

SEPTEMBER 29, 1983

Rodeo fans and horse show folks have sort of taken over my neighborhood here in Mertzon. One block from the house, there's a new arena that draws ropers and showmen on nearly any weekend.

As long as I don't have to listen to the stories that go with the two sports, I don't object to the dust and the traffic that follows the horsey crowd. Like I think I've told you before, if I had back all the days I spent holding a halter lead on a polo pony for my Boss, I'd only be about 18 years old and the same is true about the nights I spent listening to the tales of the same.

Horse operators, as far as I know, are made on similar patterns. Once a guy or a gal falls in love with a horse, they might as well have a 900-pound weight inserted in their brain, because all they are ever going to think about is going to be about that size. Of all the afflictions there are, including ones like anthrax in cattle and polio in man, nothing is so far reaching as the fever that man can develop for a horse.

Earlier in the summer, one of my friends was hurt bad on a young horse. At the time I was staying around the hospital a whole lot. So on the long afternoons, we'd get together to sort of neutralize the city flavor that was hurting us both. To keep his mind off his ranches, I acted like I was real interested in finding out whose fault the wreck had been- the man or the horse.

Thus on each visit, I'd get him to go back over how tight his saddle was cinched and whether he was slick heeled or had his spurs on. I had to be plenty careful. This particular hombre is a mighty fancy sort of bronc tuner. Understand that he's not your everyday type rider and if he hadn't been so good, he wouldn't have been hurt so bad, which is hard to explain on paper unless you've ever seen a man ride one so long that he was injured from the time involved.

Anyhow, on a horse and man accident report, you are going to have to take the man's word against the horse. I've rode up on old colts in the pasture that'd follow you around nuzzling your hindleg, yet turned out to be flat outlaws. I don't know about you but for a long time after I quit being around wild horses and wild horse riders, I kept imagining that every little bar of soap in a hotel room was going to make me slip in the shower. All that violence and falling had an awful influence on my upbringing and made me untrustful of every kind of horse except the kind they have on wheels at carnivals.

In other times, the man was always to blame for horse and man wrecks. One winter I remember the forman on an outfit north of us firing four different hands for letting a chestnut stud horse get loose in the pasture with their saddles on and the hackamore reins dragging. By spring of that same year a cowboy helping us agreed to ride this reject 30 saddles for about that many dollars. After one dose of that sorrel stud, we knew what the northern definition of "breaking loose" with a saddle meant a few miles south of that horse outfit.

I didn't tell my friend but I was on his side from the start. In a court case, I'd have to disqualify myself as being too prejudiced to give a horse a fair trial. In my opinion, the sharpest rowel ever to come from Northern Mexico, or the best quirt ever plaited in

Arizona was just right to comb a horse's hair as long as another man was doing the combing.

Once you've been cured of loving horses, you are immune for life. I heard my partner was home from the hospital. I just wish he and my Boss could have spent some time watching the ponies pass in front of my house here in town.