

Better left unsaid

Like most people involved in selling livestock I believe the faster you sell them the better it is. When it comes to auctions, the speechifying should be kept to a bare minimum. For one thing, there's usually nothing anyone can say the ranchers on the seats don't already know.

Cattlemen these days are very astute, they've had to be to have survived this long, and they've studied all the numbers, EPD's and statistics to know which stock they want and how bad they want them. The only question is the price.

The buyers have also studied the animals for hours so what is an auctioneer or ring crew, who may have showed up at the sale site an hour ahead of time thanks to United or American Airlines, going to tell them?

When it comes to auctions you should never give anyone the chance to say anything stupid. I especially believe that consignors should be like kids: seen but not heard. At a horse sale one time the auctioneer and the owner were on the block together. (Never a good idea.)

The owner kept interrupting to say things like, "If you're worried about that little knot on his leg don't be. We've had the vet look at it, and we guarantee the horse for 60 days." That little speech stopped the bidding cold. The sale pavilion went from sounding like a hog with his snout caught under a gate to being as silent as a church on a Monday. And it was totally unnecessary because no one had seen the "tiny knot" before the owner mentioned it.

For reasons I don't understand, horses are sold very slowly in comparison to cattle. But when you sell livestock slowly it gives anyone the opportunity to make a speech, from the neighbor to the nabob.

We were selling horses in Utah one time and the auctioneer was slower than a turtle with bad knees when a local yokel stood up in the crowd and said, "You're just penalizing this horse

because of the way he acted in the preview. He's not that way normally."

Even though the speech maker was a friend of the consignor I doubt if they were still friends after the sale because the auctioneer was unable to get another bid because everyone was wondering what the horse had done in the preview that none of them saw.

Jerry McAdams, who publishes a great newspaper in Hico, Texas and is also a fantastic artist, recently told me about one of the last times he worked ring at a sale. As publisher of Track Magazine he showed up to work a Paint horse sale at the Fort Worth Stock Show.

When a class-winning Paint filly was being sold one ring man told another ring man who liked to hear himself talk, "Jimmy, tell them they're penalizing this horse because of his head."

Of course, there was nothing wrong with the award-winning colt's head.

Jimmy, who didn't have the brains of a dead sheep, interrupted the auctioneer, got up on the ropes and yelled, "Colonel, they're just penalizing this horse because of his head."

The disbelieving auctioneer replied, "What?" And Jimmy repeated it. The owner leading the horse, and everyone in the stands, were so busy studying the horse's head they forgot to bid.

Having said all that, some rare speeches can be good if made by the right person. I used to work with a really good ring man who was a "fully functional drunk." Although he liked to hit the sauce he could always be counted on to make a short, pertinent comment to help sell the stock. His word was respected at ringside because everyone knew he was a stockman.

We were selling purebred cattle in Oregon this day and the wreck was on. The owner had to blame someone, other than himself, so he called the publisher of the magazine the drunk represented. "The ring man you sent to my sale showed up sober, but by the time my sale was over he was falling down drunk. His comments at ringside ruined my sale."

It's the Pitts

Written by Lee Pitts

To which the publisher replied, "I can say with 100 percent confidence that did not happen."

"How can you be so sure, you weren't at my sale," screamed the purebred breeder.

"Because you said he showed up at your sale sober. My dear man, I can guarantee that as long as he has been employed by me he never showed up sober anywhere, anytime."