

# Casting Long Shadows

*Breaking new pathways takes a toll, yet ultimately provides its reward. Bill Borror paid some dues swimming upstream, but his pioneering laid the groundwork for much of what became important in the performance movement of the 1960s. Perhaps he filled a destiny and certainly honored a heritage of service exemplified by his father, Dale E., who passed on this spring at the age of 86. The elder Mr. Borror personified the old school where duty and charity were sacred obligations. In that spirit, Bill Borror continues making his contribution to the beef industry. . . .*

One of the joys of his life lately, says Bill Borror, is hosting animal science students. Four local colleges make the pilgrimage annually to Borror's Tehama Angus Ranch near Gerber, Ca. Purpose: to be exposed to Bill's theories and experience with beef cattle breeding.

"They haven't missed a year since 1972," Bill notes. His hope in conducting the tour and sermon is that the students will embrace the performance concept at an early point in their career. Bill Borror did so. And the fascination continues.

"It took me many years to properly evaluate the 'real' values of performance breeding," he confides.

The numbers have not always been kind to him, however. He recalls one painful experience, that of watching his bulls barely grade then sell for little over bologna prices back in the 1960s.

"I was running against the tide pretty strong. I'll never forget it. I took three bulls down to the Bonanza Bull Sale—at that time the biggest Angus bull sale in the West. Two weighed between 1,600 and 1,700 pounds, a pretty monstrous kind of animal.

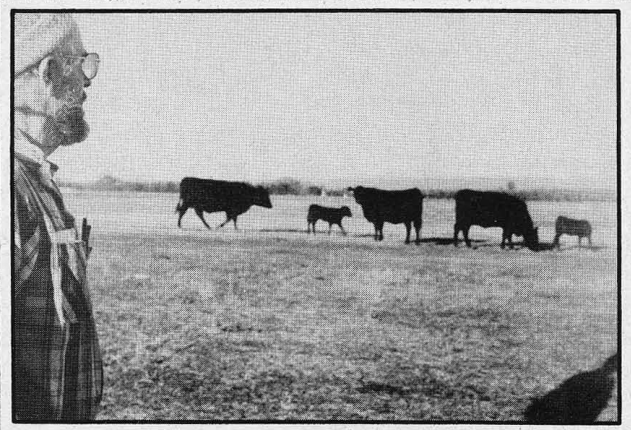
"No, it wasn't (impressive)!" he insists. "One didn't make the sale, the other two barely graded, and they sold at the bottom of the sale. I got \$500 apiece. They were too plain. I really got discouraged there for a while."

Five years later, Bill was vindicated. An international champion emerged from the same bloodlines. He didn't show the bull, "but I raised it. During that period of

time, the judges changed a lot more than the cattle did."

Bill belongs to that elite group of nonconformists that began keeping records of some kind way back in 1943. The University of California Record of Performance Program was his first guiding light, then it was the California BCIA program until 1970. He's since converted to the Angus Herd Improvement Records program.

Bill's respect for numbers has a long and dogged history. Along with recordkeeping, cow selection became a keen interest. The Tehama herd is a closed herd. Every cow earning a berth on the ranch is a product of the female factory begun more than 40 years ago. Of course, outside influence from sire lines has made significant impact. Bill cites one bull, a grandson of Dor Mac Bardolimere 3, as being pretty fundamental to future progress. The bull was purchased in 1965 and offered a yearling weight 150 pounds heavier than contemporaries. One hundred of his daughters were mated in 1972 to Rito 149 and Ankonian Dynamo in 1972. It was the fourth year of A.I. on Tehama pastures, and the combination of these sires,



**Bill Borror**  
Tehama Angus Ranch  
Gerber, California

a sound, performance-based cow herd, and A.I. formed a powerful triad.

Still Bill claims he hasn't yielded to temptation, even with all those good cows as constant companions: he hasn't a favorite.

"Well, I'll tell you . . . I quit having any favorite cows. No one has ever made a perfect one. Same thing with bulls. Everyone has the answer to the bull problem, but they don't have it for long."

Bill appreciates the impact of EPDs and accuracy computations in modern sire selection. While he and his fellow breeders can use the data with confidence, Bill believes the predictability and the stacking of pedigrees for a single trait can

*"this new life"*

## "this angus life"

lead some into an unbalanced program where their bulls excel in one trait at the expense of others.

"Single trait selection just doesn't work," he says, "when you keep selecting for it generation after generation. I'm also talking about weight to weight, not just height to height.

"And I've done it too. When the thing turned around in the early 1970s, we had some of the biggest cows in the states. In general, I think the ones I have now are plenty big enough to raise the bulls that will satisfy my customers. There's not a whole lot of sense in making them bigger."

But he could. "If you have a bull in there and his figures are 80-90 percent accurate, he's going to breed that way."

He reserves the right to be wrong, but Bill doesn't believe the breed needs to devote a lot of attention to bloodlines in the future. "Not like our forefathers had to. When we study that sire summary, I think we could do the best job for the breed by analyzing the EPDs.

"With EPDs we don't have to worry about ratioing these calves against some other calves that are sired by bigger bulls. We can still analyze their growth potential. I'm not trying to compare calves from a sire that has a 27-pound EPD for yearling weight with one with a 75-80 pound yearling EPD."

With these premises in mind, Bill Borrer sets his goals: "Breeding cattle that will continue to fit the needs of our customers, whether real or predicted, will remain our goal. There is no single line of cattle that will fill everyone's needs. Those of us that will remain in the beef business are going to have to find our niche. The Angus breed is blessed with a wide spectrum of genetic material that can fit many different environmental and production schemes."

Isolating maternal elements of EPD is revealing to those like Bill Borrer who examine the data studiously. Now that such information is available, the selection decisions should be easier. Bill acknowledges he's made a mistake.

"I can show you some heifers in my breeding program that are going down the road pretty fast. I found their EPDs for milk are below breed average. I can't take that step backwards to get a little growth. I don't have that drawback in my older cows.

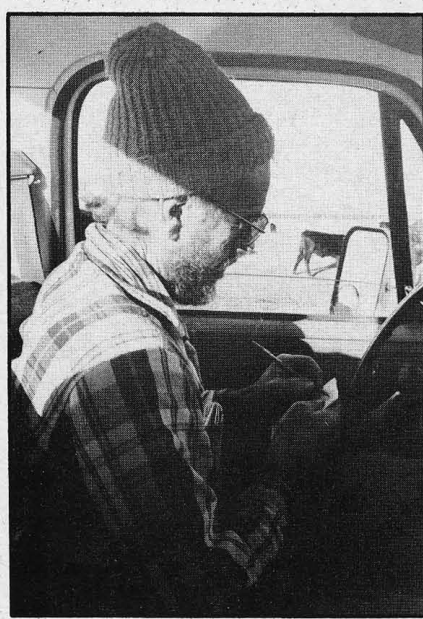
"I just wasted a generation," he continues. "I might salvage a few that look like they'll milk. We can avoid that with the Sire Evaluation Report we have today and its EPDs if we have the discipline to do it."

Losing a generation hurts. As Bill says, it takes a long time to recover and can compromise some

cherished goals. "You don't have that many (generations) to work with in your lifetime."

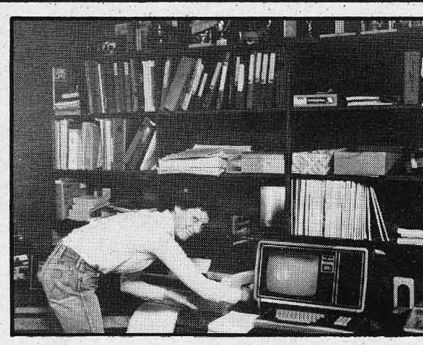
Bill continues to refine and search, and one suspects he enjoys the challenge and new revelations. For one who's been so identified with performance from its infancy, his attitude toward central tests represents a surprising departure and, perhaps in the eyes of some, even a breach of faith. But Bill is seeking new horizons. He appreciates the role of central tests for small breeders needing a visible market. For him, the central test no longer represents a tool for helping his customers.

"We've always been involved with it (central testing) at one place or another, and it's been good for us. But, it's come to the point where it's pretty much single trait selection again. It's useless for me in analyzing our breeding



*"We'll have a busy morning tomorrow. At this time of year we have a pretty easy time of it. In the morning we can pick out those in heat as they're muddy and such. I breed a number of cows without seeing them in actual heat. As long as we have one in heat to ride, we make out all right. We don't use a detector, and yet we'll get 90-95 percent of them bred.*

*"We've analyzed our records on our cows and heifers and I'm breeding a certain percentage of them to the lightest birth weight bulls I can find in the Sire Evaluation Report that have some growth potential. I can almost guarantee buyers they aren't going to have any problem breeding their heifers to these bulls."*



*Recordkeeper and data processor, Bill's daughter-in-law Linda provides the final word on which cow did what. Bill has also developed a commercial sideline—a computerized record management system for registered beef cattle herds called "BHIS," Beef Herd Improvement System—a program that integrates with Association records like AHIR. Association forms can be employed into the system and the blanks filled in at home by the breeder's computer. No tedious handwork is needed.*

*Ready access to maximize the usefulness of the data plus "screen prompts" to simplify the process for the computer-timid are features. Breeding season analysis, expected calving dates, sire summary, dam progeny reports, and archival storage capabilities are provided with BHIS.*

program," he says bluntly, citing environmental effects at home as playing too large an influence in some tests.

"It's become a contest where unless you use the highest growth bull you can find in the breed as your sire you're not going to do well in the test. There's not much use going to a test unless you want to try to win it. (But, for the majority of my customers, those aren't the kind of bulls they really need now.)"

Bill sees the central test continuing as a marketing tool for many breeders and, optimistically, a source of information combining test results and sire evaluation EPDs for a total performance diagram of the tested animals.

Predicting the future emerges as one of his obligations as a breeder, Bill believes. He looks ahead to anticipate the needs of his customers, looking farther ahead than they would typically. And, one of his pledges for that future is to engage in more one-on-one dialog with his customers

so he may better assess their needs.

Since his BIF honor in 1983, he's been stressing that area of his business and service, that and breeding toward the customer's future progress.

The customer of the future will be more critical, Bill predicts. Sire evaluation and identification of selection criteria for economic traits are the future of the breed, he suggests, as those experimenting with larger breeds return to Angus.

Clients of his region face environmental restraints as many are dependent on government rangelands. "Some have learned the limits of using larger bulls of other breeds. They're returning to the British. If we can keep the Angus cow for what she's known for, I'm sure we'll still have a market for our bulls."

Nothing's automatic, he's quick to recognize. Losing a market for "heifer" bulls, for one.

"I was as guilty as anyone for getting our bulls a little too large

for commercial men to use on heifers. But, we never could get paid for raising this type. Then folks went to Longhorn bulls. Now that they realize they can't sell those little buggers, they want to go back to Angus bulls for heifers. But you don't sell those by picking the smallest bulls in the lot and passing them as heifer bulls."

Bill himself might be just a little surprised that he's been at this game more than 40 years, chalking up numbers, recording, computing. From the crude mechanics and methods of that WWII era to the electronic wizardry of today, it's been an exciting, sometimes dizzying ascent. In 1943, there were 50 cows. Now there's 400. Balancing resources has been the persistent concern. Irrigated pastures have been developed over 450 acres seeded to fescue, dallasgrass, and ladino clover. All the feed is home-raised.

It's been a program, a life of constant expansion. More cows, more pasture every year, records, computerization, and certainly A.I. It deserves a special note.

"We started using A.I. in 1968," Bill says. "We were limited in our acreage here, we just couldn't turn out enough bulls to keep everything separate and so forth. Now, we're breeding the herd on 800 acres. The fall calvers are pretty much 100 percent A.I. bred. I might put a bull in to clean up the heifers.

"Most of the older cows haven't seen a bull in ten years!"

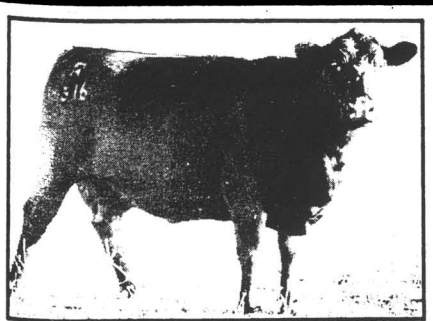
The Tehama Angus Ranch, though, exudes a kind of pioneering aura. Bill shares that the Romadale sheep breed was developed on the place in the 1930s.

And the pace goes on.

"I've got my boys here now. We bought 270 acres of farm ground three years ago, and we're raising almonds, alfalfa, sugar beets, and corn. There's lots to keep us busy."



*Bill Borrer and Mrs. Borrer (Sandy) at the 1983 awards ceremonies of the Beef Improvement Federation where Bill was recognized as the nation's Seedstock Producer of the Year.*



*"In years past, I used quite a few bulls from Martin Jorgenson—Rito and Bandolier breeding. We have quite a lot of Emulous blood in the cows."*

