Ada stands on top of her horse, Gypsy, to show off for her friend Reese before they take part in a barrel racing competition. Ada finished with a 14.7-second run. Gypsy was hesitant on the last barrel, but Ada whipped her around and finished in second place.

LEFT: So far, Ada only competes in Missouri rodeos, but when she gets older, she'll be able to take part in competitions throughout the Midwest.