

A Safe Distance

By ELLEN H. BRISENDINE



Jerry Chambers says the remote-controlled hydraulic gates and working chute have reduced labor costs at Barron Kidd Ranch, Italy, and have reduced injuries to humans and cattle.



The Turret Gate™ sweeps through the circular fence design, nudging cattle ahead and keeping workers out of the flight zone of the livestock. This reduces stress on both sides of the equation.



A double tub, or S-shaped working pen configuration is used at the Barron Kidd Ranch.

Remote-controlled hydraulic working systems can save labor costs and doctor bills.

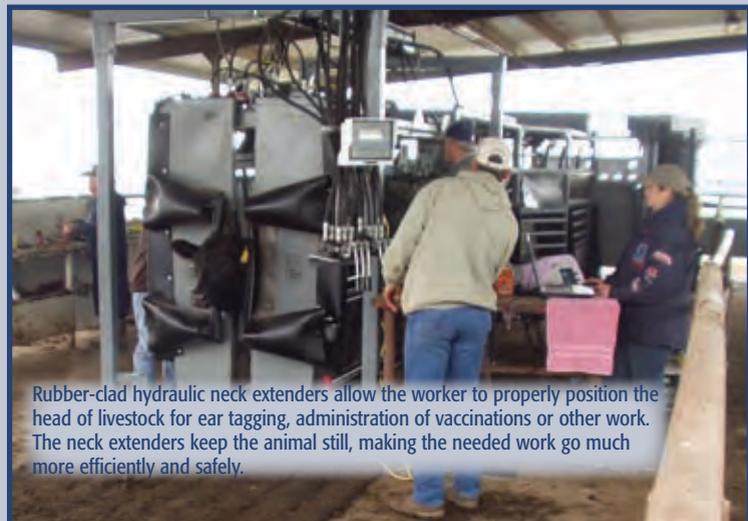


Remote controls come with just about everything we buy — big ones for televisions, tiny ones for cameras, rugged ones for garage doors and entry gates.

Jon Mollhagen, Moly Manufacturing, Lorraine, Kan., suggests that a remote control for the gates in your working pens and a remote-controlled squeeze chute might help you save labor dollars and avoid a doctor bill.

“It’s all about the safety,” he says. “The highest-impact area in which we work in this industry is that last 10- to 12-foot alleyway. We’ve narrowed these animals down, gone from a group of 50 head to four or five head, then we swing a gate in behind them and enclose them in a smaller area,” which leads to stress and often kicks to the gates or bodily pressure on the gate. “That’s where most of our injuries are occurring,” Mollhagen says.

His interest in reducing stress on cattle and humans led Mollhagen to develop the SILENCER® brand hydraulic squeeze chute in 1991. His design, which



Rubber-clad hydraulic neck extenders allow the worker to properly position the head of livestock for ear tagging, administration of vaccinations or other work. The neck extenders keep the animal still, making the needed work go much more efficiently and safely.

includes innovative coatings and self-lubricating materials, rubber-wrapped edges and a myriad of other thoughtful features, earned his product the approval of recognized animal handling expert Temple Grandin.

After the SILENCER chute, Mollhagen developed the Turret Gate™, a hydraulic gate that sweeps within the circular fence formation often called a “tub”.

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Hydraulic working chutes and gates can be operated by remote control, allowing human workers the chance to let the equipment move the cattle, rather than requiring an up close and personal effort by the hired hand or family member.

“We’re a predator of these animals any way you look at it,” Mollhagen explains. “We step into their flight zone to close a gate behind them. When we step behind them, they can’t see us as well. If the cattle kick a gate that is swinging closed on them, and the worker is two feet from it, the worker is going to get hit. That’s where a lot of these injuries are occurring.”

Mollhagen goes on to explain the all-too-common situation of three or four animals in a small area, turning and pushing against a gate, pinning the worker while the cattle run out of the working pens.

“Athleticism is an important part of our industry and having young people at that part of the working area is always a good thing,” Mollhagen chuckles and adds more seriously, “or having somebody there who really understands the behavior of the animals.” Even safer, in his opinion, is having a system operated by remote control to allow the worker to close gates from a safe distance.

Jerry Chambers, Barron Kidd Ranch, Italy, is sold on the remote-controlled system.

“I’ve been on Mr. Kidd’s place for 18 years,” Chambers says.

“Through the years, people and cattle got hurt. Mr. Kidd decided we needed to upgrade.”

Kidd and Chambers talked to several producers who use hydraulic working systems and the clincher came when one of their bull suppliers said that if they had to do it all over again, they’d go with the SILENCER squeeze chute. “What was really strange about it is that we have a portable tub from Moly Manufacturing. We’ve had that for many years. We didn’t know they were making the SILENCER squeeze chute!”

In the fall of 2007, Kidd purchased a hydraulic chute and hydraulic gates to use in their double tub, or S-shaped working pen system. “That turret gate brings the cattle around into a double tub system. The second turret gate picks them up at that point. The cattle go into a double alley and then to a single alley. We’re not in the pen with the cattle at all. The gate just moves. The boys who help me work my cattle, the first thing they say is, ‘Where’s my remote?’ It has made life easier,” he says with emphasis. “I haven’t climbed a fence or gotten out of a cow’s way in a year.” Perhaps most telling is his comment, “The hotshots are no more.”

Mollhagen says the hydraulic systems are quiet, which reduces stress on the cattle. “In most of the applications where we put in these systems, the hydraulic pump is not even in the same area as the gates.” Chambers concurs, “It’s quiet. That’s what I really like about it. We can actually stand at the squeeze chute and when the vet gets through palpating, we can talk in a normal tone without yelling at one another and we can hear him say that she’s three months bred or she’s open.”

Mollhagen and Chambers agree that humans can learn to operate hydraulic systems as easily and as fast as cattle adapt to them. Mollhagen says, “We’re seeing a lot of father-son teams out there in a typical family ranching situation. A lot of times, it’s just better if they do the work themselves than

having to come up with people to help, and having to take care of the help rather than take care of what they are trying to get done.”

Chambers says, “We have cut our work force way down because of this system. I think three people could run my outfit without any trouble.” Chambers adds a comment many ranchers would agree with: “It’s hard to find good day help when it comes to working cattle.” Mollhagen says, “Being able to take people out of the equation and then adding that safety is really big part of the program. For them to get hurt would be a foolish thing.”

The Moly Manufacturing systems can be incorporated into existing facilities. Mollhagen says, “We can cut the gates to length. If there’s a specified length, we can run that through our technical support team, which is a pretty simple process.”

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Moving animals with remote-controlled hydraulic gates is a great increase to safety. In the situations where proximity is required, such as administering vaccinations, Mollhagen has added hydraulic neck bars to his working chute to increase safety. “That’s the best thing we’ve done with SILENCER since we came out with the product. We can turn a head right or left. If an animal is not in the right place, you can adjust them with the hydraulic bars. Then we wrap everything in rubber.”

Mollhagen explains that they reduce stress by padding the bruising points on the equipment and the rubber reduces noise. “It does make a difference as far as the stress on the animals.”

The right tool for the right job makes any job more efficient and enjoyable. Jerry Chambers has found the system that Jon Mollhagen developed saves him valuable resources — time, dollars and stress. ■