



Sandy Kemp

I guess I'm probably the highest paid cowboy in the world.

I'M NOT VERY FANCY. The corrals out there are old wood, but they are solid wood, and the cattle's not going to run them down. We've got a lot of corrals like that. They're practical and they work and that's all you need. You don't need a lot of fancy stuff, 'cause, well what's the point? Some people like nice corrals all painted white, but we never were that way. My brother and I operate the same way. We don't have nothin'. Just enough to get by. I don't have no \$150 hat like some of those other guys. What's the point in having a \$150 hat? This one can do the same thing as a \$150 one, and the \$150 one is going to get dirty just as quick if you're out doing anything. It doesn't make any difference.

Left: "A cowboy's just a person. He likes to work with horses and he likes to work with cattle and he takes pride in his job. He likes to ride the best horse and be the best roper and the best rider. He prides himself on handling cattle. You can't type him. I don't think there's any one cowboy personality. Cowboys can be fat and short and tall and jolly and sullied up and mad. You've got all kinds."

That's the way I was brought up.... San Diego County, you know, used to be big in cattle years ago. There was a world of cattle down there. Cattlemen from the old school always got by with the least they could. I was brought up with a lot of cattlemen down there. They just had enough to get by, and they always made money. You know they weren't going broke by buying a lot of fancy stuff they didn't need.

We lease all this land from the city, so that's our highest cost. We don't have anything invested in the land. On the other hand, if you own a ranch you've got to figure your investment in what you actually own. Up here you don't own anything except a few corrals and whatever improvements you want to put in. Labor is a high-cost item in this day and age. And add any equipment you've got. You need some pickups and a big truck or two and a lot of horses. We've got a hay ranch up here at Big Pine, and we've got a world of equipment just to run it, but still we don't have an excessive amount. Just enough to get the job in, and that's it. You can

really save some money on the feed and grass and whatever you can grow yourself. If we had to go out and buy that hay, it would be an additional expense. We can sell off enough hay so that it pays all the hay expenses. If you want to figure it that way, it doesn't cost anything. The name of the game is money, and if you're not going to make any money, get out.

Feed on the ground is good too. We've got a world of pasture. We've got pasture every place we go. That's the cheapest feed we've got. You bet. And that's the thing, you utilize your pasture in the best way you can with the kind of cattle you think will do best. I've never given much thought to what the secret is to running a good cattle business. You have to watch your costs; that's the main thing. You have no control over the market and you have no control over the weather, so if you can gear your costs to match your operation and try to make your operation efficient and if you have the right kind of cows . . . I guess what I'm trying to say is to fit your own range so that it will do the best job for you.

I don't think there's any one breed of cattle or combination of breeds that's really any better than any other. It's up to the individual, whatever he thinks is best. Naturally, if you think you've got a good kind of cattle that's doing a good job for you, you're going to take care of them and do the best you can with them. I've been pretty successful in coming up with a Brahma-cross. I was cross-breeding with Brahma bulls back in 1947. That's the first time I owned any Brahma bulls, and ever since then we've always had some Brahma bulls and some cross-bred Brahma cows around. As far as

I'm concerned, they're the best for our operation. We used a lot of black bulls too, and we also crossed the Brahma bulls with the black cattle. The cross-bred Brahma cattle have very little pinkeye and very little hoof rot. The Brahmas raise a heavier calf than the straight Angus and straight Hereford cattle we've had, and we can sell them for the same price that we get for the Hereford or Angus. We're not discriminated against because they're half Brahma or quarter Brahma or whatever. We get the same amount of money per pound as the other cattle, and the buyers seem to like them.

We had a ranch in San Diego County that we sold last year. It was on the desert, and it was a straight desert ranch. I mean everything down there had a thorn on it. There were cholla and barrel cactus and cat claw and mesquite and ocotillo. It'd get up to 120° in the summertime down there. But the Brahma cattle were the only kind of cattle that would live down there. The Herefords just couldn't stand the heat. They lived, but they couldn't do any good. Of course we don't have the extreme heat up here, but the Brahma cattle can also stand the cold. Maybe they couldn't stand it in Montana or Wyoming, but it doesn't seem to bother them up here. They get along real good in the wintertime.

And the Brahmas don't have the flies. Flies'll get on a Brahma but not as bad as they do the other cattle. The Brahmas got a sweat gland, and they give off an odor. They kind of smell like a goat if they get real hot. And maybe the flies don't like that.

One of the most expensive parts of the cattle business is the cowboy. I guess I'm probably the highest paid

cowboy in the world. I do like to cowboy. I've cowboied all my life. I mean that's all I've ever done. I've spent more time on horseback than anything else I guess. I haven't spent as much time in the last four or five years, because I've been trying to get these ranches straightened out and settled up. But I rode a lot of horses all my life. That was the only tool we had to work with — a horse. I started riding when I was eight or nine, something like that, and you just didn't do anything else.

That's another thing about the cattle business. There's a lot of romance to it, and that's probably the greatest thing that's wrong with it. You get a lot of people in the cattle business that are going into it just for the romance. I mean they want all the romance, and they want to wear a big hat and they want to parade around as a cattleman or a cowboy or whatever. A lot of times that's not too good, because you get these people in here doing that sort of thing. Well, they run the price of cattle up. They run the price of ranches up. And it gets all out of perspective. Of course that's something you can't do anything about, because this cattle business has always been a romantic business. Frankly, I fail to see where the romance comes in, but that's what they tell me. It must be, because every damn fool I know wants to own a cattle ranch or be a cowboy or something.

I don't think there's been an awful lot of changes. The ranches themselves are changed. They've become smaller. But the biggest difference I've seen is that years ago they didn't have the horse trailers and stock trucks as much as they do now. When I was a kid growing up in San Diego County I didn't know of anybody who

had a horse trailer. If you were going to go somewhere, why, you just got on the horse and you rode. They had cars and trucks, but people just hadn't gotten in the habit of using horse trailers. When I was growing up, they didn't have to drive the cattle to slaughterhouse like they did 60 years ago. They trucked them, but the trucks were a bit smaller. We used to get 29 head of steers on a truck. Today they'll put 50 or 60 big steers on a truck.

We start to brand calves in the spring. We drag all of the calves to the fire. We corral them and rope them and drag them up to the fire. Of course a lot of guys are using a calf chute, so they don't have to rope the calves anymore. There again, that's a matter of opinion. I think it's faster to do it the way we do it. That's why we do it. It's also a lot more fun. These boys get a bang out of catching these calves. If we went to a calf chute, which I don't intend doing, I don't think those boys would quit, but I think they'd get a little salted up. Like I say, I think we can do it as fast or faster than they can with a calf chute. It's just as easy as far as I can see.

I don't think there's any one personality of a cowboy. Cowboys can be fat and thin and short and tall and jolly and sullied up and mad. What's the personality of an attorney? You've got all kinds, and a cowboy's no different. A cowboy's just a person. He likes to work with horses and he likes to work with cattle and he takes pride in his job. He likes to ride the best horse and be the best roper and the best rider. He prides himself on handling cattle. Well, just like anybody in any other profession, you can't type him. We've had all kinds working for us — good ones, bad ones, and indifferent





Above: "We don't carry water on these desert drives, 'cause if we start drinking it in the middle of the day, we can't stop. We never can get filled. So we get our fill in the morning and at night when we get to the watering holes like China Garden and Crystal Springs where we camp. We maintain these watering holes, and the cattle know where they are. If you get them halfway to one, they'll never turn back on you; it gets to be 120° out here." Bill Thornburgh

cover up for him and turn it back before he made a boner. They'd ride in front of him or something.

Here I'm running an outfit and I'm the boss, but these guys are working for me and I've got to figure that they've got shortcomings and they've got things they can do good, too. You can't run over them roughshod and cuss them out and get mad at them. There's an old saying that only a fool can't get mad, and only a fool shows he's mad. Sure, you can get mad, and these guys will blow up and they might sulk and they might quit or whatever. As long as they're doing the best they can, why, you work with them and put each guy where he's going to do the best job for you. That's all. You can drink with them and be friends with them and all that, but you don't have to be overbearing. I've got one guy up here who's worked for me 16 years, and I've got several of them who have worked 4 or 5 years. I've had to let cowboys go after they worked for me 10 or 15 years. I fired them because they had problems. Sometimes it's a personality problem — they can't get along with the other cowboys. Even if they're damn good men and very good employees, if they can't get along they've got to go. I have put up with an awful lot from cowboys with their various problems, but by the same token they have done a good job and were honest men. It's just like an old horse. I've had some old horses that were the dirtiest, rotten damned old things in the world. They'd kick at you and were hard to saddle. You couldn't catch them and they'd try to buck you off. But when you got in the middle of that old horse and you really had to get something done, he'd damn sure wouldn't let you down.

He'd get the job done. As long as he could do the job, why, you could put up with that kind of stuff. And it's the same with a cowboy. They got bad faults, but as long as they can get the job done, you have to overlook the faults, because you're never going to get all your squirrels up one tree anyway.

I like the cowboys. If I didn't like the cowboy, I'd be in a hell of a shape. I can't do it by myself. I've got to have 'em. I've cowboied and I know what it is and I think that's pretty much true of any rancher. I can go out and work with these cowboys. Yesterday I was with them, and today we're going to work a bunch of cattle up here.

I'm the boss and, shit, I can write my own ticket. I can do anything I want to do, but I don't think you can run a cattle ranch from a desk, and you can't run it from the front porch. You've got to be with the cattle and the guys that are working with the cattle. Sure, I've got a lot of book work. I write all the checks, and I raise the financing and the whole ball of wax. I do the buying and the selling, but that's what you call a manager's job. That still isn't a full-time job.

There *is* a little difference in the professionalism of the cowboys between the 1930s and now. I think the ones years ago were a little more conscientious in a way. I think they had a little more expertise in handling cattle. That's not anything against the ones today, because those old ones grew up in a different time and a different environment. The problem today with the cowboy is that there are too many distracting things for him to do. There's more rodeos today that he can go to. And

he can get around better in transportation and cars. Years ago the cowboys came up here, and they didn't have anything else to do. They were a little different breed. But I'm not saying that, under the circumstances, they wouldn't be like the guys are today. They just never had the opportunity. Rodeo has had a definite effect on cow-

boys. A lot of them get pretty good at rodeoing; why, they can ride a bucking horse or rope a calf rather than get a job. And there have been cases where a good cowboy quits a ranch job and takes another job, so he can rodeo on weekends. Years ago we didn't have that type.