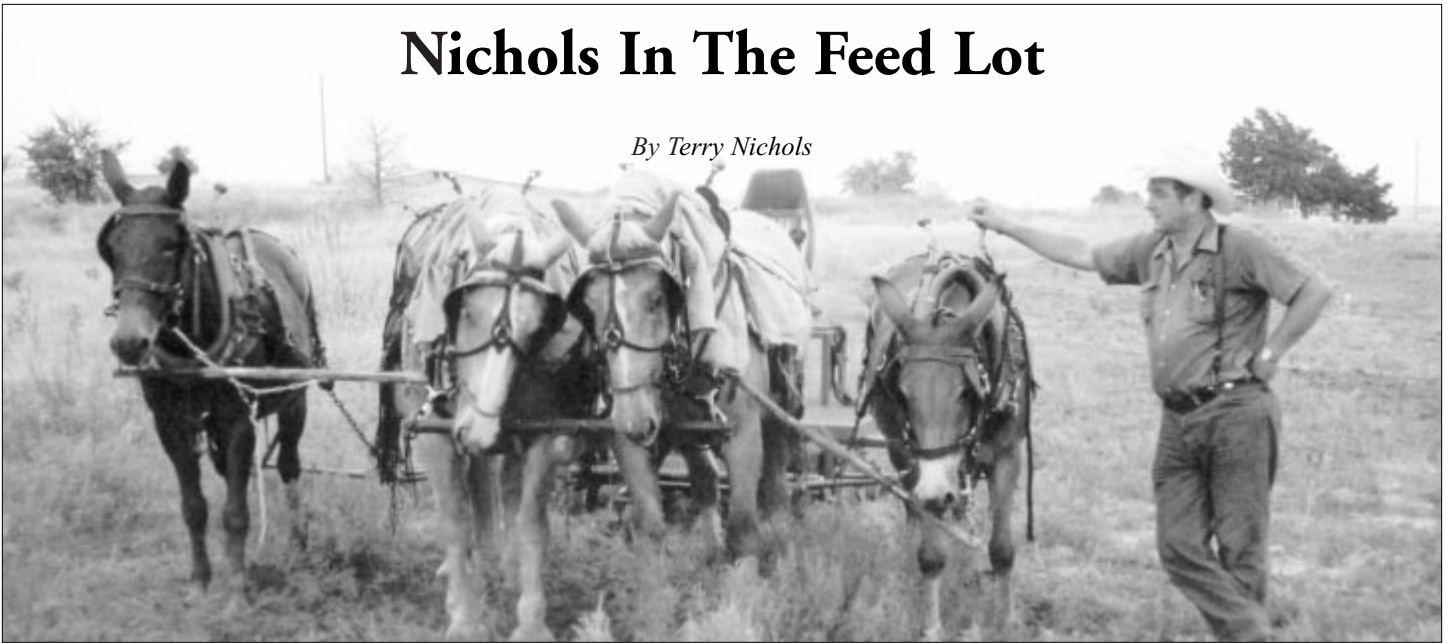


# Nichols In The Feed Lot

*By Terry Nichols*



**I**t has been a good while since I have had an article in the magazine and several folks have called to see if I was still kicking or not. I am proud to know there are a few that were concerned about me.

I mouthed off early last winter and took on a job logging out a place with a team. The fellow did not want that big logging equipment in there tearing up everything and I assured him I could do it with a team and he probably wouldn't be able to tell where I had been except for the tree tops on the ground. That is the reason I have not had any articles in for several months. I leave early and get in late and am plenty tired. I enjoy doing anything with a team but this is my first hard logging experience and it might be my last. I should be done by the time this comes out in the magazine and at least I can say my experience came from doing it but I don't know if I want anymore experience.

A lot of folks are getting interested in driving especially some where Mom wants to go along also but doesn't want to ride a mule.

I see a lot of folks at different events with their team and wagon and many of them make me wonder how they got along as long as they have without a wreck or a mule just refusing to pull anymore. I have always been very picky about saddle fit and harness fit on my horses and my mules as either one not fitting right can cause them to sore up, refuse to work or just have a come apart. Sorry saddles or harness can get you hurt if something breaks right when you need it to stay together. Many times I started to point out to some of these folks a better way to have their harness adjusted or how they should have a better fitting collar but then I decided to keep my mouth shut as most of them probably would figure it wasn't any of my business.

One of the biggest mistakes I see people make is using collars that are too big, some of them will have enough room between the collar and the bottom of the neck that I could stick my leg through it. That will sure enough sore up the shoulders and get them pulling off to the

side or refusing to pull at all. It will sooner or later ruin a good mule if you put much weight behind them to pull and it can ruin their shoulders permanently.

Another thing that just really bugs me is the folks that let the britchen down so low that if they are going down a hill it will tend to suck the mules hind legs up under him. That britchen is his brakes for holding the load back so get it up on his butt where he can sit down against it to hold the weight. Your mules will sure like you better for it.

You should pay close attention to your harness when putting it on or taking it off and any badly worn parts should be replaced. Don't think "Oh well, I will replace that someday." Do it real soon. It could mean the difference between a nice ride in your wagon the next time you go out and a wreck.

A few years ago I had a pair of owl headed mules run off with me and things weren't looking too good. I was pulling them in a circle figuring that if I could keep them running in a circle long enough

they would run down. Well, guess what? I was pulling them to the left and with the extra tension on the left line, it broke right when I sure didn't need it to break. I knew the lines were old and had some bad spots in them but I thought they would work for a while. At that instant I would have given the price of a new pickup truck for them to have been new lines.

Things were really looking bad for my future at that moment as I knew that when they came out of that circle they were really going to be totally free wheeling and running like the devil was after them. I done about the only thing I could to save my neck and that was to bail out before they got up to a full throttle running straight. You never want to jump out when there is a chance of getting things back together but with only one line, I couldn't see any other salvation. I bounced and rolled a good ways and got some skinned marks but I think I made out better than I would have if I stayed aboard that wagon. They center fired a big post and tore up the wagon, tore up the harness and still kept running.

Most of that could have been prevented with a good solid pair of lines and they would have really been cheap. Mules running off with a broken line is like your truck going down a mountain with out a steering wheel and no brakes, same results, a big wreck.

The hame strap is another thing that you really want to pay attention to and replace when they show wear. A hame strap breaking while going up hill will let the harness slide right back off of the mule and it can really be a bad deal. Any of you that know my son, ask him

sometime how exciting it is to be going up a very steep hill with a load of feed and hay for the cattle and a pair of big stout draft mules pulling for all they are worth trying to get to the top and the bottom hame strap on one mule breaks. The wagon weighed around a ton and he had over two ton of cubes and hay on that wagon and a hame strap broke at the wrong time. He started paying closer attention to the hame straps after that. He got out of the mess without any thing or anybody getting hurt but it could have been a really bad deal.

There are enough things that can go wrong to get you hurt so check out that harness and replace worn parts and get it fitting right to reduce your chances of having a wreck. I can sure verify the fact that they are not fun.

Terry