

Australia's Don Lawson

He's Performance Through and Through

by T.S. Gatz

The man — Don Lawson of "Ythanbrae" (pronounced I-than-bray), near Yea, Victoria. Lawson's as solid a performance man as can be found. He also depends heavily on Angus semen from North America to further his herd.

"I use genetics from North America primarily because those are the bulls with high accuracy, high proofs — like dairy farmers," Lawson explains. "Besides, a lot of Australian bulls have too high of birth weights."

Since 1974 Lawson has relied heavily on artificial insemination (AI). In fact, all of Ythanbrae's 300 females are in an AI program. This program involves two or three cycles, with Lawson achieving an 80 percent AI conception rate.

Lawson relies on his own 15-month-old bulls for clean up. He maintains that he must use his own bulls because he can't bring in outside bulls. The country's simply too steep, and outside bulls can't handle the terrain.

During AI season about 10 different bulls are utilized. Certain bulls are selected for heifer use, with a different set used on the cows.

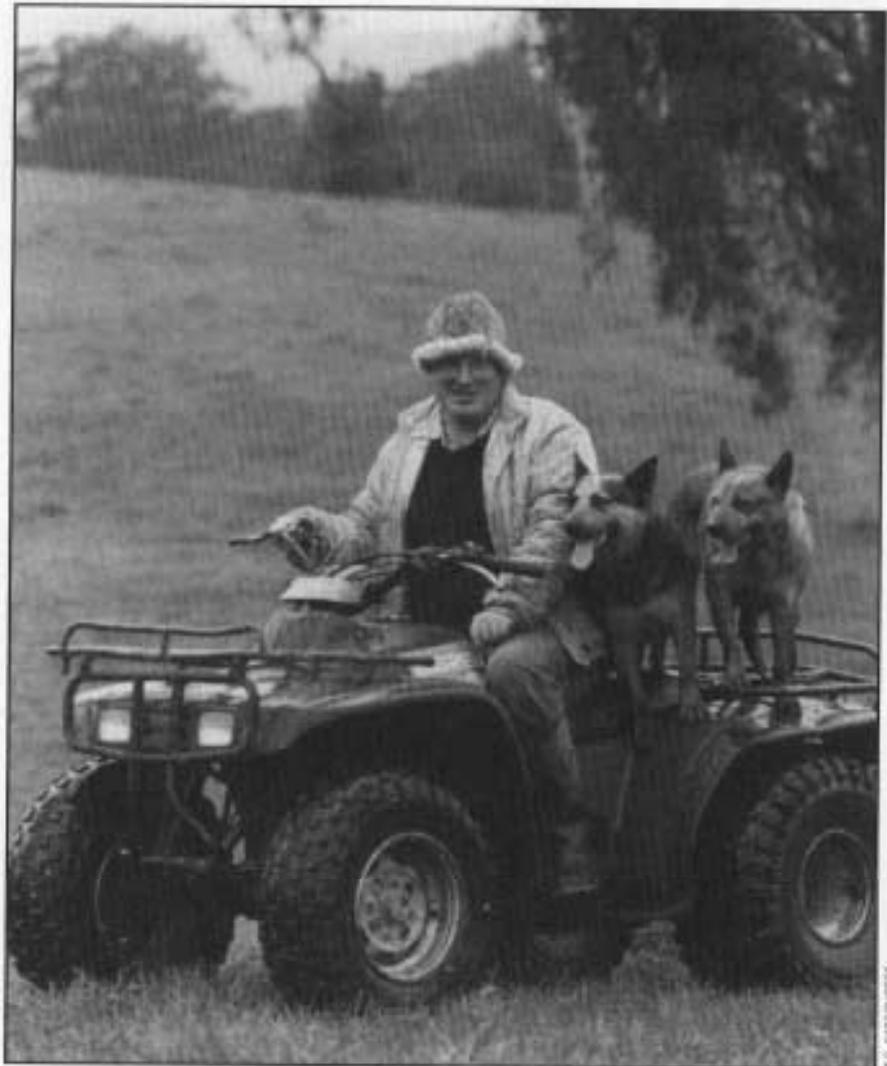
With the use of "Herd Magic," a software program recommended by the Angus Society of Australia, Lawson obtains EBVs and accuracies for three generations back.

"With this and AI," Lawson says, "I can nearly individually match each female on the place for the best offspring."

Lawson says his AI selections are based on several factors. First, he demands a low birth weight bull, a bull with a birth weight EBV of two.

"I don't like pulling calves," he interjects. "I have other things to do. And the best way to lose clientele is to have them pull calves."

Additional sire selection criteria required by the progressive Australian cattleman includes EBVs of eight to 10 for milk, 20 for 200-day growth and 40 for 400-day growth. Plus, he favors the breed's four short gestation bulls that are available.



This performance-oriented cattleman points out that he avoids bulls with super high EBVs as well as bulls with low EBVs. He's after balance and optimum numbers.

Lawson also insists that he doesn't want "great big" cows. He argues that big cows simply require too high maintenance and they don't rebreed.

In his hilly country, it's critical that cows be raised so they breed off hills. In other words, practical, functional Angus

are a necessity. And cows weighing 1,200 pounds are about right for that environment.

During the past 10 years, Ythanbrae has doubled its herd average EBVs. In 1981 the herd's averages read 1.3 for birth weight, 4.7 for 200-day milk, 5.4 for 200-day growth, 17.7 for 400-day growth and 22.4 for 600-day growth. Currently the herd EBV averages are 2.4 for birth weight, 5 for 200-day milk, 13 for 200-day growth, 31 for 400-day growth and 40 for



ANGUS

With only 30 percent of its beef utilized for domestic consumption, Australia depends heavily on the export market.

The export market receiving the most attention today is the Pacific Rim. Many feedlots are popping up, with beef cattle geared to furnishing the Japanese with quality grain-fed beef.

But the Australians aren't stopping with Japan. The Australian cattle industry is also opening doors for their beef to Korea, Indonesia, Hong Kong, Malaysia, Thailand, Singapore, Brunei and the Philippines.

While no one breed has the entire market cornered, Angus is gaining ground in Australia.

Currently, Angus ranks number three when it comes to breed registrations in Australia. But the export opportunities for Australian beef to the Pacific Rim and the increased popularity of crossbreeding hold strong promises for the breed. After all, Australian cattlemen are discovering that black is beautiful. They're quickly learning that with Angus, marbling and quality beef are synonymous.

Statistics from the Australian Meat and Livestock Council reveal that Angus and Angus crosses accounted for 4,200 — or 36 percent — of the 25,000 feeder steers weighing 300kg or less that were exported to Japan by boat during the past year. With its first cousin, the Murray Grey, that number rose to almost 20,000. It also represents an eight percent increase of the two breeds over the past three years.

In addition to gaining popularity in the export feeder steer market, Angus is coming on strong in the Australian feedlot and dressed beef export scene. Numerous Australian feedlot operators and export people openly name Angus as their number one choice among the British breeds to meet the demands of the highly selective Japanese beef market. Plus, many Japanese companies stress their preference for Angus and Angus-influenced carcasses.

Three dressed beef markets in Japan

The Japanese dressed beef preferences fall into three categories: top-quali-

600-day growth.

In a few more years, Lawson should attain his goal. That goal for the EBV average of his herd: 2 for birth weight, 8 for milk, 20 for 200-day growth, 40 for 400-day growth and 50 for 600-day growth. This, he says, will give him moderate-growth, uniform animals packed with high reliability. (He already has 15 stacked up this way.)

Even though Lawson has a bit to go until he reaches the goal for his entire herd, the EBV average for his herd knocks on the door of the breed's elite. Yes, he comes close to the EBVs for the top 10 percent of the breed in Australia: 2 for birth weight, 7 for 200-day milk, 14 for 200-day growth, 31 for 400-day growth and 41 for 600-day growth.

Ythanbrae isn't a "stud" farm, as numerous purebred operations in Australia are called. Instead, Lawson's operation concentrates on producing commercial bulls for commercial cattlemen.

"We don't go for the stud sector," he states. "Our bread-and-butter is the commercial farmers. The stud market is just too fickle. Besides, we're interested in breeding bulls for meat production."

In an annual sale conducted with other breeders, Lawson moves between 80 and 120 bulls per year. The number sold merely reflects the demand for a particular season. Furthermore, what bulls make the sale is strictly determined by the bulls themselves.

Lawson says all bulls are given the same treatment and run together. Prior to the sale, the bulls are critiqued for EBVs, testicle size and structural soundness. In addition, they must have a C or better muscle score.

"And the bulls have to have butts," Lawson says.

Because nutrition isn't good enough in Australia to sell yearling bulls, Lawson sells bulls at 21 to 24 months of age. The bulls sell guaranteed and ready to work.

Although a top price might hit \$4,000, Lawson says the \$1,500 to \$2,000 figure is a pretty good average.

"We try to produce more bulls at prices our commercial people can afford," he relates. "High prices can scare away potential buyers."

Until recently the buyers have been primarily other Angus cattlemen, commercial producers. But now the scene is changing, with more Hereford people buying.

"The first Angus-Hereford crossbreeding in the states was in 1942," Lawson states. "Now we're doing it."

"Producers are getting a 15-cents per kilo premium for black baldies compared to Herefords. They like that. So the number of Hereford breeders buying our bulls is increasing."

A majority of cattlemen attending a Ythanbrae sale are familiar with performance. Lawson says the Beef Improvement Association has taught many cattlemen to appreciate performance. Therefore, these cattlemen study weights.

"Some are really into performance," Lawson says. "That's good. We need people who are serious about the beef cattle industry."

Lawson takes a strong stand for performance. He calls performance recording "simple management." He says it's logical and so common sense.

"If you ever studied any science, you know performance is the right way," he summarizes.

AND THE PACIFIC RIM

ty cattle that are extremely marbled; cattle that have been on feed 150-180 days with less marbling but a strong emphasis on meat texture, meat color and fat color; and grassfed cattle, primarily dairy steers.

One exporter to Japan points out that the top quality market is the smallest — 10 percent of export cattle fit this category, and this market's shrinking.

About 60-65 percent of the cattle sent to Japan fit the second category, and this market is the fastest growing one. It's also the area, one exporter explained, where Angus is most popular.

One feedlot operator in New South Wales, Australia, says the Japanese tend to be very Angus oriented. In fact, when one Japanese meat importer visited his feedlot, the Japanese pointed to a pen of straightbred Angus and said that's all his company wanted.

"He was adamant about all the cattle being black," the feedlot operator stated.

Nippon Meat Packers, a major player in the Japanese beef export market, lists Angus and Murray Grey as its number one choice for the British breeds.

"We like the Angus and Murray Grey, an Angus derivative, and their crosses for our feedlot and export business," Roy Van Nesch of Nippon Meat Packers, Sydney, Australia, states. "Angus work in the feedlot and throw less surface fat. They tend to give you the desired marbling for the Japanese market we target."

In addition to the Japanese market, the Japanese-owned Nippon Meat Packers send beef to the United States for the ground beef trade, grassfed and grainfed beef to Korea and beef to the European community and Southeast Asia.

"Korea has endless possibilities," Van Nesch says. "It's an exciting area and one where Angus and its various crosses will work for us again. Korea and Southeast Asia will want more grassfed beef, but that's okay. The cattle we've been buying will work — Angus included."

Australia's fastest growing feedlot, Rockdale, recently announced that it will be buying 8,000 Angus and Murray Grey steers each month by next year. And that number will be increased as time passes. Rockdale officials say they want to keep the Japanese-owned feedlot at its 20,000 head capacity.

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— Roy Van Nesch

Rockdale's general manager, Paul Troja, said the reason the company will buy only black and greys is simple — it's what the customer wants.

When Rockdale reaches full capacity, the company will be exporting 90 percent of its production to Japan. The remaining 10 percent of beef will go to other Asian markets, with small amounts to the United States and some targeted for domestic Australian use.

Another prominent exporter of quality Australian beef is the Hannin Corporation. Currently the Japanese-Australian joint venture, Hannin Corp., stands among the top four exporters of beef to Japan.

Hannin Corp.'s Ladysmith Farms Ltd., of Wagga Wagga, New South Wales, Australia, has a feedlot capacity of 5,000. About 1,000 of these cattle on feed — all aimed at the Japanese market — are straightbred Angus.

Don Radcliffe, general manager of La-

dysmith Farms says Ladysmith-purchased cattle enter the feedlot at 18 to 24 months of age and weigh a minimum of 1,000 pounds and a maximum of 1,100 pounds. He adds that the company prefers larger-framed, light-conditioned cattle that will garner a feed conversion of 7 to 1.

Once on a long-term feeding regime of 270 days, Ladysmith Farms' feedlot recently switched to all short-term feeding regime of just 105 days.

"When we were 60 percent long-term and 40 percent short-term, with short-term being 120 days, about 50 to 60 percent of the cattle in the feedlot were straightbred Angus," Radcliffe states. "Now we're all short-term, and down to 105 days. We still like the Angus, but now we go for more Angus crosses."

Radcliffe says Ladysmith Farms found they can do the same job at 105 days as they did with 120 days. He explains that's aiming for the middle range of the Japanese market and coming out at the lower end of the middle range market.

With the short-term feeding program, Radcliffe says Ladysmith Farms has lots of Angus X Herefords and Angus X Simmental feeders. Both of these crosses, he notes, will produce the muscle texture that the Japanese are so "fastidious" about.

"Clearly the crossbreds are finding favor in competition with the straightbreds which are probably finding their way into Australian feedlots at premium prices," Don Nicol of the Angus Society of Australia said. "The crosses of both breeds (Angus and Murray Grey) are now sought after by feeder steer buyers, which is an encouraging trend for those commercial breeders buying Angus and Murray Grey bulls to target this market."

Yes, with Australia targeting the Pacific Rim and concentrating on quality beef, the role of the Angus breed in Australia appears to be just gaining momentum.

Angus is "in" in Australia.

— T.S. Gatz

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