



JOE DUTTON of Junction, Texas is not a typical cowboy. The Texas A&M senior leads the polo team and competes in more than 30 rodeos during the school year. Except for being hit in the teeth with a polo mallet and breaking several bones bronc riding, he says it is great sport no matter which saddle he is on at the time.

Joe Dutton, all-purpose cowboy

Joe Dutton is a do-it-all cowboy.

From bruising bronc riding at the Intercollegiate Rodeo Championships in Montana to stylish horsemanship on the lush grounds of the Houston Polo Club, he rides them all. If he wasn't real, you would think someone had made him up.

A 22-year-old bundle of muscle and horse sense, Dutton is a polo playing, bust'em up, hard-nosed cowboy from Junction. He hits the rodeo circuit 30 times a year and leads a championship-bound polo team at Texas A&M University.

Dutton said he does not have any problem with the different saddles he has to use, one a skimpy English saddle and the other a conventional Western saddle.

"If you can ride, you can ride," he said succinctly. "You don't ride the saddle, you ride the horse."

It does make a difference to Sketter, Dutton's horse. One day Sketter is out chasing a calf; the next day he is out running among a whirl of polo mallets.

"It took a little time to train Sketter when to stop and when not to," said Dutton. "I've been using him for roping, so when you lean up on him he's supposed to stop for the calf. Well, when you're playing polo, you lean up, lay out, lay over, anything to hit the ball. It took him a little time to learn which game he was playing. In the meantime, I spent a lot of time in the dirt."

Dutton is an agricultural economics major at Texas A&M. He will participate in about 30 rodeos in Texas and Louisiana this year and about 14 polo matches, some at the most exclusive polo clubs in the nation.

Rodeo is a tough sport, but polo has not been exactly kind to him either. Last fall he was struck in the face with a polo mallet, breaking his nose and loosening his front teeth. Thereafter, he wore a helmet with a wire protective cage in front.

Dutton said the injuries hurt, but were nothing compared to the injuries he sustained in 1974 when

he crashed through a fence after being tossed off by a bucking bronc. He broke one arm and both collarbones, and tore ligaments in his left arm.

Still, Dutton says he looks on both of his pastimes as "just sports while going to school."

"I rodeo most of the time and play polo when I have the time," he said. "Both of them take a lot of time from school. I guess that's why my grades aren't better. Last spring I was only on campus two weekends out of the whole semester. It takes a lot out of you, but I guess that's why I came to A&M. It's a good ag school, a little hard, but a good one. One thing though, they sure give you a chance to do other things while you're in school."

After he graduates next spring, the cowboy wants to work at a bank and eventually combine both a ranching career and his business background. Today, though, he is getting back into shape. He's not exactly as spry as the colts he rode out on the Texas plains near Alpine when he was three years old.

In the last two years he has had surgery on both knees for torn cartilage. One knee he hurt while calf roping, the other while doing a backward handspring in a gymnastics class at Texas A&M. But both knees are stronger now and he is back to saddle bronc riding, team roping and, of course, playing polo full time.

Dutton joined the Texas A&M polo team three years ago when he was a sophomore. That year the squad was the third best college polo team in the nation, taking 11 other teams at the Intercollegiate Polo Championships in Sommers, Conn.

This year the Texas A&M team is head back to the championships, but this time with a veteran Joe Dutton leading.

"This team is as good as the one three years ago — could be better," he smiled.

With that Joe said he had to go feed Sketter. After that he was debating whether to go hit some balls at the polo field or rope some calves.

