



Trailer Travails

Those of you who've been following my articles have already figured out that I am a stickler for detail and technique when it comes to horsemanship, at times bordering on, if not being outright, obsessive about it. So this month, I thought I'd give us all a brief break from my relentless pursuit of perfection, and offer a bit of comic relief, something I figure we can all use as the heat of late-Summer afternoons tests our mettle, and we eagerly await the first little Norther that will soon waft in to offer its relief.

This tale takes us back to early June, when my cousin Keith called to let me know that he had a nice cutting of horse-worthy square bales ready to be loaded out of the field. (I get more excited over a beautiful load of hay than many women do over a piece of diamond jewelry, so this is great news to me.) I make a couple of quick phone calls to borrow a flatbed trailer and my

dad's truck, and strike out early the next morning for Lindig Farms in Stonewall, Texas.

I love my trips to Stonewall, where many of my relatives still live and work their family farms. Its lovely landscape of tidy fields, pastures, peach orchards, and vineyards still reflects the fortitude and exacting nature of the German pioneers who first settled here.

Now, Cousin Keith, being of that sturdy German pioneer stock, is one of those self-reliant people who can tackle most any problem, and deal with most any situation. A strapping guy over 6 feet tall, he can outwork most college linebackers, and can fix most any piece of farm equipment.

Being of this same square-headed stock, I kind of pride myself on being of somewhat the same ilk. I grew up with 3 sisters and no brothers, and my County Agent dad taught us to work livestock, hunt, and fish with the best of them. Whining was never allowed, and being less than self-reliant was considered downright shameful.

So, I'm enjoying my little trip this morning, except for the fact that I'm running late. I arrive at the field, about 45 minutes later than I'd said I would. There's nobody there; but a couple of trucks and a flatbed trailer tell me I must be in the right place. It's now past noon, and I'm worried that Keith's helpers might have called it quits for the day, and that there'll be nobody to help load my hay.

After what seems like forever, Keith and company return. I'm relieved to see that his helpers are still with him. The man in the front seat with Keith looks somehow familiar to me, although I'm not sure why. Keith has an odd, quizzical look on his face. His friend seems to be fighting a smile with a look of concern. Anxiously, I ask Keith, "Am I too late to get loaded up?" He answers, "No, I've got help to load your hay, but I'm concerned about your trailer."

Clueless, I ask, "Why, do I have a flat?". At this point, both Keith and his friend break into full-blown laughter. "No, you don't have a flat, in fact you don't even have a tire. You're running on 3 legs!"

"Whaaat?" I ask, and get out of my truck to survey the situation. Sure enough, one of the wheels is completely gone from my borrowed trailer. In fact, the spindle which is supposed to hold the wheel onto the axle, is gone, too!

Embarrassed, my self-reliant image in tatters, I ask, "How could I have not heard this thing come off?" As my confounded expression inspires more laughter all around, Keith introduces me to his friend, Leon Coffee. Oh, man! I'm not just being laughed at, now I'm being made fun of by a world-famous rodeo clown! (Turns out that he and Keith have known each other for over 20 years, and that Leon helps Keith haul hay "to relax" when he's not jumping into barrels and fighting 1,200 pound Brahma bulls.)

Deciding not to wallow in my self-pity, but to learn from my unfortunate situation, I ask Keith, "How could I have prevented this from happening, or at least have known when it did?"

Keith answers in a serious tone, "That's where you just gotta know your trailer." Anxiously, I wait to hear the technical checklist which I know must be coming.

Instead, I hear a high-pitched "ching-a-ling-a-ling" followed by, "When you hear that, you know it's just the safety chains. When you hear a "ku-ku-cher, ku-ku-cher" coming from the back, you know that's just your ramps rattling underneath the rear of the trailer. But if you hear anything different from your trailer's normal sounds, you know you've got trouble."

Now I'm laughing out loud! The fine-tuned sound effects and the tough-guy farmer saying them are hilariously incongruous. Undaunted, Keith continues. "The other day, I had a guy working for me who said, "Your trailer's making some weird sounds," so I reached under the trailer and shook one of the ramps and I asked him, "Does it sound like this?", and he said, "Yeah", so I said "It's fine, get back to work."

I was able to borrow yet another trailer, and I did get my hay hauled home that day. I called the first trailer's owner, and it turns out that some work had been recently done on it, and apparently not properly completed, so the mishap was not my fault. Nevertheless, I have vowed to get to know my trailer better before the next time I go running off to get a load of hay.

May all your trailer journeys be travail-less! Until next month! Dianne

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