

## A Wild Ride, But a Lesson Learned

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Some things in life are forever stored in the deep recesses of the mind, only to be recalled at special times. A particular memory of mine is one of dad and me hauling a horse. Those were the days, not to sound old, but goose-neck trailers were not designed yet. The best and most reliable trucking was the old grain truck with side rails added to it. Every local sale barn had a list of livestock haulers, just as they do now, but the pace was considerably slower.

The general method of loading was a shaky ramp that was either hanging on the side of the truck or, if the truck was fancy, a ramp that would pull out from the bottom. The side rails were always placed in two brackets that were attached to each side of the ramp and the precarious arrangement was then attached to the truck. Hopefully the cattle would walk up the shaky 4- or 5-foot incline and end up in the truck. If all else failed, the ditch served as a handy backup, wheel wells dug so the back of the truck could line up with the road.

On one occasion, dad backed up to the ditch with the pickup, the stock racks were brought out from behind the shed and the horse was loaded. I don't recall if the pickup was a half-ton or not, but as far as I was concerned, it was just a pickup. Dad and I got the horse loaded and took off down the gravel road to our destination. Fortunately, dad never gained much speed. He was already at the age where he would forget to turn his blinker off. Every time that horse moved, the pickup would head toward the ditch, depending on which side of the pickup the horse would choose to move.

The old pickup never had power steering, so any necessary steering corrections never happened very quickly, but dad just kept on driving and never seemed concerned. Not only did the pickup swerve toward the ditch, it tilted enough that, even to this day, my stomach can vaguely recall the sea-type waves as the pickup tipped from side to side. I suspect the suspension was somewhat lacking,

but it was the only pickup we had and so there was no point in bringing it up in the discussion. Actually, the more the horse rocked, the slower dad would go. When the horse settled down, dad would slowly go faster and faster until the horse would move again, requiring quicker, somewhat scary reactions. The bottom line, we made it to our destination, the horse was fine, dad was fine and I was white. I learned a lot and a memory was created.

I think back on that ride as I see a very fast-paced beef industry in the midst of hauling this year's calves home or to market. Perhaps, just like the astronauts who first practice in specially designed vessels that mimic the various situations that will impact their survival in maneuvering a space ship or the many airplane pilots that spend hours in flight simulators, that ride I took was no different. I survived and learned the very basic concept of hauling - load stability and adequate suspensions hold the load. I don't know but I'm willing to bet that many of today's drivers have only driven very modern, super-equipped vehicles capable of speeds much faster than they should be driven. The first sense of lack of control is only felt at speeds in excess of what the conditions warrant, with too many tons out of control and a driver totally unprepared, with perhaps tragic results. I know one thing; I can look at dad and honestly say he taught me to pay attention to the conditions at hand. I can be thankful for a lesson well learned, even if I could have ridden the horse to its destination quicker.

May you find all your USAIP ear tags.

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