

NOVEMBER 28, 1991

Livestock trucks have sure changed since the days of small bobtails and slightly larger double decked units. Changed so much, in fact, we have a hard time capturing enough stock to load the big 55-foot rigs.

Gooseneck loads are more our speed. Also, over the rocky, narrow ranch roads to out-of-the-way corrals, smaller trucks negotiate better than big ones.

This fall a 20-year old boy hauled a lot of our loads on a 36-foot gooseneck. He was a big, strong lad, full of energy, and true to pattern, short of patience. On warm mornings when we loaded sheep, we'd hear him down under the top deck, hollering and carrying on something awful.

Around this outfit, yelling and whooping stand out. We've reached the stage where mistakes are handled by retreating for another run at the chute, and victories are given reserved respect. A set of hotshot batteries lasts us a long, long time, and the animal rightists sure can't send an inhumane complaint our way, because we don't mistreat the stock.

But on one of those days when the sun was wrong and the wind had died, we were having to give the lambs we were loading some extra time. I'd trailed the last cut up to the top deck of the gooseneck when the sound of escaping air underneath us became audible, announcing the boy's third flat of the day. It couldn't be anything else.

Did he ever break down! He said, "Gawdamighty, Mr. Noelke, a trucker lives a life without any job security and not a damn bit of hope. Hear that tire? It makes three flats for this lousy day."

Comforting a 20-year-old boy is a hard task, especially when the cargo he's hauling will lose about \$10 a minute until they are run across the scales.

Before I thought of anything to say, the spewing sound turned out to be one of the men filling the propane tank on the feed wagon. The time we wasted talking turned into a break and the rest of the load went real easy.