

APRIL 15, 1982

Lower oil prices and larger supplies of oil have cooled down the boom in the Shortgrass Country. Quite a bit of slack time has been tossed to the drilling rigs and the dirt contracting outfits. The wildcatter tone of the coffee houses is becoming tamer. Many of last year's big shot land dealers are paying more attention to their feet than they are the sky. Worst of all, the bankers, I hear, are lending their part to slowing down the game.

Around Mertzon, the hamburger cooks and the gasoline grinders needed a rest from the wild activity. As late as December, a windshield washing job or a griddle cleaning were apt to turn out about the same. Raw chicken fries sold as fast as their scorched counterparts; enough gasoline was spilled in a day's run to fuel an economy car for a week.

As I think I reported one time before, the oil boom didn't reach the ranch. My share of the play was the drift of dry caliche from the county road and a few piddling damage checks from the dry holes. Other than the caretaker at the cemetery we were the only unit that failed to profit from the boom. Some of my compadres cashed in a big way, but they were too familiar with woolies and hollow horns to share with me. One thing that ranching teaches an old boy is to loan his money elsewhere. Banking schools charge fancy prices for a lot of subjects that can be learned in the field.

We did have one strike at the ranch. An outfit from Houston discovered a sand that was an estimated 126 miles long, seven inches wide, and three inches deep. For years and years, drillers had been passing through what was soon to be called the "Noelke Sand."

The trick was to drill down to exactly 7,237 feet and nine inches. At that bottom, the drill bit had to be changed to a sacking needle, which had to be in skillful hands to barely prick the sand at 7237.9.

Once the sand was pricked, then an engineer had to take over and get all the motors shut off and all the noisy roughnecks off the floor. When the tower had quit creaking, the engineer would pour one quart of UniFlow oil in the hole. After about an hour, he'd get right close to the drill pipe and a slight noise like a hiccup would tell him that his fract oil had done it's job.

From then on it was all roses. The Noelke Sand, you see, flows pure sewing machine oil. Unlike crudes, it comes from the wellhead ready to be sold. "Sold" is the word, too, because down in Mexico every spring those senoras start making wedding gowns in a furor that'd excite a sales girl in Macy's basement. You don't have to wait on the Department of Energy for a permit. One of those vans like a vacuum cleaner salesman uses serves as a transport truck.

On top of that, those Mexican senoras run sewing machines just like their husbands blow a comet or drive a pickup. They say they'll take a good tight old machine and soon have it burning a pint a day. I don't have all the facts straight. I got so excited about the well that I forgot about the source of my windfall.

So far the royalty checks haven't started coming in. I already know what I am going to use my oil money for and it isn't going to be for cow feed or wolf traps, either.

When I get to \$10,000, I am gonna walk in a bank just big as you please and say "Write me one of those All Savers' CDs, so I can cut down on next year's income tax."