

Pocket Poker and Nose Lead Pulley

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I would like to share with you two small items that have made my life much easier in cattle practice. One, the pocket poker, I have used for over 25 years. The nose lead pulley I have only enjoyed for several years but wish I had made one long ago.

The pocket poker is simply a 12-inch long piece of 1-inch diameter hardwood dowel with three small nails protruding from one end. I carry it in the back pocket of my coveralls at all times when I am doing a herd check or working on cattle. Dairy cows have a mind of their own and many times their idea of what they want to do and what I would like them to do are two different things. Sometimes I think they like to do the opposite just to be contrary, what I call the "Bovine Way". I use the pocket poker to make cattle back up when they try to jam up on one another in a chute. Ever make the mistake smacking one on the head with your bare hand and almost breaking it, your hand that is? I use the tool to make a cow scoot over when they try to turn their butt the wrong way from the way your elbow flexes when palpating. Some dairy cows are just naturally slower and need to be encouraged to get on with the program when you are getting them to go where you want. A whip, a big stick, or a hot shot is usually totally unnecessary and inappropriate in most instances. So if you don't want to wear out your hand pull out the pocket poker and Bossy usually moves along.

The poker can be made from any broomhandle size piece of wood but if you want a nice one splurge and spend a buck on a 1 inch hardwood dowel and cut off a piece from which to make it. I drill three small holes in the end of the dowel so it won't split when I drive three slightly larger finishing nails into the holes. I clip the heads of the nails off with side cutter pliers and sharpen the ends to a dull point. There you have it. The cheapest but handiest little device you will ever come across to help you in your day's work.

The second handy dandy item I would like to share with you is something I made to make lifting up cow heads while in a headgate easier. I have a Foremost brand model 30 headgate. It is one of the most popular models that veterinarians use and I think it can't be beat for all round

cattle work. The hooks welded on each side to wrap the halter-nose lead rope on are simply not high enough for adult dairy cows. They don't allow you enough length to straighten out the neck when giving IV's plus there is no mechanical advantage involved when you go to pull the cows head up. It seems they always get a case of stiff neck when ever you need to pull their head up to administer medication. I remedied this by making an extension to insert into the top of either of the two vertical pipes that form the frame of the headgate on each side. These vertical pipes are 2 inch ID [inside diameter] and a piece of schedule 40 1-5/8 inch ID by 1-7/8 inch OD [outside diameter] pipe will fit inside of them very easily. A collar 1/2 inch wide cut from schedule 80 2 inch pipe will fit perfectly around the outside of the 30 inch piece of 1-7/8 OD pipe. There it is spot welded on it's top side in the middle of the 30 inch piece's length. This allows 15 inches to fit down into either of the pipe frames of the headgate for stability and 15 inches to stick out the top for extension and elevation above the headgate. It will also pivot around so you can position the pulley where you want it for convenience. A cap is welded on top of the 30-inch extension pipe and an 8 to 10 inch piece of 2-1/2 x 1/2 inch bar stock is welded on top of that to protrude out laterally in front of the headgate. A 2-inch right triangle shaped piece cut from scrap bar stock is welded where the lateral extension comes off the top of the vertical pipe for bracing. A piece of 1/2 inch metal rod stock is bent in a loop and welded to the end of the lateral extension bar stock to accommodate a pulley big enough to handle the nose lead or halter rope. This device will allow the mechanical advantage of the pulley to help when you have to fight those old stiff necked cows and gets the rope out in front of the headgate so it doesn't tangle in the workings of the headgate. This device can be moved easily from one side of the headgate to the other so you only need to make one. My wife, who is a cattle veterinarian also, really appreciates it. Both men and women will really find this is a great tool, especially anyone with a smaller physique. It is the next best thing to having a gorilla for a technician to help when pulling up those heads for treating or neck bleeding.