

The fire truck our neighbor loaned us last week to haul water and use for fire protection makes a superb water wagon. Loaded with 1500 gallons of water and the siren and one red light switch shorting on and off, the old crate scatters the cows hanging around the dry water troughs, changing the old sisters' pattern from sorrowful bellowing to drifting to another watering.

Way back, the old ranch owned a 1960 International truck similar to the '63 model fire truck. One of the ladies living on the ranch swore the truck killed one of her hens. No way of verifying her story, then or now. Coons abounded on the big draw in front of the house, but it seemed strange that just the truck idling at the barn early in the morning frightened the chickens and peacocks roosting in the cow pens. Too, when the engine overheated, the cab smelled the same as a chicken brooder.

Modern ranchers in the 1960s complained how rough International pickups rode over the pasture. The Big Boss and Uncle Goat Whiskers still had us feeding in wagons and on horses as late as 1960. Young Whiskers and I bought several International pickups after we took over the

ranches. Anything on rubber tires seemed smooth riding to us.

Of all the things loaned and borrowed to run these bitterweed outfits, borrowing a fire truck is exceptional. Be no way for a tax collector to have made an onsite audit in other days. Windmill tools, especially, were near common property. Told you once before about a neighbor who hated to loan his trailer so bad that he kept the tires deflated, but that was an unusual case.

However, having to haul water is a new experience, or better, having a means to haul water is a new experience. The men pulling pumps and mills are weeks behind. On one Saturday, our windmillers' wife logged 22 calls for service. He and his son just have two pulling units and four arms and four legs to cover, say, 300 square miles of country. Possum Martin over at Mertzon ran his rig solo until last year with two legs and one good arm. No one was ever sure why Possum retired. Probably the tension from so much hard work caused a palsy in his hands, making rolling a smoke difficult, or those were the clues of tobacco sprinkled around his chair at the coffee house.

Pipe and rods for windmills are beginning to head toward the diamond market in Brussels. The dealing in pipe goods can cause deceit in merchants. On one inside deal

this year, the former owner of the Mertzson hardware store, and a cousin of mine, discounted new two and a half inch pipe to \$11.30 a foot as gratitude for my contributing slow-earned dollars to his anticipated opulent early retirement.

Weeks – no, months later – news slipped out that at the same time of this massive accommodation in consideration for his cousin, he was buying good used two and a half inch pipe from Possum Martin's yard at \$7 a foot for a well at his ranch. That proves and illuminates that were there one tender-hearted soul left on this cold old earth, he or she could hijack the till at the orphanage and still behave better than some folks behave.

Also, for the few of us unwary country people remaining, there's the shock that sucker rods have crooked couplings to wear out pipe with seams in the wrong places. Before my cousin sold out, he confessed that some of the many bundles of rod I'd bought might have crooked connections. (If you haven't heard a hardware man's confession, it's too much for amateurs or novices going into the cloth.) Rods that could be the last joint in a 500-foot well are grinding against the pipe, or the top one throwing a couple of more rods out of line in the hole.

He omitted why the couplings are crooked. Maybe aligning windmill rods causes cross eyes or cataracts. Could be also, the country of origin isn't plumb with the shortgrass country – isn't synchronized. Be no big surprise to us to learn we carried an extra handicap in gravity or gravitation differences.

Once back from engineering school, Uncle Goat Whiskers wore out a transit and plumb bob trying to run straight lines and lay level foundations. Whiskers never did say, but judging from his disposition, he never was pleased with the way windmill legs were anchored askew, or barn floors sloped on his outfit.

The fire truck gives temporary relief until the windmill man comes. It sure is exciting to hear the truck take off, the siren and lights whining and blinking intermittently in early light. The extra diversion is badly needed. Doesn't look like an inch rain would be too much to ask ...