

TAKING THE FUN OUT OF RANCHING

PLEASE QUIT THE DRONES. BY LEE PITTS

All this modern technology stuff sure has taken all the fun out of ranching. With these fancy hydraulic squeeze chutes it's nearly impossible to have a bull get its head caught in the headgate that wasn't shut all the way so the bull's body is out of the chute with only its head caught so some idiot (usually me) has to volunteer to dodge the bull to get to the headgate release so the bull can escape so it can then put the volunteer in the hospital.

When the vet comes to preg check he doesn't get his elbow slammed into the tailgate anymore and no one gets conked in the head. And remember all those hilarious times when you were preg checking and someone might accidentally on purpose open the headgate a little early so the cow leaves the chute with the vet's arm fully engaged in the cow while all the crew is laughing their butts off.

One reason I got in this business was because I love riding horses, but now with all these fancy ATVs many cowboys have sacked their saddles in favor of these golf carts on steroids. Heck, cowboys might as well join the PGA or the Hell's Angels if all they want to do is ride a glorified motorcycle.

And *please* stop it with all this drone stuff. They're able to check the water, the fences and the exact location of every cow on the place, all while the cowboy geek sits in the comfort of the bunkhouse in his bunny slippers and his velour bathrobe. I even heard there's research being done to use a drone that sounds like a bee enabling it to gather the herd without a single cowboy! Personally, I'd rather have a colonoscopy than become a computer cowboy.

Now this virtual fencing means that no one will smash their thumb or get tied up in barbed wire anymore. Ranchers won't need cowboys; they'll hire electricians instead.

Some of the best fun in my life was attending auction markets to buy cattle. I'd get to see all my friends, eat at the auction market cafe and then bid on cattle, which I

always thought was more fun than a birthday bounce house. Now a lot of those cattle are bypassing the auction market and selling "on the video."

I was the announcer for 20 years for a video company so I get it...there are many advantages. But you don't get to stare down the contending bidder or try to intimidate the auctioneer with a snarl that has taken decades to perfect.

Boring people have done the same thing with bull sales and all this EPD stuff, so now everyone knows which are the best bulls. You go to a bull sale these days and hardly anyone is in the pens looking at the bulls. Heck, there may not even be any bulls to look at with photos on screens replacing the real thing, so

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now nobody who sits in the front row gets doused with manure. No bulls get on the auction block with the auctioneer and no bulls escape, knock over the bleachers or get out on the interstate like they used to. (I've personally witnessed this twice and it never gets old.)

I've always believed that "the eye of the master fattens his cattle," but now a blind techie can find the best bulls armed only with a braille sire summary.

We've made our cattle so healthy I hardly ever get to wait two hours anymore for my vet to show up. If you go to a branding, so many ranchers are banding their bull calves so you hardly ever have a good old-fashioned Rocky Mountain oyster pig-out. It's been decades since I've seen a guy cut off his finger wrapping it in his dally or using the castrating knife. So many ranchers are using ultrasound to test for pregnancy that I haven't seen a vet get kicked in the face for years. It's all about as much fun as an ulcerated tooth.

I also haven't seen a good old-fashioned wreck in years. If this keeps up, it's gonna put cowboy poets and cowboy columnists out of business. I tell ya, this may be progress, but it sure ain't fun. ■

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