

The pediatrician who looks after my kids says that ranchers' attitude toward crises is a defeatist one. He claims that a man who overcomes adversity won't stand around complaining how tough it is. Instead, he argues, tycoons and tycoonesses arise in the morning, charge out into the world, and take advantage of the circumstances at hand.

Well, ever since hearing the good doctor's claim, I've been testing it. Each morning, I tear out my front door fired by determination that would make Captain Courageous think he'd gone through a personality change.

Fueled by instant coffee and one-minute eggs, I've been barely taking time to put on both boots before leaving for the ranch. No drag racer on the Southern Circuit has tried any harder to cut down on the 10-mile trip; truck divers who thought they had a special easement on Highway 67 West are beginning to stay out of the way.

Thus far, the doctor's advice has worked to the comma. Adversity is easier to face at full speed. The first morning that I straddled one of the boy's bicycles lying in the front yard, I learned that axles and spokes don't tear off any more hide at five miles an hour than they do at a walk. Handlebars and sprockets are formidable adversaries in the predawn darkness; nevertheless the wreck is no worse in high gear than it is in low. In fact, if you are going in for hitting bicycles, I'd strongly recommend that you get a running start. Tiptoeing in slow motion is for moon walkers. Bicycles don't have the clinging power of, say, barb wire. The faster you hit one, the better the chances are of falling upon clear ground.

I also found that forking a tree in the dark works better at full throttle. Poking along, letting the limbs switch you in the eyes, is more dangerous than breaking on through to the trunk in one drive. Any circus tumbler can tell you that your skull is tougher than your eyes are.

If that won't convince you, try and think of one bug-eyed boxer who was ever champion of the world. Owners of prize fighters go in for hombres with big ears, not the ones who lead with their eyes. Don't ever bet a nickel on a fighter who uses his eyes or his snout for a battering ram. Better still, don't bet on any fight unless you have inside information that only one man is going to be in the ring.

Slamming a pickup door on your hindleg is less painful when you hurry, too. Increased blood circulation tempers the pain of smashing your instep or jamming your ankle in the door. Plus the harder you slam the door on these new models, the more willowy the frames are. For that matter, Detroit hasn't made door unit in 10 years that'll close tight enough to catch a Number 12 boot. It's a blessing that automotive designers haven't been in the mousetrap game or the country would have been overrun by trap-wise mice. Cavemen had better conception of latches and hinges than those boys do.

Motorists of the future will probably use the same kind of rigs that bronc riders use today. Ralph Nader seems to want to busy himself in everybody's business. It looks like he could make Congress force the car manufacturers to call automobile doors escape hatches or trap doors. Instead of going all over looking for trouble, he could find parking lots full of prospects.

Up until now, the experiment has been limited to the ranch-bound trip. But I can already see I'm improving. Nineteen-cent wool doesn't sound like much of a threat when your shins are so binged up that you're worried whether you're going to have a bowed tendon. Bruises, and sprains will definitely keep your mind off the fickle pattern of the spring. My doctor friend may end up being as sharp on counseling ranchers as he has been on diaper rash and midnight colic.

Depressions always look worse from the inside than from the outside. My compadre wants to help us, so the least we can do is listen.