

New adventures at the county fair

Well, it's over, the county fair is over. I'm going to come right out and say it. I had my doubts.

Growing up in Imperial, Neb., we had the Chase County Fair. A fair many deemed the largest county fair in Nebraska. Every year as a youngster I looked forward to the snow cones, 4-H animals, demolition derby, cheerleading contest and of course the carnival.

After attending many of the events at the Phillips County Fair, my doubts were erased. It was great! I covered the rodeo and got to see a goat get absolutely turned upside down. I witnessed two very new events in the combine and pickup derbies. Even though a large number of vehicles didn't show up, it was still a blast.

After talking with some college friends, I found out I was in an elite group when it comes to two machines used to pick or cut food off plants in fields all around the country smashing into one another. David and Corey put on quite a show.

The pickup derby was another new one for me. I grew up watching dozens of cars enter the arena in front of the grandstands in Imperial. We always snuck around the back or purchased pit passes so we could sit on the cattle chutes and be inches away from the action. By the time it was over, all we could hear was a small ringing in our skulls. When you cut off your exhaust pipes and reroute them through the hood of the vehicle, it gets really loud. Needless to say, if our mothers knew what was going on, they probably would've advised differently.

Friday night of the Phillips County Fair brought another new surprise for me. The 1200 model cars at the races. I was introduced to the stock car races on June 28 when I covered them for the Enterprise for the first time. That was great fun. It's hard to believe how fast they get going around the track. My first thought when the 1200s took the track was, where did the motorcycles come from? The high pitched squeal of those cars was pretty entertaining.

We all of course know how the night ended. It could be seen off in the distance. Dirt, wind and rain. Oh yes, another event at a county fair hampered by mother nature. Thanks a lot.

It never fails. Something will always get rained out. Back in 2005 when Dirks Bentley and Trace Adkins performed in Imperial, a strong storm rolled through 10 minutes after Dirks had taken the stage. We retreated to our vehicles to wait it out. The problem was, it wasn't a short storm and by the time it passed and Dirks gave it another go, another storm passed through ending his show. Again, thanks mother nature.

If it isn't raining it is usually what, ohh 2,000 degrees out? OK, it wasn't that hot but upper 90's pushing triple digits is pretty warm and is usually the case during county fair time.

I felt bad for the animals in the 4-H barns. I strolled through after spending time watching the kids grimace and squirm their way through the pedal tractor pull. Flies dive bombed the animals while fans blew from every angle trying to keep them cool.

During our staff meeting last week I got some funny looks, and even a "what?" when I mentioned I had recognized a large amount of pigs lounging around in the barns at the fair. I don't know, maybe it was just me but pig was definitely the animal of choice this year.

I never spent much time with 4-H. In fact, the interview judging I helped with this year is the closest I have ever been to 4-H. I guess I always thought if you didn't have a cow, pig or horse you didn't belong. I was wrong.

We always went and watched friends sell their grand champion steer or hog or lamb. It was fun. We would joke about whose plate each animal would end up on.

There was one aspect of the Chase County Fair I will always remember. You see, our fair took place a couple of days before school began. By that time we all had our new school clothes and couldn't wait for school to bust them out. The next best place was at the fair.

The summer before my freshman year of high school was a big summer. No longer were we Shorthorns, nope, we were Longhorns now. A big step. But there was one thing we long had dreaded.

If you were going to be a freshman and were spotted at fair by an upperclassman there was only one thing to do, run. And run we did, well tried to do. That's right, initiation. The upperclassmen would get cattle paint and "paint" us up. We would receive giant "F's" on our faces and any exposed skin was covered with the bright paint. And of course while being held down we would try to wiggle our way free. This proved to be a poor decision while wearing brand new school clothes. That paint is really hard to get out of clothing. Mothers were not happy.

I learned even if you went home, changed and washed it off that didn't mean you were in the clear. Nope, I was just asking for another paint-fest.

Anyway, county fair time is loved by all no matter what county or state you live in. I want to give the fine people of Phillips County props for putting on a great county fair. It was great fun and can't wait for next year.