

SPIT-AND-POLISH PERFORMANCE

Booth's Cherry Creek Ranch is home to a reputable Angus herd.

BY TROY SMITH

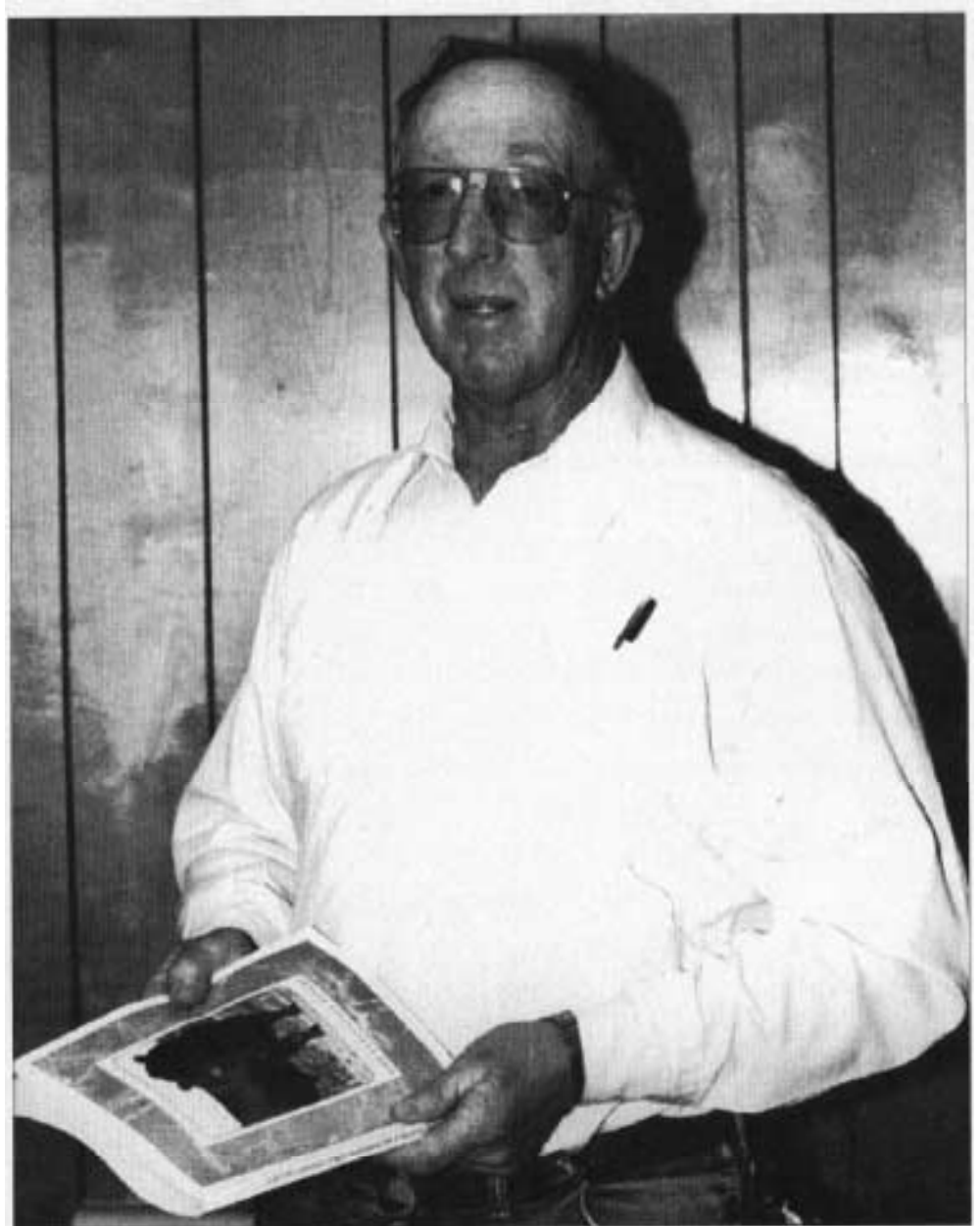
Gordon and ~~MayAnn~~ Booth, along with sons Casey and Shawn, run a reputation Angus outfit in a disciplined manner. They've been involved with some other breeds too, but none have overshadowed their Angus herd.

The Angus preference traces back to Gordon's maternal grandfather, George Haas, who was a respected veterinarian and Angus breeder.

For the meticulous, disciplined work ethic, give more than a little credit to the example set by Gordon's paternal grandfather, George Booth. Booth was a horseman, however, not a cattleman. Born in England, he served as a guard for British royalty before ascending to his true calling as a trainer and handler for the royal family's prize horses.

"He was put in charge of horses which were sold and shipped to buyers in America," tells Cordon Booth. "He crossed the Atlantic seven times and the last time he stayed."

(right) Following his father's example, Gordon Booth has strived to identify superior performance cattle and get rid of the rest.



It wasn't planned that way, but Gordon says when the seventh voyage ended, no one appeared to claim the horses. "They had been sold to a Wyoming buyer so Granddad accompanied his charges, journeying by train to their western destination.

"He stayed and went to work in Wyoming," adds Gordon. "He was a spit-and-polish kind of guy. Everything had to be just right. He handled a lot of horses, especially draft horses for six-up hitches. He worked with saddle horses too, and trained one that later became a personal mount for Buffalo Bill Cody. The controversial range detective Tom Horn is also supposed to have owned a horse trained by my grandfather."

Gordon's father, Henry Booth, preferred cattle and worked into the Haas operation. Gordon was the first-born grandchild and showed an early interest in cattle. A gift of an orphaned Angus heifer spurred him on and Gordon started tagging after Granddad Haas, picking up on old-time Angus pedigrees.

In 1956 young Gordon showed the reserve champion Angus steer at the National Western Stock Show. The steer sold for \$395 and Gordon turned around and bought two heifers from Nebraska breeder Max Hoffmeister. Gordon says the heifers would have been considered good by today's standards. They were long and thick but too tall to place in the show ring of that era. That pair of heifers cost \$400.

"He went over budget on that purchase and he's done it several times since then," quips **MaryAnn**, Gordon's wife of 36 years.

Gordon talked his granddad into selling some more heifers and joined Henry in their own separate beef operation. Henry had started



MaryAnn Booth keeps computerized herd records and says the best performing Booth cattle trace back to a handful of "super" cows.

Booth's Cherry Creek Ranch with a set of cows purchased from the Davis herd in Colorado. He used Haas bulls at first, but emphasis on performance rather than the show ring, became a driving force. In their search for practical performance, Booths accessed genetics from some notable Angus herds.

"We added some cattle bought from Martin Jorgensen in South Dakota," says Gordon. "We used cattle from the Algoma line and Rito N Bar bull. Those cattle had a lot of meat and muscle, and the Emulous cattle had frame and milk. They made a good combination and gave our operation a real shot in the arm."

Gordon feels fortunate to have received an education in Emulous cattle prior to their widespread popularity. The Booths started using artificial insemination (AI) in 1969 and Emulous 30 was among the bulls used in the early years. The bull boasted 4.89 pounds

of gain, offering the growth and frame many people were looking for at that time.

Another AI sire prominent at that time was the Jorgensen-raised Algoma 92. The first home-raised sire making a significant contribution was Booths own **Rito** 449.

By the early 1970s, Booth bulls were offered at numerous consignment sales in Nebraska and Wyoming. Gordon, MaryAnn and their sons, Jody, Casey and Shawn combed and brushed bulls to be sold through the five or six sales they used. Sending bulls to prominent bull tests, including Montana's Midland and Ogallala, Neb., helped draw attention to the Booth-bred program.

Emphasis on performance and a close relationship with Martin Jorgensen led to Booths' involvement with the Ideal Beef Systems group. Through this association, Booths developed genetic selection and marketing

programs with other performance-minded breeders like South Dakota's Doug Hoff and Roger Jauer of Iowa. And in 1975, Booth's Cherry Creek Ranch established its own annual production sale.

The early '80s led to an interest in cattle bred by Iowa's Dave Nichols.

"We really liked his Landmark bull and used him for several years," says Gordon. "We still have some of his daughters in our herd along with some daughters of Nichols Promise and Nichols Trademark."

Trying hard to never get too comfortable with their breeding program, Gordon and MaryAnn continued to search for fresh genetics. They admit that sometimes they didn't have enough money to buy some of the individuals they found impressive. For example, they were contending bidders on VДАР New Trend 315, but just

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didn't have enough dollars to buy him.

"We tried to buy Leachman Tonto and couldn't," says Gordon. "But we used him through AI and we did buy Leachman Express who was out of the same cow as Prompter. She was a super cow. New Style, Realist and Paycheck are tightly related bulls we've used and the cow is largely the reason we picked them."

The cow makes a difference. For the last 10 years, Booths have relied heavily on home-raised bulls, like Triple Threat, which are out of cows identified as top producers.

"We won't consider using any bull until we know the background of his dam and her production record," explains MaryAnn. "It just eliminates more of the

guesswork."

MaryAnn spends more time than she cares to admit, sitting in front of the computer updating herd records. It's been interesting and rewarding, she says, to see the best performing animals almost always trace back to a handful of top-producing cows.

About 15 of those cows are the donors for their embryo transplant (ET) program. The bottom third of their 500-head herd are the recipients.

"We're pretty excited about our embryo transplant work," says MaryAnn. "It was getting expensive to hire the work done and cover transportation to a lab. So we sent both Casey and Shawn to ET school and now we can do it at home."

Booths call the ET market very promising with embryos

worth \$300 to \$500. Demand for their bulls has been steady; approximately 200 bulls are sold annually.

Just as they have sought guaranteed performance, Booths are **planning** to confirm the carcass quality of their cattle. Their confidence was bolstered when a Booth-bred steer produced the grand champion carcass at the 1995 Wyoming State Fair. Weighing 1,140 pounds live, the steer's USDA average Choice carcass weighed 715 pounds, had .3 inch of backfat and was a Yield Grade 1.

Gordon believes the quality is there and reaching Choice is a matter of management. To provide it, they are taking steps to follow up on cattle raised by their bull-buying customers. That's been complicated in the past since most Booth buyers sell

calves in the fall.

"We've been working with the manager of the Pitchfork Ranch here in Wyoming," says Gordon. "They already DNA test their cattle and can trace carcass characteristics back to the sire."

Octogenarian Henry Booth never dreamed that technology such as DNA testing and embryo transplant could contribute to the cattle ranch he started years ago.

"Things have really changed and they change faster all the time," says Gordon. "We know we don't dare get too comfortable or we'll get left behind. But if things seem to be spinning too fast, we listen to Dad and usually get back on track. Around here, he's still the voice of common sense."

