

Meet **BREAKDOWN**, the Angus Bull

With a name like that, what are the chances he'll survive as a herd sire?

BY BARB BAYLOR ANDERSON

Breakdown doesn't sound like much of a herd sire, does he? He could have the best expected progeny differences (EPDs) in the industry, but chances are slim anyone's going to want their cows anywhere near him. It's hard to get past the image of his name.

But it makes the point that when it comes to naming Angus bulls, you have to tap your creative juices to choose great names for the great ones; or, like *Breakdown*, you could lose out on marketing opportunities — great EPDs or not.

"Naming a bull can be a difficult thing to do for producers who don't enjoy the task, but a name can make or break you from a marketing perspective," says Julie McMahan, Creative Exchange, Fort

Worth, Texas, who works with both horse and cattle breeders to develop marketing and advertising materials. "A name can be a springboard for a good bull. I personally like to see a name be memorable without departing too much from the pedigree."

Marketing a name

McMahan's advice will become more important as Angus breeders operate in an increasingly competitive industry saturated with sire summaries and other valuable performance data. Whether you want to catch the attention of commercial cattlemen or the producer next door, your bulls' names can become an extension of your operation and can advertise the traits your bulls offer.

"We see a lot more performance-type names that help you differentiate from so many brothers from the same sire," McMahan says. "For example, there are so many 6807 sons out there that proper names for the best ones are easier to remember and help set the top sons apart."

Brian McCulloh, Woodhill Farms, Viroqua, Wis., agrees. "When we sold Woodhill BV Bando 1187-189 to Accelerated Genetics, the first thing we did was change his name," he says. "Bando is part of so many

bull names that, in this case, Woodhill BV Bando 1187-189 became Confidence."

Don Trimmer, beef genetics manager for Accelerated Genetics, Baraboo, Wis., worked with McCulloh in changing the bull's name. "You have to choose a name people remember, something you can build on from an advertising perspective," he says.

"Confidence is a low-birth-weight bull, so by changing his name we can sell his traits and use the tagline, 'Breed your heifers with Confidence.'"

Mark Duffell, general manager of Whitestone Farm, Aldie, Va., uses a similar strategy. "When we named Equity, we decided to play off his name for marketing the traits that the bull offers," he says. "We had 'credit cards'

made up with raised letters on them that carried the information about the bull. That stirred up a lot of interest."

When to name him

McCulloh says some breeders have found you can name a bull too soon. He senses a growing reliance on using the traditional farm prefix, then the sire, then the tattoo number, at least initially, and paying the fee later to change names of the most promising and salable sires.

"If you name bulls at registration time, and 120 days later you find the bull is a disappointment, you've already stepped out and bared your soul," he says. "By naming bulls in a generic sense first, no bulls are singled out, and you can evaluate cattle from an objective standpoint. You can't always make the determination from Day 1 that you have a great bull on your hands. But you can rename him when he becomes a top seller or performer."

"If we think a bull will be sold as a registered animal, then we give it a unique name. It is also good to try to incorporate sires and/or dams to keep family lineages going," Duffell says. "And while we like to give names a lot of consideration, when you

register 300 to 500 head of cattle per year, time is also a factor."

Duffell says the other advantage of including a farm prefix and sire information is that commercial cattle operators recognize and even look for that information to secure certain genetics.

"Commercial producers recognize the good bulls in this industry," he explains. "If you have a Traveler son and identify him as such, commercial producers pretty much know what traits they will get."

Finding a name

But Trimmer adds, "Producers often want to maintain their farm prefix for distinction. You should also choose a catchy name and a slogan that ties into the bull's breeding value or parentage to get the most mileage."

McCMahon encourages breeders to think graphically also.

"Consider your logo possibilities. You can advertise the right bull name graphically as effectively as you can advertise the bull with ad copy," she says. "It can be a successful way to create an identity for your animal."

Both Duffell and McCulloh start with the thesaurus for brainstorming names. Duffell also browses baby-name books, while McCulloh combs through current events and looks at other breed and species publications.

"Be careful with the thesaurus. The words you choose should be easy to pronounce and interpret," McCulloh cautions. "You should also be conscious not to use bull names that may carry a negative connotation from the past."

Alternately, consider names that tie in with a sire's success. For example, McCulloh names Woodhill Scotchman sons using *Tartan*, and he named PAPA Forte 1921 sons *Fortitude* and *Fortress*. Duffell used similar tactics with PAPA Durabull, sire of *Dependabull* and *Reliabull*. Duffell also considers geography, using *Shenandoah*, which is Whitestone's location.

"It is important to come up with names that are easy to say and remember," Duffell says. "Sometimes a name just pops in your head, like *Battalion*. We chose it for no rhyme or reason other than it sounded good."

