

# Let's Ride

By MELISSA HOLUBEC  
The Battalion

The challenge of saddle bronc riding is one that few people have the courage to attempt. Texas A&M sophomore Miles Gibbs faces that challenge most weekends of the year.

"It's exciting," Gibbs said after competing last night in the Texas A&M University National Intercollegiate Rodeo Association Rodeo. "Bronc riding gives you an adrenaline rush, a kind of natural high."

Gibbs was one of a hundred NIRA members to compete in the A&M rodeo's opening night. Students from Hill College, Southwest Texas State University, Warton County Junior College, McNeese University, and other colleges in the NIRA's southern region will be competing through Saturday night. Events include saddle bronc, bareback and bull riding, calf and team roping, and steer wrestling for men. Women compete in barrel racing, goat tying and break-away roping.

"This is a different kind of talent," A&M sophomore Shannon Fite said. "A lot of work goes into each event. What you see is the finished product."

Fite, who has been involved with rodeo events all her life, competes in barrel racing.

"I get lots of personal satisfaction from rodeoing," she said. "It helps relieve stress."

Organizations which sponsor rodeos often hire rodeo companies to relieve members of the extra stress gathering livestock, announcing events and other details can cause.

For the last five years, Bad Company Rodeo, Inc. has produced the A&M Rodeo. The A&M rodeo is one of only two college rodeos the Sonora-based company will produce this season in addition to 13 professional rodeos and nine bull ridings.

"We only produce college rodeos at Texas A&M and Uvalde because we feel that they try to produce class A rodeos," Altizer said. "We try to produce those two just like the pro rodeos

we do."

But as with any organization, being a member of the rodeo club requires work. Both Fite and Gibbs helped work shifts at opposite ends of the arena. After Gibbs finished his event, he took a shift working in the arena for the bull riding competition while Fite sold programs at the entrance gate.

"Since we are putting the rodeo on, we have to be on committees to help work," Gibbs said.

But rodeoing is more than a weekend of competition.

"Most of us live, eat, drink, sleep, and dream rodeo," local competitor Jesse Byler said. "I competed until October when I was injured, but I still travel the circuit as a fan."

For some competitors, rodeoing ranks even above education.

"I put rodeo first," said Kris Watson, a freshman at Hill College in Hillsboro. "I know it's not right, but that's how it is with me. It's what got me to school."

Parents influenced many college competitors at a young age. Some still follow their children to rodeos and offer support.

"We come to all the rodeos we can," said Susie Grimes, mother of Hill College sophomore Johnny Grimes. "We haven't missed a college rodeo yet."

Grimes and her husband John said they are fortunate that they are able to go to as many rodeos as they attend.

"There are a lot of parents who come, but there are also a lot who can't for one reason or another," she said.

Parents watch as competitors progress and relationships develop between their children and students at other schools. Johnny Grimes ropes with A&M junior Kyle Kelso. Each partner practices with school team members during the week. When rodeo weekends come around, Grimes and Kelso work together as a team.

"We each practice during the week, but we rarely get to practice together before we compete," Grimes said. "You have to go on blind faith."

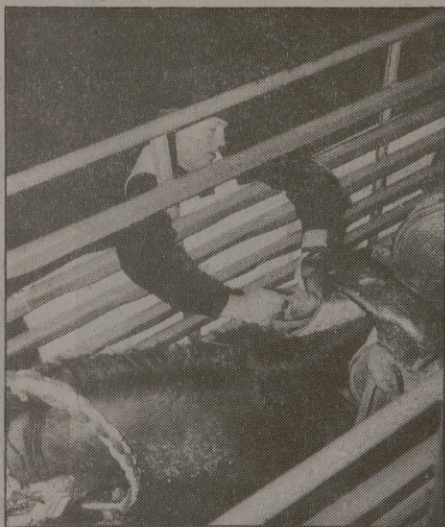
**Top** - Texas A&M team roper, Chad Magee, leads a steer to a gate after his run in Thursday night's rodeo.

**Top Right** - David Drake, of Southwest Texas State University, rides in the Diamond Shamrock Bull Riding contest. After the bull riding, rodeo clowns performed in a bull fight with Mexican fighting bulls.

**Right** - Texas A&M saddle bronc rider Miles Gibbs, sinches up his saddle before riding Thursday night at the Brazos County Rodeo Arena.

**Far Right** - Rodeo clown, Mark Swingler sits inside the barrel awaiting for the next bull rider to come out of the chutes. Mark has been a rodeo clown for seven years.

**Bottom** - Laura Connor rounds the number two barrel during the first night of the Texas A&M University National Intercollegiate Rodeo Association Rodeo.



Photos by  
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