

# He Sings, He Sells Angus And He Raises Cattle

by Marilyn Barr  
American Angus Assn.



*Leroy Van Dyke, well-known country music entertainer, recently recorded an open and close plus background music for the American Angus Assn. radio advertisements. Not only a singer but a licensed auctioneer and country-born cattleman, Van Dyke was a natural for the Angus radio spots. He explains in the following article how his farmer-cattleman ambitions were suddenly changed by a hit song that catapulted him to the ranks of a top entertainer.*

**“H**ey, well all right, sir, here we go there, what are you gonna gimme for ‘em? I’m bid \$600 down here, now \$10, now \$25, now \$35 . . . .”

These are the opening words to a lively hit country song written and sung by a man often called “the world’s most famous auctioneer,” Leroy Van Dyke, the only licensed auctioneer who also is a top-flight performing artist and vice versa.

Country music, cattle and auctioneering make up a 3-way mix in the life of Van Dyke.

“There’s only three things I ever wanted to do, and I’ve done them all,” Van Dyke says, “sing, sell and raise cattle.”

No stranger to country ways, he was born near Sedalia, Mo., where he grew up on the family farm. He took an active part with the family cattle, a commercial herd made up mostly of Angus and Herefords.

After passing through a 1-room grammar school and graduating from high school, the country boy stayed home to farm with his father, Frank B. Van Dyke, for a year. Then, realizing the importance of understanding his chosen profession—agriculture—he enrolled at the University of Missouri. There he studied animal husbandry, journalism and speech, graduated with a degree in agriculture.

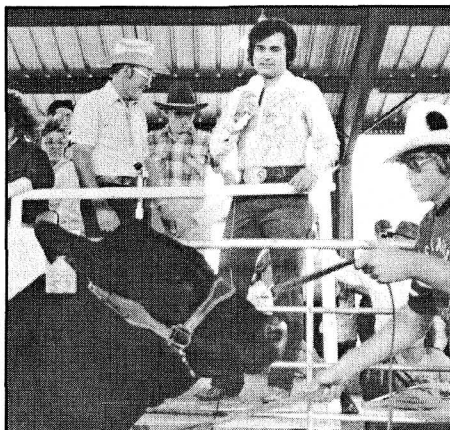
## First Job

With no thoughts of entering the entertainment field, his first job after college was as livestock fieldman for the DROVERS JOURNAL, a midwestern publication. Holding this job for three years, he worked in the Illinois, Wisconsin and Indiana areas selling ads, working sales and writing results of cattle shows.

Between his junior and senior years at the University of Missouri, Van Dyke followed in the footsteps of his cousin, Ray Sims, an internationally-known cattle auctioneer, and trained as an auctioneer. Later Sims, Van Dyke and Hugh James from Decatur, Ill., started an auctioneer school in Decatur, Ill. He sold cattle in his home area for a few years after his fieldman job.

Van Dyke joined the army and served in Korea with the Counter Intelligence Corps. With “time and a Sears-Roebuck guitar,” Van Dyke found himself livening his army buddies’ leisure hours with his “pickin’ and singin’.” One song in particular began to

*Van Dyke, a former 4-H’er, enjoys auctioning cattle and often gets record prices.*



form in his mind. He put the story of Ray Sims into music and called it “The Auctioneer.” The song rapidly became a favorite among his friends, he says.

“I didn’t write it with the idea of it being a hit record,” Van Dyke recalls. “I just wrote the story of Sims’ life. Then I sang it at parties and it got popular. I started going to talent contests and tried to get it recorded.”

## Career Launched

After a television talent show in 1956, the song was recorded and became a best-seller overnight. According to Van Dyke, more than 2 million copies of “The Auctioneer” have been sold to date.

This song was followed by “Walk On By,” one of only three songs ever to top both country and pop sales charts world-wide.

It was the recording of “The Auctioneer” that earlier this year spawned the idea of having Van Dyke record the Angus radio advertising spots, says Keith Evans, director of communications and public relations for the Angus association.

“We have used auction sound to introduce the Angus radio ad messages for several years now, so it seemed logical to us—considering Leroy’s talent, popularity and identity with Angus breeders—to have him and his group record the opening and close plus the background music for the spots. In fact, the sound of the radio spots is similar to the open and close Leroy developed for ‘The Auctioneer’ recording. The words, however, promote Angus cattle,” Evans says.

“The Auctioneer” changed the direction of Van Dyke’s career, and he moved to Nashville, Tenn., where he became a member of the Grand Ole Opry cast.

## Family and Cattle

Married to the former Sue Greathouse from Hindsboro, Ill., he is the father of three

children. Lee is 14 years old, Carla is 12 and Adam 9. Van Dyke purchased a farm in Williamson County, Tenn., and began his own cattle herd. He built up a foundation herd consisting of 80-90 purebred Angus cows.

"The most efficient machine on any farm is the Angus cow," Van Dyke states.

Then, he explains, because he thought the potential of exotic breeds was yet undeveloped, he crossbred his Angus cows with Chianina bulls. He felt that breed seemed to offer some growth potential to cross with the efficiency of the Angus mother cow. Frozen semen was flown in from Italy, and a percentage Angus-Chianina herd was developed.

Although some of the cattle still remain on his two Tennessee farms (one is 809 acres and one 64 acres), Van Dyke says most of his cattle are now owned in partnership with his brother near Sedalia.

However, he isn't able to spend as much time as he'd like working with the cattle because of his entertaining schedule, which involves spending 275-310 days per year on the road.

Part of his entertaining schedule includes singing at livestock shows and rodeos. Van Dyke and his band, The Auctioneers, have played at most major livestock shows in North America, including the Ak-Sar-Ben (Nebraska), the Royal Winter Fair (Canada), the El Paso (Texas) show and rodeo, and hundreds of state and county fairs.

#### **Helps at Auctions**

While at these shows, he often is asked to auction champion animals and has set record prices at such shows as the fat stock show in Ft. Worth, Texas.

Van Dyke says he especially enjoys these appearances for two reasons. "I like to sell, and I spent 10 years in 4-H, so I realize what payday means to these kids. It's a pleasure to help them out."

Not only has Van Dyke made a name as an auctioneer and singer, he also played the starring role in a movie, "What Am I Bid?" Needing an auction scene for the movie, he called the American Angus Assn. to locate an Angus to use in the movie. Bill Roche, regional manager, and Keith Evans went to Hollywood to help film the auction scene. In a realistic auction ring set, decorated by Angus promotional material, Sims auctioned off an Angus bull, assisted by the two members of the association, one as a ringman and one in the auction box with Sims.

Van Dyke explains that he has "always been close to the American Angus Assn. people as well as breeders, auctioneers and promotional people."

The entertainer says, "You can take the boy out of the country, but you can't take the country out of the boy. Well, I'm one country boy who's proud to take the country with me wherever I go, and I take it along in the form of music and song."

And for the future? Van Dyke plans to "keep on singin'." 