Cowboy still rides rodeo through art

By The Associated Press

MONROE—Nothing compares with the vagabond life of a rodeo cowboy. Just ask Toyah Bill Taylor, who for more than a decade traveled 14 hours a day from one rodeo to another.

Taylor said everything he owned or cared about was slung over his shoulder. Sometimes he slept on the back of pickup trucks; other times he was so broke he couldn't pay his entry fee into the competitions he loved.

Despite the miles, broken bones and empty pockets, Taylor thrived. Not even his current life as a burgeoning Western artist can compare to the bullring, he said.

"It's you against yourself and the bulls, the horses and your time. Most people work eight hours a day. I worked eight seconds, and I loved it," Taylor said.

And there are no co-workers like cowboys.

"There is no jealousy in rodeoing. Cowboys pull for each other. It's a true sport and the only sport where your competition will do everything to help you win. When they're down, you pay their entry fee and feed them," Taylor said.

"I've seen it happen a thousand times. If a guy would keep his mouth shut, he would win. Instead, he goes up to his competition and tells him how the bull turns, how to hold his rope. He comes in first; you come in second."

From 1965 to 1978, Toyah Taylor rode the rodeo circuit. He took his first name—a Comanche word he says means running water—from the dry, arid town of the same name in southwestern Texas.

Toyah is his legal name. Taylor said the town adopted him and brought him to manhood.

"I was on my own at 14. I put myself through high school and college working rodeos."

On a rodeo scholarship, Taylor attended a Texas college where he earned a fine arts degree. Fifteen years ago, he went back into the field after leaving the circuit.

"When you're a bull rider, you're old at 30," said the 43-year-old Taylor. "It's a young man's game. It's a career (that) when you retire you don't get a pension."

Although he is still a cowboy at heart, Taylor now travels only to show his art, teach or open new markets for his line of rodeo T-shirts and caps.

From his small gallery in West Monroe, Taylor sells his paintings and posters of rodeo scenes.

"I try to make everything look as rustic as I can," Taylor said.

Most of his time is spent re-creating on canvas the life he loved.

"When you get too old to ride bulls and horses, you paint 'em," he said.

Toyah Bill Taylor has traded his spurs for a paintbrush.