

BUCKIN' STOCK TALK



By Terry Ann Lihdal

We asked some of the top people in the bucking bull business this question: "What do you feel makes a better bucking bull, line breeding or outcrossing, and why?"

STEVE AND CYNDI GILBERT - DIAMOND G RODEO

"We don't do line breeding, at least not on purpose. It does happen, but it's not planned. When we've had a calf born from direct line breeding, there's often been a problem such as a calf with three legs, blind or otherwise deformed. When deciding what bull to breed to what cow, we look at the genetic connections. Check for a direct line between the bull and the cow before you breed them. Line breeding is fine as long as you stay three generations down - three generations between the dam and the sire. As an initial breeder, if you have three generations down, you shouldn't have a problem.

We have had as our goal to build a quality herd of mother cows. Our experience has taught us that the mother cow is more important than the bull. We have enough genetics to allow us to outcross from within our own program. In our outcrossing, there are several major things we take into consideration. We look at the personality of the bull. We take an extremely hot bull and typically breed him to a cow with a gentler disposition. Crush Boss (the sire to White Magic) was a hot blooded bull and we put him with gentler cows to help temper the disposition of the calves. We look at the size of the bull. We often breed our bigger bulls to smaller cows. If you put a big bull with a big cow, you're apt to get a really big bull. We try to keep the size of our bulls from getting too large because, as a general rule, bulls over eighteen hundred pounds can't buck as long as smaller bulls. The big bulls tend to break down sooner. We also want heart in our bulls. We purchased "Ricky," one of our initial herd sires, in 1989 from Sammy Andrews. Ricky had over 100 offspring before he died at 21 years old. Ricky had a lot of heart and thus the "Ricky" blood runs deep in our herd.

We breed naturally. We don't use straws. With our hot blooded cows, we find they tend to sluff the calf. Besides, the bull and cow deserve to have some fun by being in the pasture together! We use five to seven bulls each year for breeding. We put anywhere from ten to thirty cows with each bull. This gives us the outcross that we want.

A first time heifer is never initially bred to a charbray or bigger boned bull. We've found that first time heifers do better being bred to a longhorn. The longhorns are smaller and you don't have to pull the calf. There are fewer miscarriages and it's easier for the heifers to calve longhorns due to their bone

structure. When we started breeding the heifers to a longhorn, we did away with ninety-five percent of our calving problems. The first longhorn we bred, -77, Wrangler's Painted Desert, was just an average rodeo longhorn and one of his first offspring was Mr. U.S.A. who holds the NFR Arena record with Cody Hancock (96 points).

We don't breed futurity calves. We are looking for a longer career than a classic or futurity calf. Our calves only run through the chutes once when they're weaned and then we turn them out on a 3500 acre mountain range until they are almost three so they can learn to become bulls. Our bulls are bucked for the first

time with a cowboy at approximately two and a half years. (It's surprising how they remember the chutes after all that time.) We take these young bulls to six high school rodeos in November and buck them again in the spring as they turn three. Some are ready to use, sparingly, at open or smaller rodeos; others are turned back out to mature some more. In our experience, most bulls, but especially charbray bulls, mature at five years of age. It's amazing what happens when they turn five. White Magic was just a bull at four and a half. Then he turned five and it was like we turned on a switch. It was an amazing change to his athleticism.

For people just starting a program, our advice is to start slowly. Too many people want all the famous genetics, but they have no idea if those genetics will work together to make a future superstar. They try a little Houdini, a little Playboy, and throw in some other genetics for good measure. New breeders have no experience in what they want—other than a superstar. First time breeders should pick a trait they like. Pick one line and start breeding with some good foundation cows. We look at personality and genetics of the cattle, and with our experience in the business, we get gut feelings about genetics to match up that work out. We've had luck with our hunches, but we've also paid attention to the results of chances we have taken such as the calf, Mr. USA or White Magic. On the other hand, you can have a prolific money bull that doesn't do a thing for your breeding program. Someone building a program should step back and evaluate the breeding choices you make—but you really can't tell until the bulls and cows are three to five years old.

When it comes to building a breeding program, there's





science. But there's more luck than management. It's the chess game in the genetics that is fun. If you get one that bucks, chalk it up to luck and enjoy the ride! The success makes all the failures worthwhile."

DON KISH - DON KISH BUCKING BULLS

"Line breeding gives you a better percentage of bulls that will buck. Outcrossing gives you more rank bulls. I do line breeding for the higher percentage of bulls that will buck.

When I first started my program, I did the same thing instead of changing up the breeding. If you keep breeding the same thing, the bulls keep getting more inbred. When you just breed bucking bulls for so long, they lose their size. I had to use outcrossing to get more size into my program. You can outcross with English breeds like Herefords, Charolais and Angus cattle. You can use anything that will put the muscle back in. For example, if you have a little bull, you can breed him to a Charolais cow. Or you can put a Charolais bull on your cows. Your outside bull can come from your neighbor. We've had neighbors' bulls jump the fence and breed our cows. Use what you have access to.

You want to take a look at what level your program is at. It could be twenty percent of your bulls weigh eighteen hundred pounds. Eighty percent weigh thirteen hundred pounds, but you have a higher percentage of bucking bulls. Size hurts the percentage of bucking bulls you get in your program. Nobody's been able to get both size and a high percentage of bucking bulls. Almost everyone in the rodeo business has to buy livestock. It's hard to find people who rodeo off what they raise.

I've spent thirty years with this breeding program. One hundred percent of our livestock is our own. The two biggest bulls that built my program are Wolfman and Too Legit. Wolfman is a son of Fonzie. Too Legit is the son of Little Oscar. Fonzie and Little Oscar are brothers so that makes Wolfman and Too Legit cousins. They're pretty much the backbone of my program. Then there're also the bulls Red Rock, Gold Buckle and Mr. T. Wolfman brought the bucking blood. Mr. T. and Red Rock brought the size. Over the years, I've bred only five outside bulls. Almost every bull we've used, I've raised.

To have a successful breeding program you have to do both line breeding and outcrossing. It sounds very complicated, but it's very simple. I do line breeding except for a small percentage of outcrossing that I do for size. There's no reason for me to breed rank bulls. Nobody wants rank bulls right now."

CINDY ROSSER - FLYING C LIVESTOCK

"I can't really talk about line breeding. I don't do it. But, I can't be sure that I don't have some line breeding in my program. Three of our sires, Reindeer, Werewolf and Diamond Cutter are bulls that came from Alex Naccarato. They're all Naccarato breeding. That's all we know. We don't know who the fathers are and we only know two of the mothers. So, we can't trace back the line of their genetics.

Outcrossing, now I'm a fan of that. My son, Mikel, was

the one who started our outcrossing program. He researched all the genetics and studied the breeding lines. He studied the results of the futurities and he picked out a heifer sired by Diamond Cat. He wanted that heifer because her half brother was winning futurities. It was a Jackie Ratjen heifer. That was the first cow we bought. The second cow Mikel bought was a Durango daughter. He traded Justin McKee for Bluestem Wine daughters. Mikel did research to see what he thought would go together well. He was always adding genetics to the pot.

Mikel really liked the Gunslinger bloodline and wanted to add it to our program. He was given Holey Slinger, a son of Gunslinger out of a Bodacious cow, that has become a good producer for us. He's a good solid bull. He crosses well. We bred him to some cows and his offspring have been outstanding. David Fournier raised the +2 cow that he gave to Mikel. She produced Little Brother (PBR Finals), Red Man (Classic Finals 2011) and a Holey Slinger calf who bucks. She will be flushed this year.

We got Hawaiian Ivory, with the Hawaiian bloodline, for an outcross bull. He's got size and power, and he brings some new, strong genetics into the program. We also have Little Brother, out of Baby Brother, that gives us another good cross.

We've sorted eighty head of cows that we'll breed to Reindeer, Hawaiian Ivory and Little Brother. We'll put Reindeer and Hawaiian Ivory on the cows with gentler dispositions. Those two bulls have their "little" quirks. You don't want to breed the cows with the worst dispositions to a hot tempered bull like Reindeer or Hawaiian Ivory. You just might get a calf way too hot to handle. We breed the cows with the worst dispositions to a gentler bull like Little Brother. Little Brother is double bred Baby Brother so we'll make sure to put him on something else for an outcross instead of line breeding. We'll put a smaller cow with Hawaiian Ivory if we want to get a bigger calf. But sometimes it doesn't happen that way. You don't always get what you wanted.

Big Mike is a bull we use to put size in calves. His daughters are big and can be bred to almost anything. We never put a first calf heifer on Big Mike. Then we have Mikel's Kat, a son of Skat Kat. He's narrow like his sire and good for first calf heifers. Joe B. Waters is a producer with first calf heifers. He's been on nothing but first calf heifers and it works well. All the heifers bred to him have an easy time calving.

When I'm deciding what cow I want to breed to what bull, I look at what I think would be a good mating, what I think will work. I look at the cows. If a cow has been bred and doesn't produce, she's not worth keeping. And if a cow doesn't have quality calves, it's not worth having her in your breeding program.

I am going to do some line breeding next year as we will have Big Mikes, Joe B. Waters, Troubadours, Whiterocks, and of course Whitewaters."

