

THE STOCK SOLUTION

by Lee Netzler

We were eastbound on U.S. 50, between Cimarron and Sapinero, enjoying a beautiful autumn day, spending our last week of a camping vacation through southwestern Colorado. Traffic was light, which made it perfect for sight-seeing as we traveled down the highway. We were surrounded by rolling hills and distant mountains, and as we drove along each picturesque scene was continually replaced by another.

Piper, my Scottish Terrier, was asleep on his blanket in the back of the Jeep, just behind the front seats. He occasionally napped there at times when we were taking longer drives.

Suddenly, Piper awoke. He shook himself and then roughly pushed his way into the front seats. Accustomed to his usual politeness, this time I was surprised by his rude insistence. Once in front, he clambered quickly to the open window where he began taking short breaths, mixed with a kind of sniffing and snorting.

Since there was nothing in sight to cause this odd behavior, his actions were totally puzzling. Yet he was obviously very agitated about something, and it seemed to be getting even worse.

As we traveled down the highway, we tried to figure out what was bothering him. We attempted to give him a drink, offered him a snack, shut the window, loosened his collar, and tried whatever else came to mind, but nothing seemed to alter his increasing agitation.

I tried to think of other situations where he had become similarly disturbed. There were two that came to mind—when we were hiking and came across fresh deer tracks, and when we were in the vicinity of sheep. Both of those scents would really get him activated. He would always let me know when deer were in the vicinity, and following his nose, he would occasionally point out the spot where the tracks crossed the trail. In similar fashion, when we were driving along, there wasn't a farm yard that we passed where he didn't hop up to the window for a look once he got a whiff of sheep scent.

But here we were, cruising at the speed limit down Highway 50, without a critter in sight anywhere. And, as time went by and our traveling distance added up, it wasn't logical that he would still be responding to animals that we might have passed miles back.

After several minutes of trying to figure out the mystery, we came around a bend in the road to find that we were overtaking a caravan of half a dozen cars caught in line behind a slow moving semi-trailer. It took me a couple of minutes to realize that the big trailer was a stock trailer—the kind used to haul cattle. Suddenly, I had an idea, and turned on my CB radio.

"Hey there, Mister stock-hauler," I said, "we're stuck back here in the parade behind you and we were wondering—what're you hauling today?"

"Sheep," he said, "I've got 3 tiers of 'em packed in the trailer. It's a real load full!"

The mystery was solved.

I answered the driver, "Well, I should have known that was it, because I have a dog here who can really smell a sheep from miles away. He's been agitated for a long time now while we've been overtaking you."

"Is that so," he said, "Even while we're moving along?"

"Yep, even while we're moving along. I'll give you a look at him when we pass by."

The cars ahead of us systematically passed the heavy semi rig at each open stretch of road, and soon we were behind it waiting our turn.

"We're coming by next," I radioed, "and we'll give you a look at Piper, the dog who can smell sheep from miles away."

"OK," he said, "I'll be watching."

Over the next hill there was a long empty flat stretch of highway. We eased into the passing lane and slowly proceeded past the big rig. As we passed the truck cab, Piper was presented with his head out the window, long black beard and eyebrows streaming wildly in the wind.

The CB crackled and a loud laugh came over the speaker. "That's a mighty good-looking sheep dog you got there! Never have seen one quite like it, but if he does the job, that's all you need."

"Oh, he does the job all right," I answered. "It's the handler who can't figure it out sometimes. You have a good trip now, and it's been nice talking with you."

"You, too——and I'm real glad I got a chance to meet your sheep dog."

Now that we were ahead of the load of sheep, the scent was gone. Piper relaxed and in a few minutes he climbed into the back seat and resumed his nap. The handler, who had just learned a little something new, finally got to relax again, too.