

MARCH 7, 1985

At the moment, I am out at the new fairgrounds at Austin, except the official name for the place is the Texas Exposition and Heritage Center. It's a Sunday morning about 9 o'clock. The winds are whipping down the alleys and through the bucking pens like they were on a bald spot on the Texas Plains.

My business, however, isn't to check the winds. I am waiting out of the wind in my pickup to see who is going to adopt the wild horses that are being offered by the Department of Interior. Had I known horse orphanages were this cold, I'd have spent the weekend on the coast at a regatta or something more comfortable than standing around a rodeo arena.

What I've seen so far were about 40 head of un-broke colts and yearlings standing in pens; one cluster of horse operators wearing black hats hovering around a ski stove; a lady halter salesperson; and three or four guys working for the Department of Interior. What I'd wanted to see was a wild west show staging wild mustangs pitted against gentle city fellows being dragged and kicked toward their trailers.

Well, that sure hasn't happened. The more like wisened-up cowboys than prospects for stunt men. Most certainly the horse fanciers over at the stove aren't going to provide any action unless one of them steps on his own spur and falls down, or maybe gets too excited while verbally topping off a bad horse and has a nerve spasm.

Competition among the media today is such that other than advertising insulated underwear, pictures of hombres dressed up in cowboy clothes, shaking and shivering by a stove, aren't of value. I missed seeing a colt try to bite the headman in a haltering episode. He's refused to re-enact the scene in slow motion, so that's lost. I'd be the last to ask that the horses be choused, but I sure would like to get a few frames of the agents standing in an alley with their loops built, ready to throw, and about 20 of these horses piling out a gate heading in their direction.

These horses don't average 600 pounds. Austin has top notch medical facilities, and at a rodeo setup there's always a big first aid kit including emergency splints and tractions.

Up to a point, I've believed every single word these Interior men have told me. Government employees are more honest than civilians are. It's plenty embarrassing to write or tell a big one when it might be cranked out into a million memos.

The reason I did qualify and say "up to a point" is that I think the boss government man sensed I was pretty gullible. I kind of led him into it. First, he told a tale about a wild paint jackass they captured out in Nevada that was so smart that it sounded like he could have been taught to use this typewriter.

After his jack story he cast his biggest one of the day, if not the year, and claimed that ranchers out west had won four of five lawsuits against the Department of Interior. Maybe the wind blowing so hard had made him talk that way. Like I told him, from what I've seen and heard of ranchers and their lawsuits, I'd prefer having my money on guys that can't stay out of barrels in which to roll over waterfalls.

The horses are costing \$125 a head to partially defray the expenses involved in shipping them. Unlike private horse ventures, the project is well financed. Congress has appropriated \$16 million to remove 18,000 wild horses out of the estimated 70,000 that are roaming across the Western States.

Applicants have to be 21 years of age and not to be taking the horse for a profit motive. The part about making a profit is hardly necessary. In all the times I've been associated with clubfoots, the only one I've heard of that made money were a few triple crown winners and maybe a roping horse or two.

People tell me wild stories all the time. As soon as I get home I'm going to check on those lawsuits. When word gets out the some ranchers have whipped the Department of Interior, they won't have a chance when other outfits heat the news.