

The Older Old Blucher Gets, The Less He Seems To Give A Darn

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MERTZON — The last of the great listening horses, Old Blucher, is failing faster than a second hand tea bag in a pot of boiling gyp water. The one time expert listener is caught in a spell of extreme unconcern — a fault, needles to say, that has sent many a good listening mount back to a common position in the remuda.

One thing that's hurting Blucher in his age. He's in that marvelous stage of life when events that once annoyed him are funny, and those that once amused him are annoying. Young doctors call it middle age.

Besides the burden of this reversal of values, he is also faced with a gradual loss of hearing, a steady decline in vision, and a shortness of breath that threatens to hasten both deafness and blindness.

However, the most drastic change to come over him is his new attitude toward all the woes and grief suffered by ranchdom since the first pair of runover boots were patched with a home cobbler's kit. Where once he devoted his existence to absorbing the misery of the ranching set, he now maintains a cold, indifferent outlook, a disinterested viewpoint as void of feeling as the tip of a sea otter's frostbitten nose.

For example, the other morning, while we were taking a ride, I charted the position of ranchers under all the administrations from Roosevelt to Johnson. Taking great pains, I showed the old simpleton that living under the awning of the Great Society wasn't one bit different than barely holding off the wolves under the rafter tips of the New Deal. But Blucher just looked off into space.

Then I dismounted and, using a stick in some soft dirt, proved that keeping body and soul together under the shadows of the Great Crusade wasn't any less certain than living off the drippings from the eaves of the New Frontier. Although Blucher seemed to remember the Kennedy era, he acted as if he'd never heard of the Eisenhower regime.

Never before had Blucher let me down when there arose a discussion of ranchers always being on the outside looking in. This was the first time he had ever failed to show the proper compassion for this age-old tragedy that has afflicted the ranch game since, I suppose, the time of George Washington.

In a last-ditch effort to regain his attention, I tried to get him to listen to the grim quotations of the current wool and mohair market, but Blucher's mind was elsewhere.

Now I don't know where on this earth a man would ever find another all around listening horse. This age of pickups and trailers simply doesn't produce the type that makes good listeners. My only hope is the outside possibility that old Blucher, the best of them all, may stage a comeback before a new set of problems strike the Shortgrass Country.