

# Three by Three

*Genetic Excellence: It's more than a phrase or the name of a 15-year-old bull sale; it's what three Tennessee Angus producers strive for in their own herd and every bull they feed out for the sale.*

by Lindsay King, assistant editor

Fed up with tire-kickers and long-winded negotiations for just one bill of sale, Kent Brown and Richard Brown formulated a plan. Hatched 20 years ago, this plan didn't come to fruition until 2004 in the form of the Genetic Excellence Bull Sale.

"We wanted a way to bring several bulls together for a bigger sale than any one breeder in this area could have," Richard says. "We started with about 15 consignees."

Originally, Richard and Kent were looking for a third party to feed the bulls through the winter.

Eventually, they accepted the heavy responsibility and split the sale cattle in half.

Both Browns took 40 bulls each to their home operations in north-central Tennessee, and fed the cattle until the first Saturday in January — sale day.

## A pen of 40

A staple element of the Genetic Excellence Bull Sale is the integrity and quality of the consigned animals.

"The bulls are never picked over before the sale," Kent says. "When we receive the bulls, they are committed to this sale. A lot of people wanted the bulls to be

available for sale at all times, but we knew to maintain the quality of the sale we couldn't allow that."



Today, this Angus partnership corrals together three breeders: (from left) David Holt of Holt Farms; Kent with Jared Brown & Son; and Richard from Spring Oak Farm.

Bulls arrive in July, but not just any animal can step off the trailer and make the sale.

"We go out and look at the bulls on their farm in June and evaluate them visually," Kent explains of the screening process. "There are minimum EPD (expected progeny difference) and actual data requirements. They have to be AI (artificial insemination)-sired and genomically tested to even be considered for consignment."

Kent says the group has turned down plenty of high-performing bulls that didn't meet their standards.

"Our number one criterion is feet and leg structure: soundness," he

says. "No matter how good a bull is, if he has bad feet or structure, we won't take him."

The cattlemen try to maintain almost identical feeding programs. "We don't push these bulls extremely hard, we don't try to get 5 or 6 pounds gain (ADG) a day of average daily gain (ADG)," Kent says. "We target 3 lb. of ADG, so we've backed down our adjusted yearling weight to 1,100 lb."

All bulls are housed in one large pasture, ensuring the group gets plenty of exercise. The rolling hills of Tennessee

require a fit, athletic bull to ensure his longevity in a herd.

Each lot is hand-fed rather than relying on a self-feeding system. Keeping a close eye on the rations and consumption plays into the consistency all three producers are gunning for in this endeavor.

## Upsizing

Five years ago, Kent and Richard wanted to increase their feeding capacity from 80 to 120 head. David Holt was a long-time consignor to the Genetic Excellence sale, which made him the perfect addition for the partnership.

"When we brought David into

this, the cattle market was at an all-time high,” Richard says. “We had more demand than bulls to offer our customers.”

Today, a pen of 40 bulls reside at all three operations – Richard, Spring Oak Farm; Kent, Jared Brown & Son; and David, Holt Farms.

Cattlemen in the area, and surrounding states, look for a multi-faceted bull. He needs to work well on heifers for his first couple of seasons and then transition to the cow herd.

“We have a lot of producers in the area with 30 or fewer cows in their herd,” Kent says. “They aren’t going to buy a \$5,000 bull. We brought in more bulls, which allowed us to add a new genetic base and more consignors as a result.”

It was quickly becoming standing room only during the sales hosted at Hyder-Burks Agriculture Pavilion in Cookeville, Tenn. The sale also features 150 bred commercial heifers exclusively from Genetic Excellence bull buyers, past and present.

## One-pager

“We started with a one-page sale book that looked more like an Excel spreadsheet,” Kent says of the fact-driven trifold. “The bulls and heifers came through the ring just like a traditional sale.”

Buyers silently demanded innovation as the stands grew more crowded with each sale. Chairs replaced the pull-out bleachers, speaking to the success of this once off-the-wall endeavor.

“We don’t bring cattle into the ring anymore,” Kent says. “They are all videoed prior to the sale.”

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Starting on Thursday evening, potential buyers can lay eyes on each lot. In its third year of online broadcast, buyers don’t have to even traverse the trail to the sale barn.

“Generally, there will be almost 350 people here,” Kent says. “The caterer prepares for 325 people and almost always runs out of food. That’s a good problem to have.”

“Blessed” is echoed among the three salesmen as they recount their unexpected journey to success. The shadow of gratitude and disbelief leave their mark on each of their faces.

Marketing more than 100 bulls in an area where the average herd size is under 40 is no small task.

## Partners

“There are plenty of people who have tried this,” Kent says. “But I don’t know of anyone actually feeding three different groups in an area with the demographics like we have here.”

The Upper Cumberland region of Tennessee can be an unforgiving place when it comes to weather. The heat and humidity of summer quickly swings to the left when temperatures drop and the mud begins.

This proves the most challenging aspect of achieving uniformity between the three groups of bulls.

“We put ourselves on the line and take someone else’s bull for six months and we are responsible for his care and getting him to sale day,” Kent says.

They aim to achieve a level playing field while providing a wide variety of genetics to their area.

“I think this sale has done a lot as far as bringing high-quality bulls in and showing producers their value,” Richard adds.

Perhaps the most uniform trait of this group is the dedication to the quality and integrity of the sale. While the partnership among the three is the foundation of the sale, the relationships keep the seats full.

“The partnership came together so we would have more horsepower on sale day,” Kent says.

Forging new relationships with customers new and old only strengthens the partners.

“The main thing that keeps us going are those friendships we’ve made,” David says. “We want to grow that for the future.”

Each partner is preparing the next generation to carry on Genetic Excellence, both the sale and in their family herds. It’s not a feat for the faint of heart. In fact, it can only be tackled by those with more heart than most. **AJ**