

The Bull from Illawarra

by "SUNDOWNER"

WHAT surprises me most about Queensland cattle ticks is the cost of not dipping at all. I did not know that "tick worry" actually kills cattle, but I am assured that it kills thousands even where dipping is fairly regular. A Queensland weekly to which I am temporarily subscribing has, in fact, suggested that the answer to tick losses will probably be found in the blood of those cattle which for some reason or other have not been dipped and by some lucky chance or other have not died but developed an immunity. Two out of three, it says, will die; but science may find what it is looking for in the blood of the third.

Here, again, I imagine that the reference is to areas where the infestation is very heavy. All the cattle I saw in Africa 50 years ago, milking cows and working bullocks, were studded with ticks, but I do not remember that ticks ever killed them. If I had nothing to go on but talk I would be sure that it is tall talk, and that the locals are stretching a visitor's obedient leg. But there is at least partial persuasion in print.

JUNE 29 TODAY I saw my first Queensland sheep. It was a Merino wether, dingy with age and coal dust, tethered in a dirty back yard.

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"Not very long," he stammered.

She smiled again. "Even a little while, I suppose, is quite long enough when you're waiting for a doctor." While she smiled Jimmy felt her eyes searching him. Did she guess at the wild impulse within him that cried for a shield against something poised above him like the hawk circling over the distant field, choosing its moment to strike?

"And in a little while, of course," the calm voice went on, "we'll know just what ought to be done for mother."

The horse stamped and shook himself with a jingle of harness. Mrs. Benjamin loosened the reins for him to stretch his great glossy neck to drink from the race.

As he lowered his head his eye caught a reflection of the dog standing over the water. He reared and backed sharply, nostrils quivering with fright.

Mrs. Benjamin gathered in the reins quickly while Jimmy grabbed at the dog's collar to lead him away.

"All right," he heard her say. Swiftly tying the reins, she had climbed down and taken the bridle.

"Steady now, you big booby," she coaxed him. "Jumping at shadows." She stood by his head a moment or two. Then when he had quietened she climbed back into the gig and released the reins. The horse looked at the dog, whinnied and bent to drink again.

"Now he hasn't done that for a long time," Mrs. Benjamin said. "The doctor, I suppose, would say it's the 'Old Dread' working in him. He knows all about the minds of horses."

Jimmy turned involuntarily to look at the dog squatting beside him. Mrs. Benjamin smiled.

HERE is an interesting custom here of measuring road distances from running creeks, and a pleasant practice of putting up the name of a creek about half a chain before you come to it on either side.

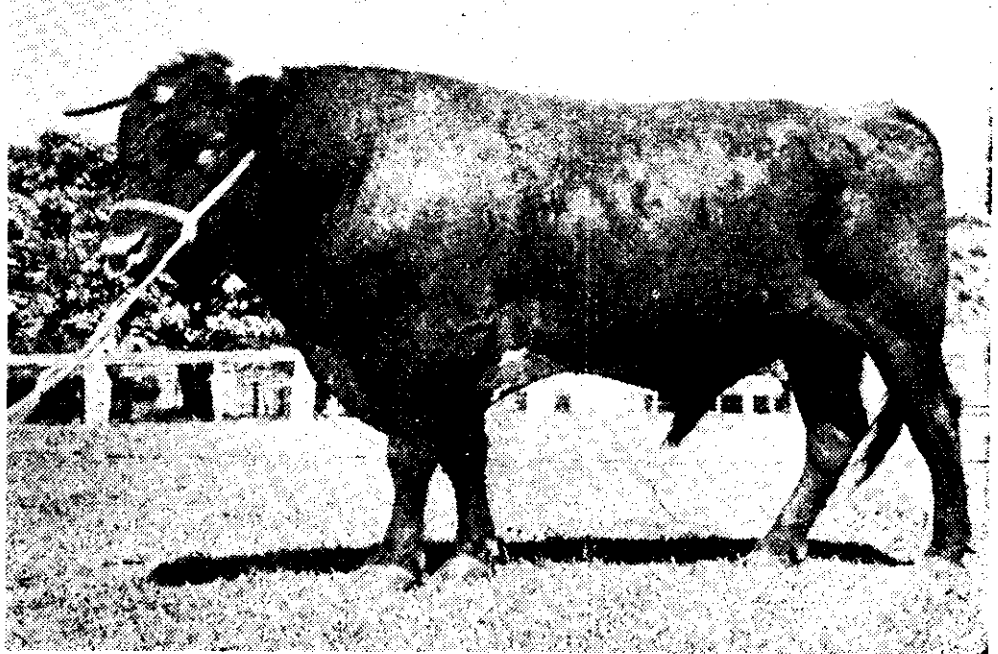
JULY 1 and you therefore never cross a creek—if you belong—without knowing where you are and where you are going, and I wish we could say the same in New Zealand. But I am not sure that Australians are any brighter than we are in selecting their place names. Here are some of the notices I saw in a road journey of about 50 miles: Duck-hole Creek, Andy's Creek, Running Creek, Doubtful Creek, Bolland Creek, Doughboy Creek, Sheep Station Creek, Darkey Creek, Branch Creek, Catfish Creek, Deep Creek, Nine Mile Creek, McGinty's Creek, Double Creek, Scrubby Creek. I like Doughboy, Duckhole and Catfish, but I think we would be equal to Nine Mile.

Sheep Station, Running and Doubtful. It, of course, opened my eyes to find so many creeks, all running, in country too dry and hard for cultivation.

"YES," he said, "that is our Illawarra—the original Australian Shorthorn." I thought the original Australian Shorthorn was a bull bred in England or Scotland and not quite good enough to be kept at home; but I was not sure

enough of my ground to argue. In any case, I was a visitor, and the confidence of Australians, though not small, is nowhere equal to their hospitality and friendliness. I listened and tried to admire.

But the bull I was asked to admire looked like nothing so much to me as the probable begetter of a good team of working bullocks. He was big, leggy,



A CHAMPION Illawarra Shorthorn bull—Aine Park Perfection. The colouring is dark red, with flecks of white

"Just the image, he tells me, of something nameless, horrible, cruel. When you delve into the mind of a horse, it seems you've got to go back thousands of years to the time when the thing lay and waited at the drinking place ready to pounce . . ."

"What pounces?" said the doctor, bustling out at the moment to fetch something from the gig. "A tabby cat or a black panther?"

"A South American puma. Rob has just seen one. Luckily it turned into a water spaniel."

The doctor patted the horse's flank and laughed. "He's got himself into a sweat all right. And you've been giving away some of that Natural History, Kate, will you reach me out the small case from under the seat?"

He took the case from her, opened it and removed a small phial and a syringe.

"I'll be about ten minutes," he said, handing her back the case. "You may get on with the Natural History."



He grinned at Jimmy, paused then to look closer at him. As though he were reminded of something, he returned to the gig and rummaged around on the floor.

"Kate," he said in a lower tone, "the kid's white as chalk. What have you been saying—making him see things?"

It was a moment or two before her reply. She spoke then almost as an aside from an intensive study of an approaching flock of sheep.

"I didn't see it, dear, till it was too late. It was a little too fanciful—in the circumstances."

"The circumstances?"

"Oh, I listened to all the storekeeper said. This kid has a secret dread packed away inside him. He could put a name to it, too. Dick, will you promise me something?"

"Yes?"

"It's just this. If there's anything which has to be told that is going to hurt—would you please let me tell it?"

Dr. Benjamin scratched his chin and took up his bag again. He spoke very deliberately.

"This thing you have in mind, my dear, has the not very attractive clinical name of carcinoma. We should prefer to use that term rather than the other, if we had to. Fortunately, we don't have to." He went across to Jimmy and put his hand on his head. "Let my wife tell you about a beast who has had his lair uncovered too early."

He turned and went back into the house.

Ten minutes later he came out again. His wife was down on one knee beside a boy who did not look up. There was a clear hard patch of ground before them and they were taking turns to spin a top.

coarse in the bone, and as high in the shoulders as a Brahman. I thought, in fact, that he was one of the new Brahman crosses now being advertised in Queensland, and exciting a good deal of controversy. But I was assured that his mother, in a bad season, and after many hours of travelling, had just given 70 pounds of milk with three pounds of butterfat in 24 hours, and that at home in normal conditions she had given 90 pounds of milk with 3½ pounds of butterfat. Illawarra cows, I was further assured, had been first 35 times in the 36 years in which butter production records had been kept in Queensland.

Since the proof of the cow is the milking, I turned back to that bull when the owner was not there to advertise him, but all I could see were the hocks of a giraffe and the trailing belly of a buffalo. If there are 1654 like him in Australia, as I gather there are from the latest issue of the A.I.S. Herd Book, and 8728 cows, and if no other breed can compete with them in the bucket, it is time we gave up trying in New Zealand to breed Shorthorns that not only milk well but look perfect ladies. I have in any case been only a lukewarm admirer of Milking Shorthorns since Gordon Jones's Darbolara bull got tangled in his chain and my courage went out in a flood when I struggled to release him. (To be continued)

A PROGRAMME which should be of special interest to sundowners, shepherds and dog-lovers is now being heard from IYA in "Country Journal" at 12.30 p.m. on Tuesdays. In it a well-known dog trainer and breeder, Bert Ellis, of Dairy Flat, Albany, discusses in an informative and colourful style the training and care of sheep dogs, from puppyhood to field trials. The third of this series of four talks will be broadcast on July 20, and the final one on July 27. The talks may be repeated later from other stations.