

son Rodeo

vboys rodeo to 'escape'

who serves as a liaison between other inmates and prison officials, said the prison rodeo is fun for those participating, but also is hard work. West, participating in his fifth prison rodeo, said the riders are a chosen few. The competition is stiff and the inmates must prove themselves before being chosen.

Inmates wanting to participate in the rodeo must go before a Classification Committee where their records are reviewed. Those with clean prison records may move on to the try-outs, where they must show they can ride bareback broncs and bulls before being selected to participate in the rodeo.

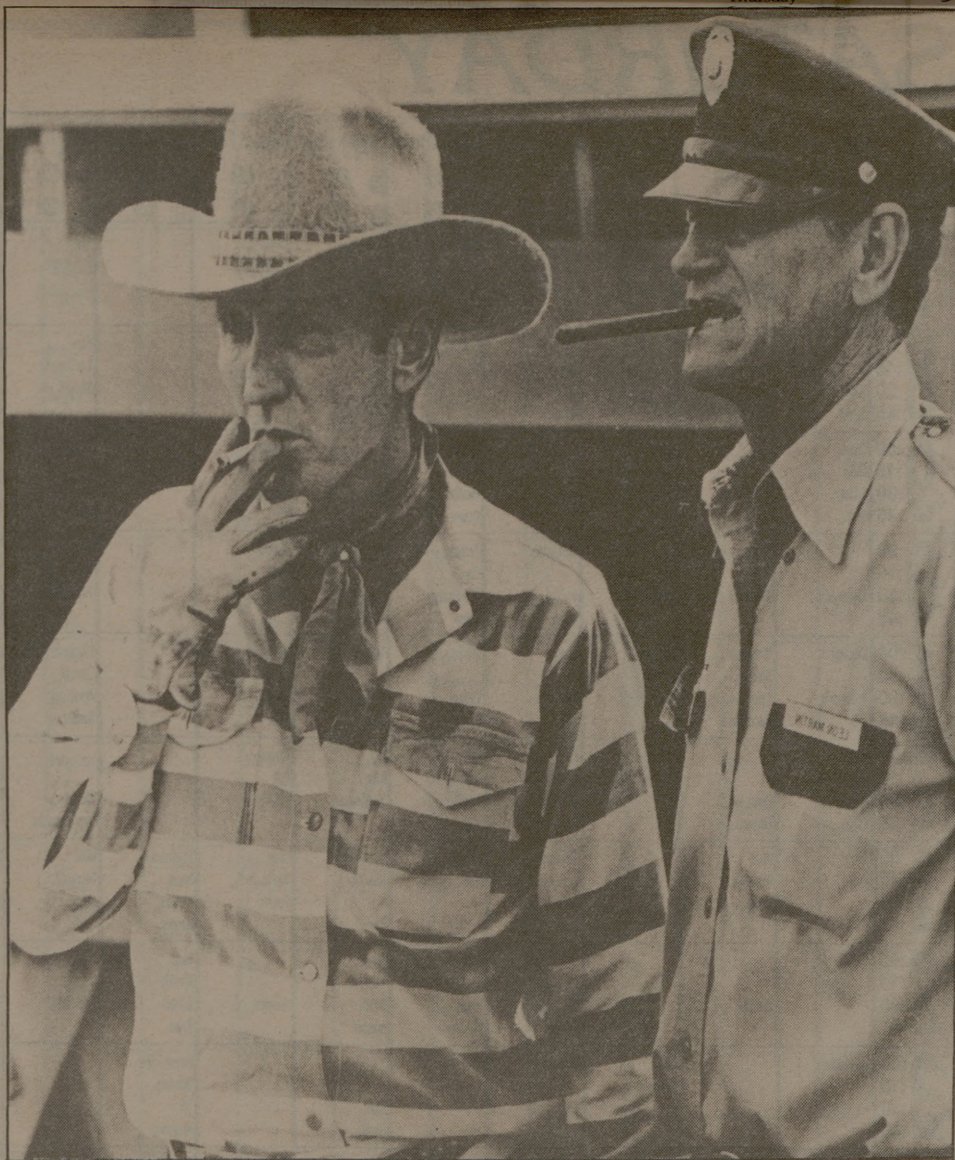
Veteran riders get first consideration in the selection process because they have already

proven themselves as good riders, West said.

One veteran rider won't be participating this year. Sixty-year-old Ellis Unit trustee Willie Craig, a veteran of 29 prison rodeos, said he enjoys himself by watching the younger riders. Watching their mistakes makes him feel younger because he made the same mistakes when he first started to rodeo, he said.

Craig showed disappointment, though, when he said, "I have a lot of fans up there (in the stands) watching." He misses being able to participate but he said he is getting too old to rodeo.

Willie Craig may be too old to ride in the rodeo but his spirit continues in the hearts of the young hard-luck cowboys.



Above, inmates' casual conversation with the guards make their relationships a little easier and their stay in prison more bearable. Below, Henry Hinson, from Josephine, fits his saddle for the bronc riding competition. Hinson is serving a 20-year term at the Ellis Unit. Left, armed guards are a constant reminder to all attending that they are in fact inside a prison.

