

THE TINKERER

I'M ALWAYS SURPRISED WHEN I'M FINISHED.

BY LEE PITTS

I'm a tinkerer. Please note: I said tinkerer, not thinker. *Big* difference. Before I tell you about some things I've built from scrap I should state that I'm not an inventor. *Big* difference. One of my best friends is an inventor and he spends most of his time in high-level talks with lawyers, model makers, professors and his income-tax team. A tinkerer consults with no one and makes no money so he doesn't require the services of H&R Block, let alone an entire team.

A tinkerer never knows what he's making until it's finished. That was certainly the case with my first creation at the age of 10. I thought I'd just built the world's first automatic dog feeder, but there was only one problem. My dog wouldn't eat out of it. Turns out I'd just invented the world's best automatic squirrel feeder instead.

My next creation was the chicken lasso. I hate to admit this, but 60 years ago we raised a lot of layers and when they got old we'd catch them, dress them out and gag them down in soup. The accepted method to catch chickens back then was to take a wire coat hanger, double up the end to make it stronger and bend it into a hook. Then you tried to snare the chicken's foot with it. I suppose it worked okay, but it could hardly be considered fun or morale building. So one day I was messing around and cut one of the cotton ropes off my mom's clothesline. (For you Gen Z's and millennials, this is how we dried our clothes back in the Dark Ages.) For lack of any calves to rope, I started roping chickens. Talk about fun! I was thinking about selling a few chicken lariats until my mom discovered I'd already reduced the capacity of her clothesline by 25 percent.

I'm pretty sure I'm the first person to come up with truck reins which allowed me to steer the truck from the pickup bed while feeding cows and standing on hay stacked three bales high while in granny gear. I wrapped some rope around the steering wheel in the two o'clock position and ran it out the driver's side window—leaving enough slack so I could hold the reins on top of the haystack from the rear of the vehicle—before putting the lariat through the passen-

ger side window and attaching it to the steering wheel in the 10 o'clock position. That way, before I was about to enter one of the many rock piles on the ranch, I tugged on my reins which turned the truck thus avoiding the rock

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pile. Believe it or not, this worked with some adjustments. (The eleven o'clock and one o'clock positions worked much better.)

Everything was fine and dandy until I was too late one time and got tangled up in the rocks. The reins were jerked from my hands and I sailed off the truck like a rodeo cowboy off the back of a bull. Needless to say, I didn't stick the landing. Lying there on the rocks I realized I sprained my ankle real bad, so I had to hop as fast as I could to stop the truck before it entered the slow lane of the highway that bordered the ranch.

The contraption I'm most proud of is my Water Pik®-like device. My teeth are slowly rotting out because of all the nasty drugs the docs have given me. I've had 13 teeth pulled so far. *Ouch!* My dentist suggested that maybe we could slow down the rot if I used a Water Pik®. When I found out how much they cost I figured I could make my own using my airbrush and my shop compressor. I set my compressor at 125 psi, put some toothpaste in the paint cup and pulled the trigger on my airbrush. I think I may have set the pressure too high because it knocked me on my butt and dislodged two teeth, roots and all.

At \$595 apiece, the going rate in my neck of the woods to have a tooth pulled, I figure my Pitts Pik already saved me \$1,200. I think I may have just accidentally invented the world's fastest and least painful way to pull teeth! ■

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