



“Ropin’ In The Open” cowboy skills competitions take place every year on a real working ranch in Missouri.

Cowboys Ropin’ In The Open

Cowboy skills competitions have become quite popular, but there’s only one event that takes place in a real working ranch pasture, according to Mac and Pat Scott. They started “Ropin’ In The Open” 10 years ago and now hold it every year on the first Saturday of October at their New Cambria, Mo., ranch.

The ranch has a natural amphitheater, so visitors can view the action from the hillside. Without any fences, it’s challenging for cowboys. If they go out of sight from the announcer’s stand, their time isn’t counted.

Competitions include: cow/calf penning, roping and branding, cow milking, and sorting out a steer.

“All the spectators and cowboys like it. Basically, we simulate what we do on a working ranch,” Scott says. Branding, for example, uses a cold brand that makes a lime mark.

It’s not a moneymaker, Scott admits. He just hopes to cover expenses and offer a fun event for people in the area. Participants pay \$100 each, and adult spectators pay \$5. The majority of the money goes into a jackpot for prizes and buckles.

“If it weren’t for family and friends helping, we couldn’t do it,” Scott adds. Helpers provide extra corral panels and



Cowboys travel as far as 200 miles to compete.

assist his wife in the cook shack.

It takes 12 to 14 teams of 4 cowboys for the Scotts to cover the event costs. Cowboys travel as far as 200 miles to compete.

Scott invites anyone interested in Ropin’ In The Open to contact him.

“My goal is to have it good enough to show on RFD TV,” he says. “It’s neat to have something that’s the only one like it in the country.”

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Meet Jack, The Traveling Slab Salesman

“I love taking an old log, splitting it open and finding the beauty inside,” says Jack Pectol. “I love the wood and get a kick out of pleasing the public.”

That’s exactly what he’s done for the past 31 years as he’s traveled throughout the U.S. with his pickup and trailer filled with wood slabs. Except for a few trees cut at a sawmill, he cuts most of the slabs himself with his trusty old chainsaws fitted with bars from 3 to 6 1/2 ft. long.

Pectol buys black walnut, Cyprus, red cedar, oak, and other standing timber, and then cuts down each tree and slabs it up on site, since he doesn’t have equipment to haul logs. He makes a variety of sizes. Smaller pieces for end tables might be cut almost straight across the diameter. Most pieces are cut like French bread at 45, 50 or 60-degree angles, 2 1/2 to 3 in. thick.

“I don’t use guides. It’s all freehand chainsaw cuts,” Pectol says. “You have to make sure the teeth are the right length, angle and depth.”

He uses a Dremel-type handheld sharpener that hooks to his truck’s battery. It sharpens chains fast and accurately. His old 090 Stihl saws are still his favorite, but it’s hard to find parts so he purchased a 3120 Husqvarna recently.

Pectol is away from his Heber City, Utah, home about half of his life. He “follows the radiator cap” to Northern states in the summer and Southern states in the winter. He’s learned which states require permits and asks private property owners permission to set up along busy highways. The best locations are near affluent resort areas. But his prices are reasonable for the general public starting at \$5 to \$20 for clock faces to \$25 to \$100 for end table and headboard size pieces to \$300 for museum quality pieces.

He tells customers to store their slab on its edge inside a building where it can dry slowly with good air circulation and no sunlight. When dry, sand the slab with a angle grinder, then follow up with a belt sander for a smooth finish.



Jack Pectol cuts down standing timber and then slabs it up into a variety of sizes to sell.

Pectol has photos of beautiful furniture he has built with slabs to show customers what they can do with the wood. Through the years he’s cut all kinds of wood, from 6-ft. diameter poplars planted by Mormon pioneers in Utah to willows in Virginia’s Shenandoah Valley. Currently he buys most of his wood in Arkansas.

Besides selling retail, he sells loads wholesale to furniture makers, taxidermists and other individuals at up to 40 percent off his retail price.

“Call and specify what wood you want,” Pectol says.

Although Pectol seems to spend nearly half of his life away from home with his work, he has a driven passion toward his wife and nine children (25 grandchildren); and toward his Mormon faith.

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Shelterbelt Business Growing

As shelterbelts age across the Great Plains, a new business opportunity is growing. Dead and dying trees, larger field equipment, and conservation tillage are all reasons farmers are ripping out shelterbelts. However, removal can be dangerous, even with heavy equipment. How farmers remove them also can affect how easy it is to farm where they used to be, warns Clyde Reilly of Shelterbelt Solutions.

“Guys go out with bulldozers and backhoes and start knocking down trees, and pretty soon they have a tree falling on the cab,” he says. “Most bulldozer cabs aren’t any stouter than a skid steer cab. Tree removal with a skid steer is the safest way I know.”

Reilly prefers skid steers, in part because of their size and power. Unlike larger equipment, they can’t take a tree down quickly. The biggest reason he sticks with skid steers is their maneuverability in close quarters.

“We have an extractor attachment that I designed for our skid steers,” says Reilly. “It lets me do selective removal of a single large tree or an entire shelterbelt. It takes more time, so we are more expensive than heavy equipment

operators, but when we finish, there are no sticks to pick up and no dirt in the burn pile.”

He says farmers can expect a return on investment in three to five years on shelterbelt removal. A half-mile shelterbelt takes up two acres of cropland.

While Reilly also does shelterbelt renovation, he says that often is not an option. “We will go into a shelterbelt and find that 90 percent of the trees in a row are dead,” he says. “Sometimes an inside row next to buildings needs to be removed. With our skid steer, we can get to the work without damaging remaining trees.”

Reilly and his crew work mostly in North Dakota, South Dakota, Minnesota, and Montana. Pricing varies by the job and the price of fuel. He says there is more work to be done than he has time to do.

“If there are people out there who want to do this type of work, I would be more than happy to set them up with what I know,” he says. “Everyday is fun. We travel around the state in a camper and have a different picture out the window every day.”

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Egg-Bot Decorates Eggs, Ornaments

Add a little personalized color to your holiday decorations with Egg-Bot, a robotic pen plotter. With computer software and ultra fine markers, you can put designs and your own artwork on ornaments, eggs, wine bottles – any spherical or ellipsoid object up to 4 1/4 in. in dia.

“You can convert photos to line art. For example, we’ve done the Mona Lisa,” says Lenore Edman, one of the owners and founders of Evil Mad Science LLC, an electronic hobby kit company that manufactures and sells the Egg-Bot, which is based on an original design by artist Bruce Shapiro.

Egg-Bot connects to the free software program Inkscape, which allows you to draw your own designs. Sample designs are available for download as well. You attach the correct color pens, one at a time.

The device attracts a variety of customers, Edman says, from egg artists and carvers to hobbyists. The mechanical aspect of working with motion control also has an educational component.

Customers come up with a variety of uses. “One crafter is using it in his ceramics processes, using Egg-Bot for texturing. We use it for decorating our mini pumpkins,” Edman says. “The surprising thing is the



Egg-Bot is a robotic pen plotter (above) that lets you make designs on eggs and ornaments.



Photo courtesy Lenore M. Edman

amazing art people do with it.”

Egg-Bot sells for \$195 and requires assembly with screwdrivers. A \$250 version draws on ostrich eggs and other items up to 6 1/4 in. in dia.

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