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Shortgrass Country

by Monte Noelke

On my way home last month, one of our yearling heifers ran into my pickup. She was traveling at about 25 miles an hour, which is a pretty good clip for a short legged Angus, and I was losing so much ground skidding to miss her that my rate of speed was dropping into the negative.

Three weekend guests were along to witness the crash. All the stuff in the front seat was thrown in the floorboard. We didn't have a scratch or a mark on us, but the heifer ended up on her side in the ditch with my brand facing the road.

After we made it to the ranch I began to try to remember how many courses of vaccine the heifer had had to give her lifetime immunity to every bovine malady from seed warts to runny noses. I couldn't recall if those were the cattle we'd shot twice with 4-way or once with 7-way.

One thing I sure wasn't going into was the brucellosis shot she's had to comply with the law. Out here away from the legal minds that run today's cattle business a herder doesn't know if a cow brute killed in a collision on a ranch road can be declared legally dead without a blood test. I didn't want to turn myself in and find out I was going to

have to give her mouth to mouth recitation until an inspector could come from Dallas or Fort Worth.

Nowadays I drive more cautious on the dirt roads. Shadows of grasshoppers and jack rabbits send me skidding toward the ditch. By the latest count, only 1678 people had heard about the rancher who wrecked his pickup running over his own stock. Cattle always have been my downfall, but I think that stunt was carrying it a little bit too far.