

City Slickers

Brett Hinsch D.V.M



Arnie and Derek and some of the ranch hands driving the cattle down the road to the ranch.

I was between appointments in my small animal practice when my nurse informed me that Dr. Trueba was on the phone. Joe Trueba had introduced me to the mule business several years ago and I have never forgiven him because it has cost me a fortune in mules, but that is another story altogether. Joe had grown up on a one hundred square mile ranch in northern Arizona and was the closest thing to a real cowboy that I knew.

When I got on the phone, he said, “A friend of mine has a ranch near Wilcox, Arizona with about a hundred head of cattle scattered in the Dos Cabezas mountain range. You want to go help him round them up out of the canyons, drive them to the ranch, castrate and brand them?”

I instantly had a mental flash from my childhood of the old westerns on TV and I replied, “I’m in.”

Getting up at 4:00 a.m. to round up the herd was no problem because I barely slept the night before. I had slept under the stars many times before but scenes of the movie “City Slickers” and lines of Billy Crystal danced in my head. I was worried the real cowboys would spot me for the city slicker I was. The thought of chewing tobacco to fit in crossed my mind, but then I thought better of it. No sense being a city slicker and sick at the same time. Breakfast was monstrous and my only dilemma was deciding whether or not it was polite to wear spurs in the ranch house.

Joe and I split up in the morning. He and our friend, Arnie, rode the high ground and I left with Derrick and a ranch hand to search the canyons. The ranch hand’s job that day, I’m sure, was to provide ‘adult supervision’. We rode for miles up the canyons. The last mile was too rough and the ranch hand had us wait for him while he checked the tail of the canyon for stock. While he was gone, Derrick had a headstall break. It was falling off so I got off Rosie, my favorite Belgian plow mule, to fix his headstall. Rosie has never been one to turn down a chance to graze. I let go of the reins and let her graze while I worked on Derrick’s headstall. (You know where I’m going with this.) Just then a deer moved in the



Joe Trueba on "Holly", watching over the herd

brush and Rosie took off. I took off after her, first running to try to head her off, then alternating running and walking after her. She would keep about 20 yards ahead of me perfectly matching my speed. I ran, she ran, I walked, she walked. This went on for miles until I collapsed from exhaustion in a pile of sweat. I lay there for a minute or two and she came back and nuzzled my head. I swear I heard her say, "Tag, you're it!" I grabbed the reins and felt steam coming from my ears. I was not happy!

Just about this time, Joe showed up. He had been watching the whole thing from the ridge line above and noticed I was in trouble. I begged Joe to give me his gun so I could shoot this mule, to which Joe replied, "If you are going to shoot anybody, shoot yourself, because you deserve it more than the mule."

"What?" I replied, feeling the urge to spit venom.

He then asked, in his usual laid-back cowboy way, "Did YOU forget to tie up Rosie and did YOU chase after her?" He also passed on the ultimate bit of cowboy wisdom, "It's a very long walk back to the ranch and a mule might come in real handy."

Feeling more embarrassed than angry now I replied, "I guess you're right!"

My pride sufficiently wounded, I saddled up and headed toward the herd gathering up a few strays on the way. We

drove the herd into the pens, returned to the ranch house and had another massive home-cooked supper complete with lots of laughter (at my expense). I found that it is not very difficult to entertain cowboys.

After branding and castrating steers till dark, I fell asleep in ten seconds flat, woke up the next day, and did it all over again (minus the part where Rosie got away).

I learned a few things about cowboying and myself on this trip:

1. Most mule problems are caused by people.
2. Mules are like wives, they never forget.
3. It is much harder to blame yourself than your mule.
4. Cowboying is much harder than it looks on TV.
5. There is a reason they don't give guns to city slickers.
6. Last, and most importantly, I shouldn't quit my day job as a small animal veterinarian.

It was so much fun I signed up for next year's roundup.

The one thing about having mule adventures is that when you're 90 and in a nursing home, you will have some great stories to tell.