

BeefTalk 583: The Pickup Rut



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Rutting is that time of year when the male of the species prepares for the upcoming breeding season. Not all species have a rutting season, but the season is well-known in many populations of deer, as well as sheep and various wild ruminants.

Dominance is the key because the dominant male usually will control the larger bands of females and sire the most offspring. If any activity has been captured in the world of photography, the mighty bull moose or deer stag raking its antlers across the landscape, followed by a loud and penetrating roar, has been seen and heard by many. An image of bighorn rams or musk ox bulls going head to head can give a person a headache just watching.

Although domesticated cattle do not have a formal rut, very similar behavior is observed in the bull pen, particularly prior to bull turnout and at the conclusion of the breeding season as bulls are reacquainted with each other.

Generally, the structure of the pen also is tested.

Even though the rutting season may be tough, rough and even fatal, during the rest of the year, the animals live in peace.

Periodic shifts in rank or dominance seem to occur throughout the year while the bulls are penned. This makes penning the bulls a challenge, especially when space is limited.

One would not normally associate rutting with pickups. However, it is obvious that, as the winter weather settles in or, in some cases, just the weather service suggesting some indications of snow, there is more robust pickup activity. Pickups rounding corners or running out to the fields seems to be a little more vigorous.

With several pickups lined up at the intersection with strong desires to each go their own way, one cannot help but see the image of mountain sheep ready to fight. The occasional stoplight causes a brief hesitation, but the engine noise indicates otherwise. The feel of winter is in the air and every pickup truck is ready to take on the challenge.

The pending weather, such as a foot of snow, couple of feet of slush, slippery gravel or even a few failed roads, are what pickups live for. There is the promise that winter is coming and the pending joy in plowing through and conquering the first blocked road. The challenge becomes the proving grounds of only the true and mightiest of pickups. So it goes, at least in the heart of cattle and oil country.

The robust pickups, much like the dominant bull, stand their ground in wait for the season. It's a season that many of us would like to bypass. However, we can't, and one knows that winter is coming and all the associated harshness with it.

The cows will settle in the draw and become dependent on processed or stored forage. The cows will wait out the season patiently. Inside the cows is the new calf crop. The calves are not born, but they are growing and romping anyway.

Even the bulls slowly will give in and all will be welcomed on the bedding pile. There will be no outcasts. There will be billows of steamy breath rising to the winter sky, and the cattle will pass the day with quiet rumination and patience.

Pickups don't ruminate, but they do idle while waiting for some indication of where to go. The challenge is great and the motto is that we can overcome. So pickups do have a rutting season and the moral of the story is one of contrast.

In the world of living things, there is a need to understand that life and the environment that we live in must be synchronized. There is a time for the rut and a time to rest. Nature was designed to have rutting, reproduction and rest periods.

For many, the rest is a much needed period of recovery. In stark contrast, the pickup only has the rutting. Perpetual rutting has no outcome or accomplishments. There only is the short-term gratification of getting through one barrier in anticipation of another.

The other day, a producer called and was disappointed because, in the rush of the day, he failed. As the producer was preparing to market an outstanding set of calves, the truck was in rut and needed to hurry to the next location. The producer had to set aside a very well-designed and thought-out marketing plan for the sake of someone else's impatience. The producer lost and the truck gained nothing.

Patience is good, but understanding is even better. If you seem to be caught in the rut, stop because life can be better.

May you find all your ear tags.