



RAWHIDE: Matt Curnow with horse Lonestar, at Anna Creek Station, is enjoying one of Australia's busiest cattle seasons. Picture: TRICIA JOHNSON

Dry, dusty, tired - but living a dream

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IN a dry, dusty creekbed, stockman Matt Curnow reins his horse, Lonestar, to an abrupt halt beneath a cluster of old gum trees.

Life as head stockman on Anna Creek station, the world's largest cattle property, has simple joys that most city people can only dream of.

With the mustering season under way after the long summer, Mr Curnow's busy life is one of cattle work and stock camps, sleeping out under the stars each night.

This year is likely to be one of the best on the giant Anna Creek station, owned by S. Kidman and Co., near William Creek in the Far North, with the cattle industry enjoying a buoyant era.

The Australian beef indus-

try is riding high as the world's largest exporter with shipments worth a record \$4.6 billion last year, up from just \$2 billion a decade earlier.

Helped by mad cow disease in the United States, exports of Australian beef to the Japanese market soared to a record 405,084 tonnes worth \$2.4 billion last year.

Cattle is big business in the

“Being happy is the important thing

Australian Outback with the industry worth more than \$7 billion this year, easily the largest individual rural sector.

The good times have pushed the cattle herd up to 28.5 million and climbing back toward 30 million head, a level it has not reached since 1976, a few years after the previous beef boom ended.

While it is relatively small compared with India's 313 million cattle and Brazil with 150 million-plus, Australia's cattlemen export nearly two thirds of annual production.

The national beef industry's buoyancy spells good times for the large cattle companies including S. Kidman and Co., the Australian Agricultural Company, Heytesbury Beef,

Stanbroke Pastoral Company and the North Australian Pastoral Company.

For Mr Curnow, life revolves around turning off prime quality beef from the station for the world's hungry markets.

In his third year at Anna Creek station and his ninth year with the Kidman company on its vast northern

stations, his record would get him a job almost anywhere in the Australian cattle industry.

He spends 60 per cent of his working life in an Anna Creek stock camp mustering cattle.

“It's a good industry to be in and Kidman's are a well-respected company and always look after people well,” he said. “I've never really thought of doing anything else, I'm happy doing this.”

Mr Curnow admits he has had vague thoughts of going to work in the lucrative mining industry.

But for now, he's happy being a stockman and working the land.

“I might possibly one day, working here is more of a lifestyle,” he said.

“Money is not everything, being happy is the more important thing.”