

of 'em all'

"Some compete part-time and others enter as many rodeos as possible for a chance to win the prestige championship belt buckle.

"They have to train and stay in shape like any other athlete. It takes a lot of concentration and skill to ride bucking animals," he said.

Everyone dresses western

Some drove to the stockyards in campers. Others pulled up in Cadillacs. Most everyone's clothes were of the western style. A few looked like they were ranch hands, but most looked as if they had just taken the price tag off their new Tony Lama boots.

To cool down dusty throats, vendors sold beer for 90 cents a can and sugar water with an orange and lemon wedge which masqueraded as lemonade was sold for 75 cents.

Between the competing events clowns put on a show, along with the Oglala Indians. The Oglalas chanted ancient ballads in their native tongue and danced to the rhythm of drums. They were from the South Dakota Pine Ridge reservation and are descendants of Red Cloud, Crazy Horse and Sitting Bull.

Midway, carnival's dream

Next to the grandstands was a traveling carnival's dream, a midway complete with an official Cheyenne Frontier Days souvenir stand and a quarter mile stretch of rides.

People stood in line for stomach-turning rides that lasted less than a minute, and then tried to cool off by standing under the shade of hot dog stands.

No rodeo is complete without entertainers and at night people could take in such performers as Charley Pride, Dolly Parton and Johnny Paycheck.

At night, the downtown area looked like the Old West. Bars were packed with cowboys and the marshalls were replaced with police officers walking their beats.

One cowboy remarked to a policeman that he needn't be concerned if people get a little rowdy. Most everyone knows each other and "We're just goin' down the road."



Cowboy clowns around on the job

He comes to work in pants six inches too big and paints his face red. His business and traveling companions include a monkey, a mule and several ducks.

When Wilbur Plauger does his job, he just clowns around.

Plauger also is Cheyenne Frontier Days' answer to half-time entertainment. He's been performing his animal acts, along with bull fighting at Frontier Days for 24 years.

But Plauger didn't get his start in rodeos as a clown. In 1946, he was a ranch hand. Plauger describes himself at that time as a "drifting cowboy who broke horses."

"Back then ranch hands wages were 50 bucks a

month plus room and board. When I entered a rodeo in '46, I never dreamed that I'd end up in rodeo work, but I was a championship cowboy that year," Plauger said.

"I won some money too. It was more than I'd made in a year on the ranch.

Bull rider

"I got extra money for fighting bulls. Then the rodeo asked me to do some clowning for extra money, but I still rode bulls 'til I was 36," Plauger said.

Plauger also had the opportunity to clown on other levels.

"Hopalong Cassidy hired me as a clown for his show and put me in the actor's guild to make a movie. But I didn't like that kind of work. It was too dull for me. I had to sit around sets all day long.

"I did a few Walt Disney movies, *Run Appaloosa Run*, *Indian Girl* and *the Horses* and I did a few Daniel Boone television shows," Plauger said.

In 1970 the 56-year-old clown was flown to Australia for the Sydney Royal Easter Show.

"It was like a big world's fair and I got to meet the queen (of England) and her family who were there to celebrate Australia's 200th birthday," the clown said.

Animal acts

"I did some of my animal acts in Sydney, but the country wouldn't let me bring in any of my animals so I had to train some new ones in about two weeks," he said.

Some of Plauger's acts include a monkey dressed as a cowboy that rides a wild bucking dog and an Old West shoot out with another clown.

Yet Plauger didn't quit competing professionally until 1973.

Plauger boasts of other accomplishments in his life.

"A lot of other cowboys I know have potbellies and get out of shape when they get older. I'm still going strong and I never took a drink in my life," Plauger said.

"A couple cowboys and myself started the cowboy chapter of the Fellowship of Christian Athletes. We started out with four members. Now we have over 800 members.

"I'm a born-again Christian. Three to four years ago I didn't tell people that, but God wants this world to know that He loves everybody. I've got the opportunity to tell others. I had all this exposure and didn't use it before," Plauger said.

