



83-YEAR-OLD STOKER NOT DONE YET

BY KYLE PARTAIN

When the call came the first week of April, J.W. Stoker was unavailable. It seems the 83-year-old trick rider/roper was out teaching trick riding

to members of the Cowgirl Chicks, a Texas-based trick-riding group.

"I'm always teaching someone to ride or rope," Stoker said. "That's probably why I'm in as good a shape as I'm in at 83. I've had my share of accidents along the way, but nothing serious. Surprisingly, the worst accidents I had came when I was roping – not during the trick riding."

Stoker admitted he doesn't break his own colts anymore, but he's still training horses on a daily basis and always looking for opportunities to perform his trick riding and roping.

"I've gotten to do some great things in life because of my riding and roping," Stoker said. "As I get older, I find that a lot of my friends aren't – if you know what I mean. So I'm always thankful for another day and the chance to do what I love."

Stoker got his start in trick riding and roping at age 9, when he learned from Pinky Barnes. A year later, he hit the road full time with Clyde Miller's Wild West Show.

"It was toward the end of the Great Depression, so people needed some entertainment," Stoker said. "Mr. Miller had a great show with all kinds of acts. It was a great experience for a 10-year-old kid like me. My mother and father worked for the show and my sisters performed with me, too. When World War II broke out, they quit having the shows."

During the Korean War, Stoker served in an army unit filled with entertainers –

including a young singer named Eddie Fisher. Nearly 20 years later, he returned to Asia with Casey Tibbs' Wild West Show and performed in Japan.

In his 70-plus years of performing, Stoker has appeared at nearly every major rodeo in North America. He's plied his trade in Australia, Cuba, Finland, France and Venezuela, among others. He also earned

slowed down a lot," Stoker said. "But there were times when I did as many or more conventions in a year as I did rodeos."

Stoker's varied career included several movie appearances, as well. He started out in *The Kansan* and followed that up with an appearance alongside Marilyn Monroe in *Bus Stop*. He also doubled for Sam Bottoms in the Clint Eastwood movie, *Bronco Billy*.

"Working with Clint was great; he made you feel like he'd known you all your life," Stoker said. "While we were shooting, there was a trick roping contest in Oklahoma City that I wanted to go to. He let me go for a few days and said they'd work around my parts until I got back. When I did get back, the first thing he asked was, 'Did you win?'"

The movie was made in 1979, but Stoker received yet another royalty payment just a few weeks ago.

"I wish rodeos paid royalties," he said. "I can't believe I'm still making money off that movie 30 years later. It was just an amazing experience all around."

Stoker credits much of his success to the great horses he worked with through the years.

"I've got a Paint horse now that I sure wish I'd had 15 or 20 years ago. But one of the best I ever owned was Pumpkin. I rode him in the '60s – if I remember right – and he was just a great horse. They tried to sell him to Roy Rogers for a movie, but he had a scar on one side that kept him out of the business. That horse lived to be 34 years old."

"I'm just thrilled to be going into the ProRodeo Hall of Fame," Stoker said. "To be honest, I've had a charmed life."

The rodeo life has been great to me. Fans love to watch people do daring tricks on fast-running horses. And I got to make a living doing just that. Even at my age, I still like to stay busy. It keeps a guy out of trouble."



A trick rider and roper since age 9, J.W. Stoker has performed at nearly every major rodeo in North America. He's also traveled the world performing with Wild West shows and with a special unit of the United States Army during the Korean War. Stoker appeared on a Wheaties box as the Juvenile World Champion Trick Rider when he was 12.

—PRCA file photo

steady income by hitting the convention circuit, performing regularly at the Southfork Ranch (of Dallas fame) and the Circle R Ranch.

"After 9/11, the convention business