

Horsing Around: Contemporary Cowboy Humor

Kenneth W. Davis

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Did you hear about the two cowboys who one hot dusty day decided to take a forbidden dip in one of the water tanks on the ranch they worked at? A couple of their cohorts thought they'd be funny and steal their clothes... That was just the beginning of the troubles in this hilarious, true-to-life tale by one of several cowboy humorists whose works are collected in this book.

The episode is one of a couple referred to in Kenneth W. Davis's "Singing the Bare Body Electric in Texas Ranching Country." Davis is a professor emeritus at Texas Tech and the author of nearly fifty papers about Southwestern folklore and literature. He is one of ten regional writers whose observations on the cowboy way of life are compiled here. Others include cowboy poet Baxter Black and Curt Brummett, a New Mexico native.

The reader gets a glimpse into the modern cowboy's day. Anecdotes explain how he deals with horses, cows, nature and other people; most recall the unintentional humor that arises out of situations met in this difficult and somewhat legendary and historical occupation.

Brummett tells stories that will have the reader hard-pressed not to laugh out loud while reading along. In his "Windmiller or Windmillie: There's Ample Fun For All," he wryly notes: "I don't care what anyone says, it only takes one steer, one dog and one mad woman to have a stampede in a 6x6x6 pasture." In a similar vein, he recollects a story about a childhood scheme to make some pocket change. It involved cats and didn't go off as planned, but half the fun is Brummett's turn of phrases, described as "much in the tradition of Mark Twain."

A nice touch is the background biographies preceding each author's work and short explanations with additional information on each of the topics they delve into along the way.

ROBIN FARRELL EDMUNDS (May / June 1999)

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