

15 Road-Worthy Cowboy Songs

SUMMER RODEOS AND ROPINGS REQUIRE A LITTLE DRIVE TIME TO GET TO. HERE ARE SOME CLASSIC WESTERN TUNES FOR THE ROAD.

By William C. Reynolds

FOR SUCH AN AUSPICIOUS OCCASION AS the 15th anniversary of *Cowboys & Indians* magazine, I figured we should celebrate with a list of 15 great cowboy songs. These 15 memorable Western sing-a-long songs are perfect to load in the iPod for some grand summer \$4-a-gallon driving. Whether you're headed to a roping or a local rodeo or just stuck in some rush-hour traffic on the way to work, these should bring a smile to your inner-cowboy. Some of them are classic oldies, some are newer, and some may have you scratching your head wondering where they came from. Consider these a start for your own summer Ultimate Cowboy Collection. Happy trails!

SOMEDAY SOON

Judy Collins—*Colors of the Day: The Best of Judy Collins*

Many people have covered this Ian Tyson classic about the road life of a rodeo cowboy and the girl who wants him to stay. Collins' haunting version is timeless in its message and delivery. It's Tyson at its best.

EL PASO

Marty Robbins—*Gunfighter Ballads and Trail Songs*

This unforgettable ballad became Robbins' signature song after its release in 1959. He was inspired to write the song having grown up hearing stories of range wars and cantina fights from his grandfather "Texas" Bob Heckle—who had experienced them all.

THE VAQUERO SONG

Dave Stamey—*Tonopah*

Dave Stamey is the Charlie Russell of cowboy music. His words and music take the listener deep into the stories he tells. "The Vaquero Song" is an ode to the *vaqueros* of Old California and their mystical ways with horses and cattle.

RANCHO DELUXE

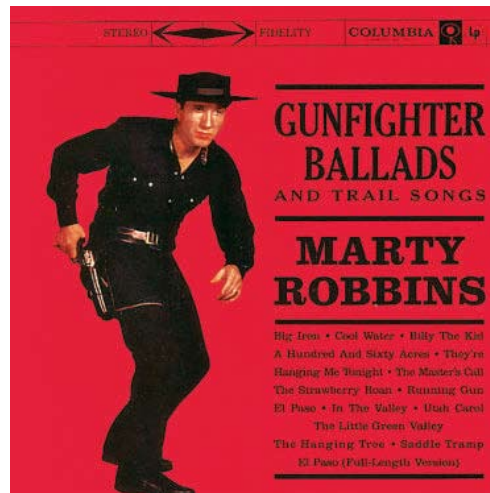
Jimmy Buffett—*Rancho Deluxe* (Soundtrack)

This title song from the 1975 film *Rancho Deluxe* is classic party-time Buffett. It harks back to those wacky 1970s, and while the film never really captured a wide audience, the film soundtrack did give us such standards as *Livingston Saturday Night*.

IN THE REAL WEST

Tish Hinojosa—*Culture Swing*

Tish Hinojosa is a folk singer who records in both English and Spanish and has one of the most beautiful voices in Western music. Her heartfelt lyrics tell the stories of the working people of the Southwest—on both sides of the border.



PATRICK

Mike Beck—*Mariposa Wind*

There have been many songs written about horses over the years. Mike Beck loves the world of the *vaquero* and the bridle horse, and this song is a fond and eloquent memory of a favorite horse.

BACK IN THE SADDLE AGAIN

Gene Autry—*The Essential Gene Autry*
Leaving Gene Autry off this list would be an act of cowboy treason. This classic “happy anthem” of the joy of being horseback speaks of a simpler time in America when cowboy heroes kept our spirits high and entertained.

THIS COWBOY HAT

Chris LeDoux—*Chris LeDoux: The Ultimate Collection*
“You’ll ride a black tornado, across a Western sky...” No cowboy song collection would be complete without a song from the late, great Chris LeDoux. His was a life of inspiration for every cowboy who ever crawled on a bronc. Just LeDoux It!

HIGH NOON

Tex Ritter—*His Best*
Another film song that sums up the quiet strength of the cowboy is this song from the film *High Noon* starring Gary Cooper. Ritter’s voice echoed through the words about a cowboy who, when everyone else failed him, dug deep into his own personal strength.

SOUTH COAST

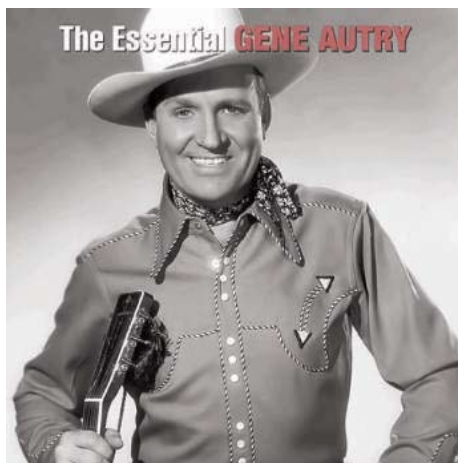
Ramblin’ Jack Elliott—*Hard Travelin’: Songs by Woody Guthrie and Others*
This song by Lillian Boz Ross tells the story of a cowboy’s life between California’s rugged Big Sur area and the little town of Jolon. It has been recorded by many, including the Kingston Trio, but nobody does it better than Ramblin’ Jack.

AMARILLO BY MORNING

George Strait—*Strait Hits*
Anybody who has hit the rodeo road with a truckload of cowboys, saddles, and gear bags knows the feeling Strait so perfectly presents in this timeless road song. Gene Elder’s fiddle playing is as haunting as the winds of West Texas.

MY HEROES HAVE ALWAYS BEEN COWBOYS

Willie Nelson—*The Essential Willie Nelson*
Here is another song that simply could not be left off of our list. In its



purest sense, not in the many commercials and videos it has been used in, this classic sums up the essence of the romance of the cowboy life for every kid who ever dreamed of heading West.

PRAIRIE IN THE SKY

Mary McCaslin—*Prairie in the Sky*
It was a tough decision whether to include this version of the song or Tom Russell’s. But since we have another Russell song we tipped our Stetson to the original. McCaslin is another folk singer who consistently grabs the hearts of Westerners with her earthy romanticism.

TONIGHT WE RIDE

Tom Russell—*Indians Cowboys Horses Dogs*
Many of Tom Russell’s story songs make you grab for the night latch and hold on for dear life. This song is no exception and tells the story of Black Jack Pershing and the hunt for Pancho Villa. By design it makes for a great road song.

FOR STRONG WINDS

Ian Tyson—*I Outgrew the Wagon*
Tyson’s ode to a cowboy’s dreams has been recorded by the likes of Joan Baez, Sarah McLachlan, and The Kingston Trio, among others. Neil Young recorded it twice and called it one of the greatest songs he had ever heard. Tyson’s own version is still the best.

Lastly,

GOODNIGHT IRENE

The Weavers—*The Weavers Greatest Hits*
How can we end this dance without the final song?

Somewhere out West, on any given Saturday night after the rodeo, a dance is being held—maybe at a local Grange hall. After all the encores, the band will play its good-night with this classic American song, and the assembled will find their way back to the pickups, humming a fond farewell. Another Western tradition lives on, and we are the better for it.



To find these songs and more, visit [Apple iTunes](https://www.apple.com) or [Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com).