

The Day Second Took Champion

George Crenshaw goes into the National Western history books as the only showman to win champion with a second-place entry.

Story & photos by **Corinne Blender**

There are many memories of Angus cattle that have been named champions at the National Western Stock Show (NWSS) in Denver, Colo. Dust off the books from 60 years ago when a rather unique win was recorded at the NWSS steer show. That win was commemorated at the 2002 show.

George Crenshaw, Shamrock Farms, Manhattan, Kan., remembers when the judge pulled his Angus steer out of the lineup during the grand champion drive in 1942.

"He didn't slap my steer on the rear, but said, 'Son, move your steer over there,' and he gestured to an area a little removed from where he was working the six steers," the 78-year-old Crenshaw says. He figured the judge was just getting him out of the way. The champion Angus steer had been in the same class as his, making him the only second-place steer up for grand champion.

His steer, Lazy Lad, had been named reserve Angus steer in the junior show. That placing earned the 18-year-old young man the right to exhibit the animal in the open show where he, again, claimed reserve grand champion Angus steer.

In 1942, there were only three breeds of cattle shown in Denver. The classes were broken down into Angus, Hereford and Shorthorn. Grand champion overall was selected from these breed champions. When Crenshaw was asked to move his steer out of the lineup no other steers, including the champion Angus steer, had been selected.

"I walked him over there and was leaning on my show stick as



► To commemorate the anniversary of Lazy Lad's victory, George and June Crenshaw (far right) presented an antique treadle sewing machine they had restored and made into an end table to the owners of the grand champion female in the ROV Angus show. Also shown are (from left) associate judge Tim Fitzgerald; lead judge Quintin Smith; owners Lynn and Paul Hill, Champion Hill; and owner Ronald Dobson, Dobson Pulpwood Farm.

an 'interested spectator' when he pulled the champion Hereford from the lineup," Crenshaw remembers. "That's when he came over and slapped my steer."

That year the judge pulled the second slotted Angus steer, Lazy Lad, naming him the grand champion steer at the 1942 NWSS.

Controversial from the start

Crenshaw grew up in Harper County, showing cattle through 4-H at the county fair and the Kansas National Fat Stock Show in Wichita. The registered Angus herd would begin from the family's desire to raise their own steers rather than taking the time to scour the neighboring commercial herds for that perfect animal as they had done in the past.

The foundation female bloodlines included that of Ida 13th of Sunbeam, the mother of Lazy Lad. These same bloodlines still run through the Crenshaw herd today.

In 1941, Crenshaw said he knew Lazy Lad was the best steer he had ever had when he went to Wichita. Folks in the barns told him that he would be the winner this year — no one would beat him.

"Well, they did. I had the champion Angus steer, but the champion Hereford was grand champion," he says. "I had the reserve grand champion for the third year in a row."

Reserve grand champions seemed to taunt Crenshaw throughout his early show career. After the Wichita show, he knew Lazy Lad would go

through the sale ring, and he had hoped to get 25¢/pound (lb.), like he had for all of his other reserve grand champions.

"I about went into shock when the auctioneer dropped his 'hammer' at \$19.50 per hundred, less than \$200 for an outstanding reserve grand champion steer," Crenshaw says. The grand champion had sold just before to Phillips 66 Petroleum Co., who always paid 66¢/lb. for grand champion animals. "I refused to put 'Lad' into the trailer that would take him to the slaughterhouse, but took him back and tied him in his stall."

The gavel had fallen on what was deemed Lad's future. The auctioneer told Crenshaw that the only way Lad would go home with him would be for the

steer purchaser to release the animal. It was up to the buyer.

"He turned to me with a big smile on his face, shook my hand and told me, 'the steer is yours, and I hope you have good luck with him,'" Crenshaw remembers of his brief meeting with the buyer.

To Denver

Getting to the next show would be no small feat for the young man and his prized steer.

"My sister, Helen, wrote Mr. Hollinger of Wheatland Farms at Chapman, Kan., and asked if I and my steer could ride to Chicago in the boxcar with his cattle," Crenshaw says. Hollinger agreed to let the two ride with them, but said they should travel to Denver instead. Crenshaw and Lad both would experience their first boxcar trip.

Crenshaw rode from Chapman, Kan., to Denver in the boxcar. When the train finally arrived, he says, he remembers sitting there less than 100-200 feet from the unloading dock.

"You could sit there for five or six hours until the spirit caused the railroad people to move your boxcar up to the unloading dock," he says. "It didn't do any good to fuss at them or to get upset, because you would probably just sit there that much longer."

Back in those days, it wasn't unusual for the cattlemen to stay in the barns. Crenshaw was stalled across the street from the main arena in the old mule barn.

"I couldn't believe how many fellows stayed over night in that old, cold, damp barn," he says.

Staying with the cattle gave his father enough time to look over the rest of the competition, and Crenshaw remembers going



► From left, George and June Crenshaw present Elana Switzer, owner of the reserve champion female in the junior show, a set of knives.

into the show knowing that a steer from Nebraska would be his only competition. That same steer would in fact place as the champion Angus steer. The reserve champion title would again taunt Crenshaw, and he decided that he would not go back into the grand champion drive.

"When I didn't show up in the ring at 1 o'clock, Mr. Tomhave, our breed secretary, came into our barn and told me to get my steer into the ring," Crenshaw says. "I didn't have much time to get Lad ready, and perhaps that helped."

The same judge had placed the classes throughout the show, but a new judge was called in for

the grand champion drive. Crenshaw and Lad would write their page in history from that moment on.

The *Denver Post* carried a feature on the 18-year-old farm boy from Attica, Kan., who had won with his 4-H steer, on its front page. Lad's picture was surrounded by news of the war, as the attack on Pearl Harbor had happened barely five weeks before. Crenshaw remembers their story was one of the most publicized of champions at the NWSS.

NWSS history would take note, too.

"Prior to Lazy Lad winning the grand champion steer award, the rule simply read: grand

champion steer — breed champions and reserve breed champions competing," Crenshaw says. "In the 1943 rule, it read: grand champion steer — breed champions and reserve breed champions competing. Reserve breed champions are only eligible for reserve grand champion and then only if their breed champion was grand champion."

This time, Crenshaw did have to let the gavel drop on Lad after the show. He sold for \$1/lb.

Crenshaw used the money to purchase both a war bond and Lad's full sister. Her bloodlines still exist in his herd today.

In Lad's honor

To commemorate Lazy Lad's victory of 60 years ago, Crenshaw and his wife, June, traveled to the 2002 NWSS to present special trophies to the grand champion and reserve grand champion females in the junior Angus show, and the grand champion Angus female in the open show. The female classes were chosen because the steer classes are no longer separated by breeds at the NWSS, and Crenshaw thought it only fitting for an Angus breeder to receive these special awards.

The couple presented knife sets to the top juniors. In the open show, they presented an antique treadle sewing machine they had restored and made into an end table. The table took countless hours of fine detailed craftsmanship to complete. For the Crenshaws, it was a labor of love, which helped them complete one of the most memorable chapters in their family's long history with the National Western.



► From the money he made selling Lazy Lad after the 1942 National Western Stock Show, George Crenshaw purchased a war bond and the steer's full sister. Her bloodlines still exist in his herd today.

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