

Turn north on Katy Lane...

*where you'll find Melvin and Lorraine Jones, "Briggs"
(considered to be the largest Angus bull yet recorded),
and a very special Golden Retriever named "Katy."*

By Jim Cotton
Editor

To those of you faltering in your resolve, read on. Melvin Jones, Angus linebreeder from Pottsboro, Tx., shares your dreams, hopes, and struggles. His herd has been built long-distance fashion, for during his working years, he circled the globe six times yet developed an enviable herd through the efforts of AT&T, the postal service, and his wife, Lorraine.

While there may be many absentee owners and breeders in the registered business, few can claim the title as properly as Mel Jones. Much of his adult life has been spent in the faraway and exotic for as long as 18 months at a time. His career started in pre-World War II in Panama, helping with the third set of locks on the canal to permit movement of aircraft carriers and other large war vessels. After the canal and the Pan American Highway, Mel joined the U.S. Army Air Force and traveled with a war bond publicity effort headed by General "Hap" Arnold. This unit helped recruit workers for defense plants by displaying captured German and Japanese equipment including aircraft.

Following the war, Mel worked on the Trans-Arabian pipeline plus several airbases near Casablanca, in Saudi Arabia, and Iceland. By this stage of his career, he had advanced to positions of supervisor and general supervisor. Road building projects beckoned him to Thailand, Cambodia, and Afghanistan. Then there were pipelines in Iran and a demanding masterpiece, the only road and pipeline over the Andes Mountains in Ecuador. Average elevation was



Melvin Jones, Lazy J Spread, Pottsboro, Texas

12,200 ft. above sea level. More than a third of the pipe had to be laid by helicopter, and they were limited to early morning and late afternoon operation in the rarefied air at such heights.

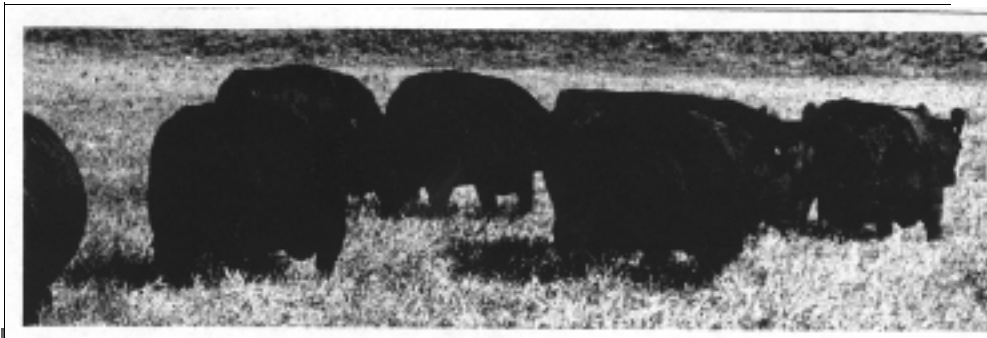
"My biggest challenge in construction," Mel says, "was a 134-mile road in Iran. I had one other American with me, 4,000 Iranians and other nationals, 500 structures, five tunnels—one a mile and a quarter in length—and two bridges, each 150 meters long."

Shifting from one climate to another made additional demands.

"I left Saudi Arabia at 6:20 in the evening on TWA, and it was 134 degrees inside the air terminal which was then a little mud hut. Three weeks later I was in Iceland, and it rained, sleeted, or snowed for six months straight. Most places weren't fit for families."

Separation, isolation, and delayed communications compounded the normal rigors and decision-making of the registered cattle business, Mel points out.

"It was a challenge to make management decisions from half-way around the world, mating cows to a particular bull in the linebreeding program and not being able to see the results for 18 months ... then selecting the females which would always keep



"We started with the large-type Angus cows we felt would be the future of the Angus business. The demand for top heifers has always been great, and we oversold. If I were to do something over, I would have retained some of those heifers and expanded our operations. It's hard to buy outside heifers and still have herd uniformity. With Briggs as our leader, we'll continue our linebreeding program. We'll strive for a herd of 1,500-pound cows that will wean 750-pound calves." -Mel Jones.

the herd moving forward."

For many of those years, too, there weren't that many bulls to choose from, for Mel Jones envisaged a different kind of Angus than that popular three decades ago. He remembers popular mature "baby beef bulls" weighing 1,200 pounds. Our herd bulls have always been ton-plus bulls. Some buyers couldn't understand why we raised large Angus at that particular time."

And large sires they were. One of Mel's abiding goals of those years was to produce large Angus, larger than thought necessary or even possible. Mature weights of mature bulls was all he had to go on in the early years; when

performance testing came into vogue, he studied reports sent to him from the States, allowing him to compare weaning, yearling, and birth weights. Such data remains his prime criteria today.

"We must first get that calf on the ground," he emphasizes. "Structural soundness and eye appeal are related to a certain extent, although we have seen steers win shows that were too straight in the rear legs. We like a smooth backline and an animal with some thickness."

One of Mel's strongest convictions concerns breeder testing their bulls, either through stations or under controlled conditions on the ranch.

"We make a test run before I ever decide on anything. Year before last, I bred Briggs to five head. I got a 660-pound heifer, a 685-pounder, 695 pounds, and a 700-pound heifer, and the bull weighed 801 pounds during a period of 188-200 days. So, I'm well pleased on that." He gave "Briggs" only one chance on each mating, he says, "and then I moved him out."

Milk must be retained. "That's the one thing I've had through the years is milk—it's got to be there if you're going to sell to the commercial man. We strive for a 1,400-pound cow to wean a 700-pound calf. We're doing it. Now, since I've got Briggs, I'm going to go on up to a 1,500-pound cow providing she'll wean a 750-pound calf."

One's image of Mel Jones during the formative years might include a steamy jungle setting or



Six-foot and then some, Mel Jones demonstrates the scale of his new herdsire, R&J Briggs, a purchase from the R&J herd at Briggs. The bull was certified as weighing 3,110 pounds on his third birthday, last March. Mel says of him:

"He got up to around 3,400, and we pulled him off feed May 25 for a month. Then we put him back on feed for a while until Waymon (Waymon Ashley, Association regional manager for Texas) came to take pictures. We pulled him back off and he's still fleshy. He's an easy keeper and that's what we're striving toward."

"Briggs" is a mating from R&J Austin 13 and "Mamie," R&J Duchess 1239.

a baking desert hovel where a khaki-clad fellow is pouring over-when time permits-pedigree charts and performance data from bull test stations. Linebreeding's the core of this man's program with Wye Plantation and Marshall bloodlines the prominent features.

Mel Jones bought 36 females of Montgomery Marshall breeding in 1964. One bull, Montgomerys Marshall 39, weighing in at 2,380 pounds, was an influential sire as was Mr. Marshall who grew to 2,555 pounds at age five. Mel's number 5 cow was a Mr. Marshall daughter contributing a "tremendous impact" upon the herd. This cow never weaned a calf under 700 pounds at 200 days of age. Cow number 5 also provided a son whose mature weight hit

2,505 pounds. Several of his daughters are producing today in the Lazy J Spread herd.

When he decided it was time for an outcross, Mel kept size uppermost in his quest. As this was his first and only outcross, the decision was carefully plotted and he chose to use Great Northern via A.I. He paid \$100 per cow for semen plus a certificate fee and bred 12 cows this way.

One of the fruitful products was Lazy Marshall 55, dubbed "Nasty" for short because of a kick he planted on his owner. Nasty's three-quarter brother, Premier Jackpot, sired an outstanding female in the meantime, Premier Jackpot Dutchess, which weighed 2,060 and was one of the largest cows available at the time through

the R&J herd at Briggs, Tx.

Premier Jackpot also sired "Mamie," a beast R&J marketing manager Jim Reeves says "will die on the place," she's so respected. (Another, according to Reeves, is Perryville Esso Extra 17M.)

"I went down and felt of Mamie, and that's quite an animal," Mel said. "She's got height, she's got width, she's got everything. As she's the dam of Briggs, I could keep going with my linebreeding program." Premier Jackpot is Briggs' grandsire and intensifies the pedigree's thrust.

Mel generally follows the practice of mating bull cousins to heifer cousins. He states his goals as continuing maternal strength through linebreeding keeping milk, heavy weaning, and yearling

Some folks just have the knack. . .

It's a safe wager some of the most popular accounts in the realm of human interest are those special, even astounding relationships existing between people and animals. Stockmen of the traditional stripe get a glimpse now and then.

Those that see it often must be the teachers of guide dogs for the blind. Mel Jones can attest to the bond which develops.

"All I got is confidence in Katy. I depend on her 100 percent." At the Guide Dogs of the Desert school in White Water, Ca., there's a final test administered to both dog and new owner. They're left in the desert more than a mile from safety and security and must make their way back to the car and rendezvous.

Leading Mel around cacti, sand dunes, tin cans, and under tree branches, Katy made 100 detours around potential hazards. At last, a voice told Mel to reach out; he felt the car's door handle.

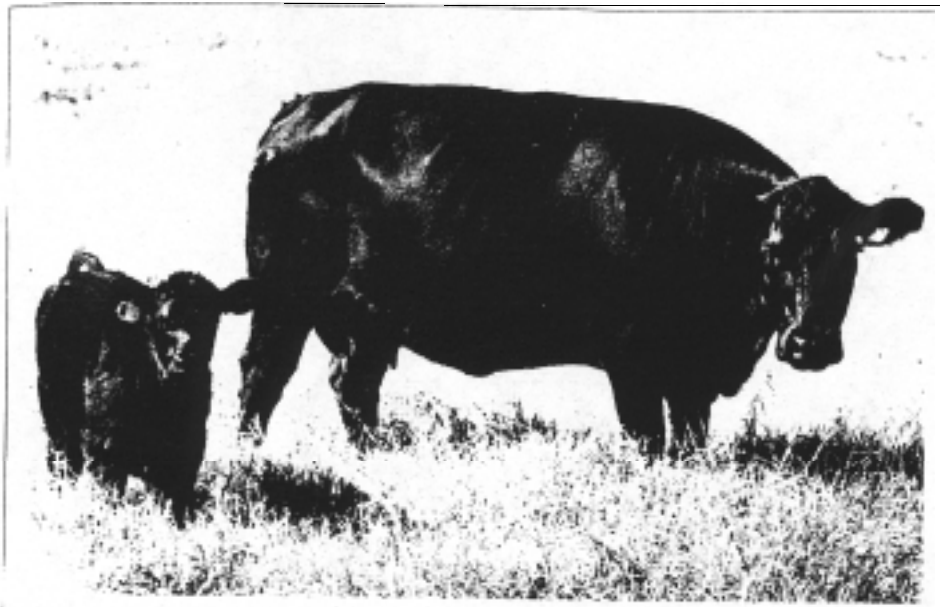
Each dog must adjust to the owner's voice and personality. As Mel has no feeling in his left leg, Katy had to modify her training pace to his slower walk. Katy is also trained to shift quickly and act as a brace should Mel stumble or fall. Guide dogs keep pressure on the harness and essentially pull their owner for added safety.

Katy has learned the meaning of "house," "barn," "feed trough," or "Briggs." Mel fell over a concrete slab early in their relationship and Katy has never forgotten. Now she'll lead and block him around the obstacle as if embarrassed by the mishap.

She alerts to low-lying branches and even



Katy began her guide dog training when only a few weeks old at Guide Dogs of the Desert in White Water, Ca. Training with a new master or mistress consumes a 28-day period. She was 18-months old when she flew home with Jones and joined the family.



The number eight cow weaned a 801-pound calf sired by Briggs. Mel Jones: "We have culled each generation mainly for milk and for the weight of her calf at weaning."

weights at a level well ahead of breed averages. He believes size will prove meaningless if at the expense of easy keeping.

"The cattleman just cannot creep feed calves and sell them at the present market. You've got to have something that's an easy keeper to satisfy the commercial cattleman today," Mel asserts. "You've got to have a program that weans off a heavy calf from a cow that's thrifty.

"We've been after a heavy-bodied animal that will hold the grass and that will keep on grass."

Mel normally winters his cows cheaply on coastal bermuda hay only. But, last year he found cottonseed cake so cheap, he fixed some troughs for feeding three pounds every other day plus mineral and free-choice hay.

cowpies, an ability mothers of reckless farm toddlers might appreciate.

Mel's brother Jerry tells of attending the Ft. Worth Stock Show with Mel and Katy. "We were following a calf going into the ring, and she kept nudging Mel. So Mel asked me, 'What in the world is she doing? And I said, 'That calf's dropping on the path and she's walking you around it.' "

Aside from serving as a physical guide and watchdog, Katy is tuned to her master's mood and state of health.

Mel enjoyed good health, though a diabetic, and perfect vision until his eyes began hemorrhaging. Then began a harrowing series of freezing, laser treatments, and incision operations. Nine operations were performed, and the verdict was a grim one, namely, replacing the optic nerve. Little hope remained.

The erosion of self worth became one of Me's greatest crosses to bear during this bleak interlude. After an active life and responsibility for crews numbering up to 4,000, Mel Jones found himself alone and afraid to go outside.

"You have no sense of balance or direction," he says of blindness. "There is no way you can walk a straight line. You must have a starting place, otherwise you're always confused. Eating loses its appeal."

But with the help of Lorraine, the Denison, Tx. Lions Club, his family, and Katy, Mel is enjoying a new surge of satisfaction and rewards. from his lifetime involvement with beef cattle. Breeding the largest Angus bull known to exist represents a triumph, the effect of which may ripple across' the Angus community for some time.

For Mel, it's the fruit of a heartfelt love for good stock. Mel's always been a native

stockman, and the proof is evident in the performance and temperament of his cattle friends.

"I know all the cattle well," he says. "If you tell me the tag number; I get an exact picture in my mind of that animal."

Mel checks the length, width, and cleanliness of each calf, feeling their skin, briskets, and legs. With 38 years' experience, he can tell which is his best animal.

Jim Reeves appreciates the uncanny touch Mel has developed, but what he considers a marvel is the response from the herd, especially its seasoned members. "I think the whole herd senses he's handicapped. He can go-up to Briggs like no one else can." Mel tells this story on Briggs.

"I dropped my cane, and I was down. on the ground reaching around for it., When I raised up I was under him, and so I crawled on through to the other side. He just stood there."

(Try that with your typical bull, even a show bull.)

"I could never drive my cattle, even, when I could see. But I could say; 'C'mon babies, let's go to the lot,' and everyone would follow. me."

The flock knows its shepherd's voice and all; such a trust may symbolize the ultimate in husbandry. Mel Jones knows the feeling. Others may spend a lifetime among their herds and flocks and never know such communion. If that's a compensation, for losing one of his senses, those. of us looking on from the sidelines can simply say, "Bravo!"

The only way to tolerate being blind is to feel that for some reason the Old Master saw fit for you to be blind,' says Mel Jones.

That reason may be coming clearer with each passing day.

Mel relates Briggs had to be cut off supplement as he kept getting too heavy. "He went to the mineral trough when he couldn't get feed, and he ate 50 pounds of 14-percent calcium and phosphorus. So I cut off his mineral, too." Rather like the adolescent every home has had at one time or another, an Angus version of football's "Refrigerator."

Briggs once ran his weight up to an estimated 3,400 pounds, but Mel felt it was simply too much.

"We've gone as far as we want to go with him, but I did want to get a weight established on a certified scale, with witnesses, and that was 3,110."

The Nasty bull was no slouch when it came to gaining ability and easy keeping. His official 140-day test produced an ADG of 4.87 pounds on 20 pounds of 10-percent protein plus hay. "He was the easiest keeper you ever saw. He'd eat hay and stay fat summer and winter, didn't make any difference. Oh, he might drop a hundred pounds from summer to winter."

Mel's brother Jerry characterized the Nasty bull as a "regular pet. Wonderful temperament."



Lorraine Jones. The couple have two sons, Al and Jim, both involved in retail businesses.

"He was the cleanest bull in the front end I'd ever seen. You could put a straight edge under his brisket. He was at least two feet wide in front, and his legs were out on the corners."



Grandfather Jones used the brand, the Lazy J, displayed by Jim Reeves, marketing director for R&J Ranch, Briggs, Tx. Jerry Jones, Melvin's brother, is on the right and is the informal custodian of the family history:

"We were run out of Tennessee by Indians. Our family left right in front of a raid. One of the Indian girls they had befriended came and warned them just in time, and as they were leaving, the house was set afire. In 1858, there were only five ranches between the Red River and Denison, and our family held one of them."

Listening between the lines, one gets the notion Briggs may be the center of attention at present, but Nasty holds a special place in the family's history and was the generator of many things good for the program.

Mel is pleased with another R&J purchase, "Renegade," a son of Briarhill Bartman. His heaviest calf came from cow number 20 at 725 pounds.

Mel's plan was to put Briggs, now proven, over Renegade daughters. "But, I kinda got carried away and sold off those 20 females," he laughs. "We got lots of compliments on that set of heifers."

The Mel Jones Angus endeavor languished in doldrums after he lost his sight. But, the arrival of a guide dog and the support of his faithful partner Lorraine, helped Mel chart a new course and restored his interest and vigor. Both husband afar and wife at home laid the foundation for the good things of today. R&J Briggs is an outcome and a new opportunity.

"We've got a couple of Esso daughters which are known for heavy milking ability. I'm running a test on one of these in particular. Her granddaddy on the dam side was R&J Ike, a full brother to R&J Duchess, "Mamie." So I'm going to try to get two shots of Mamie.

Then when I breed Briggs to this daughter of Esso and granddaughter of Ike, that'll be two shots of Mamie. I'm anxious to see what that's going to do."

Jim Reeves says of the plan: "That's probably just as important or more than two direct shots of Duchess. She's our very top foundation cow."

One can bet Mel Jones will "see" the results with the same clarity and precision as a sighted person. His talent for mating and matching is clearly not handicapped, and it may even be said the cloud that settled over his life and future in 1978 bore a silver lining.

Thanks to Lorraine, Katy, a host of other supporters, and for tomorrow a bull named Briggs, the Mel Jones saga is opening a new and exciting volume. Throughout his adventurous life, Mel's witnessed sights few others can claim; he's seen six of the world's seven wonders, for instance. During the stint in Ecuador, he remembers looking down on rainbows and watching helicopters disappear below him into the clouds.

Perhaps he sees those memories vividly as ever in the mind's eye, and one suspects the mental images he forms of his cattle are more deeply etched than those who look at their cattle but don't truly see them.