

JANUARY 28, 1988

One of the places where we winter sheep is close to a professional horseshoer. He's a young energetic boy that makes most of his living shoeing polo ponies at a distant point, but on his days off he'll do a ranch job. It's real handy for us, because we can just leave a horse in the pens down there at night, and the next morning, he'll be walking on iron.

I have a soft place for horseshoers. Having seen that craft from underneath the hindleg of a number of the Boss's thoroughbreds, the sight of a stooped figure with his mouth full of nails intermittently holding up a 1200-pound beast brings on severe physic back spasms.

As good as this farrier is getting at setting cold shoes, I've been trying to talk him into realigning pickup front ends and maybe mounting tires that are out of round. The way herders around the county race to grass fires and tear off on coyote hunts, a man with an eye that good could practically set up a regular route of front end work alone.

After a pickup has been used on a ranch for over a month, the driver has to know its tricks or he couldn't steer it through a 12-foot gate without knocking down at least one post. I'll agree that jacking one of them up is risky but even as dangerous as a bumper jack is, it's not as treacherous as one of those glass eyed idiots that thinks a chicken feather floating past his hindfoot requires a fit of kicking.

He refused my proposal. He wasn't impolite. "On my pickup door," he said, "The sign says custom horseshoeing, and that don't include mules, or pickups either."

The way they see the world is what makes blacksmiths so temperamental I hate to see a young man waste his talents, but he 'd probably get might spoiled when he found out how much easier it is to tighten a lug than to set a horseshoe nail on a foot.