



BLACK CANYON ANGUS

Built on Good Mother Cows

by Nancy Ann Sayre

A visit to the pastures of Black Canyon Angus in Maher, Colo., puts one in awe of the dramatic beauty found on the western slopes of the Rocky Mountains. Fifteen thousand acres 8,000 feet high, bordered on one side by a skyline of mountains and on the other by an abrupt 3,000-ft. drop into the Black Canyon, one fence, thousands of deer, elk and tourists . . . that is the summer grazing grounds for Dick Mott's 300 Angus cows.

The main ranch is 1,000 feet lower and 2,000 acres big. After lowering your eyes from the skyline, you cannot help but be impressed with the group of females in the Black Canyon herd. Big, functional females. And the young cows speak of the progress in motion.

That progress is a result of Mott's energy and his appreciation of the Angus breed. Commercial cattleman turned purebred breeder, Mott firmly believes in the Angus cow and her natural mothering ability, fertility and milk.

"The Angus cow is the best mother there is," he offers. "I know what guys face with other breeds because I've been there. These cows calve easily, milk well and breed right back. And they're anxious to mother those calves . . . in fact, I love to see a first-calf heifer try to roll me."

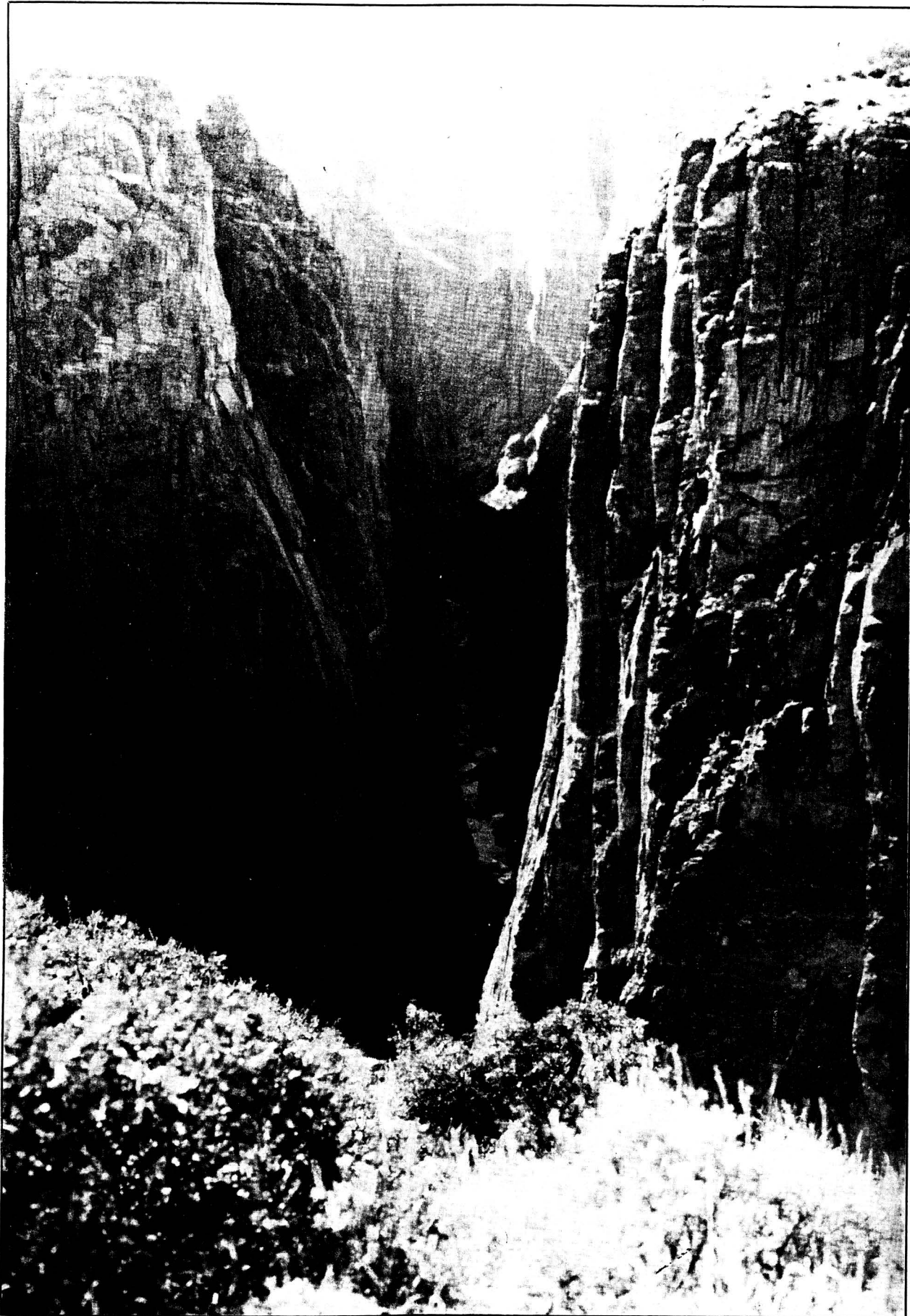
"We're in this for the females. I want cows that can produce, and the bulls just come along. I'm not worried about them except to this extent—I don't want any more race-

horse-type cattle. I want to keep some meat on them. You put those bulls in there (to sell) and you can see what ranchers pick. They want them tall, but they want some quarter on them."

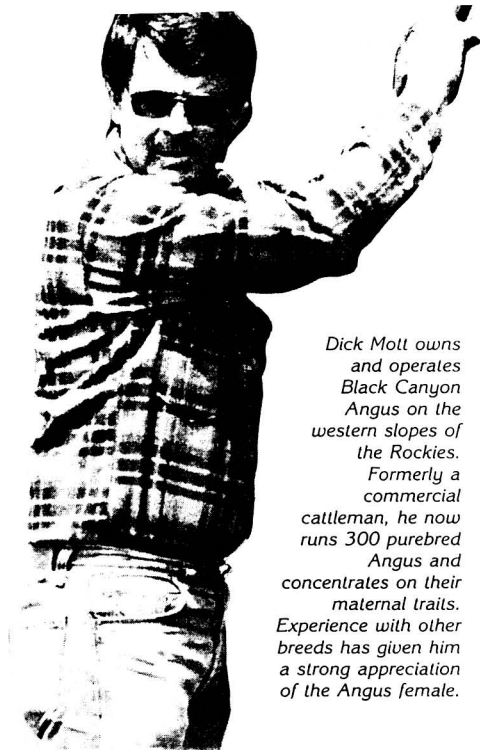
The Black Canyon operation depends on those commercial ranchers; Mott sells about 75 young bulls each year. Most of his customers are local (his cattle have sold out of state as far as Oregon, though) and most are commercial Hereford breeders. They buy Mott bulls to produce Angus-cross females, mainly black-baldies.

To assure that they not only produce well for Mott, but also pass on genetic strengths through sons, Black Canyon's 300 cows are treated much like commercial cattle in the area. "The only thing we do differently," comments Mott, "is A.I. everything. We breed about 45 days and settle close to 80 percent of the herd."

That A.I. work, done by Mott and Herb Van Schooten (he has worked at Black Canyon several years) follows a spring calving season. Cows drop calves between mid-March and early May in hay meadows located near the ranch's headquarters. After calving, each cow is moved to larger pastures, then on to rougher, cedar-covered hillsides. Cows in heat are detected by observation (usually from horseback) during the A.I. season, then bulls clean up naturally before the herd is moved up the mountain to summer range-land. Hay makes up the winter ration, fed January through May.



An abrupt 3,000-ft. drop into the Black Canyon is the pasture fence for much of Dick Mott's summer grazing land. The main ranch is located farther down the mountain (but still 7,000 ft. high) and draws its name from this scene.



Dick Mott owns and operates Black Canyon Angus on the western slopes of the Rockies. Formerly a commercial cattleman, he now runs 300 purebred Angus and concentrates on their maternal traits. Experience with other breeds has given him a strong appreciation of the Angus female.

Wrapping Up the Strong Traits

Inseminating nearly 250 cows is an ambitious undertaking for two men in a commercially-oriented mountain operation. Mott, though, feels the results are worth the effort. He has been taking full advantage of the genetic opportunity (and consistency) since he started in the Angus business.

His breeding program, which has zeroed in on Shoshone Viking GD60 for several years, reflects his belief in "wrapping up genetics" for increased predictability. Intense linebreeding is not the goal, rather Mott aims at concentrating certain genes with the greatest emphasis on maternal characteristics.

For now, Mott is strengthening the influence of two bulls in his program; all "Viking" daughters are bred to PS Power Play, "Viking" is used on all others. He insists on consistency and uniformity in his own calf crop. And he wants to be able to predict to a customer what a bull will produce . . . and be right.

"I've tried a lot of bulls that are good individuals," he explains, "but their calves are as erratic as a shotgun pattern—you get a good, big one and then you get a little rat. That's because there's nothing wrapped up there."

That, he says, is the reason he has stuck with the "Viking" bull; he has used him quite extensively for several seasons and says the calves are very consistent. The Black Canyon roster includes some 150 2-year-old and 3-year-old "Viking" daughters, plus a strong group of yearlings and baby calves. The daughters have grown and produced well. And "Viking" sons suit Mott's market well, heavy enough without being extreme.

Extremes have never appealed to Mott. By the time he got started with registered Angus, he knew what he wanted—thanks to

experience with other breeds and a close association with Lee Leachman.

From Commercial Cattle to Purebreds

Mott, son of a schoolteacher and himself a biology major at George Fox College in Newburg, Ore., got interested in the cattle business early. By the time he finished college, he had invested too much in land and cattle to change careers, so he and his father moved to the Maher area (from nearby Paonia) and expanded their commercial operation.

During the early 1970s, Leachman purchased groups of commercial heifers from Mott for his neighboring Triple L Ranch (Hotchkiss). Their relationship continued until the Triple L dispersion in 1975. At that point, Mott decided he wanted to enter the Angus business on his own. He knew the combination he wanted and purchased 75 Canadian Colossal daughters, bred to Ankonian Dynamo, in the dispersal sale.

Those females proved to be a solid herd beginning, but another important influence in Mott's start was the people he came to know through his work with Leachman and travels in purebred circles. One of those cattlemen was Tim Pierce, who worked with Mott after leaving Ken Caryl's Colorado operation.

Basic Performance is the Rule

Although Mott first chose to use "Viking" on the basis of his appearance in Reno, the

bull is best known now as a performance sire. Through continued use of the bull, Mott became acquainted with joint-owner Ben Lawson and the Bovagene organization. That group, made up of some of the nation's strongest performance breeders, has had an impact on Mott's philosophies, too.

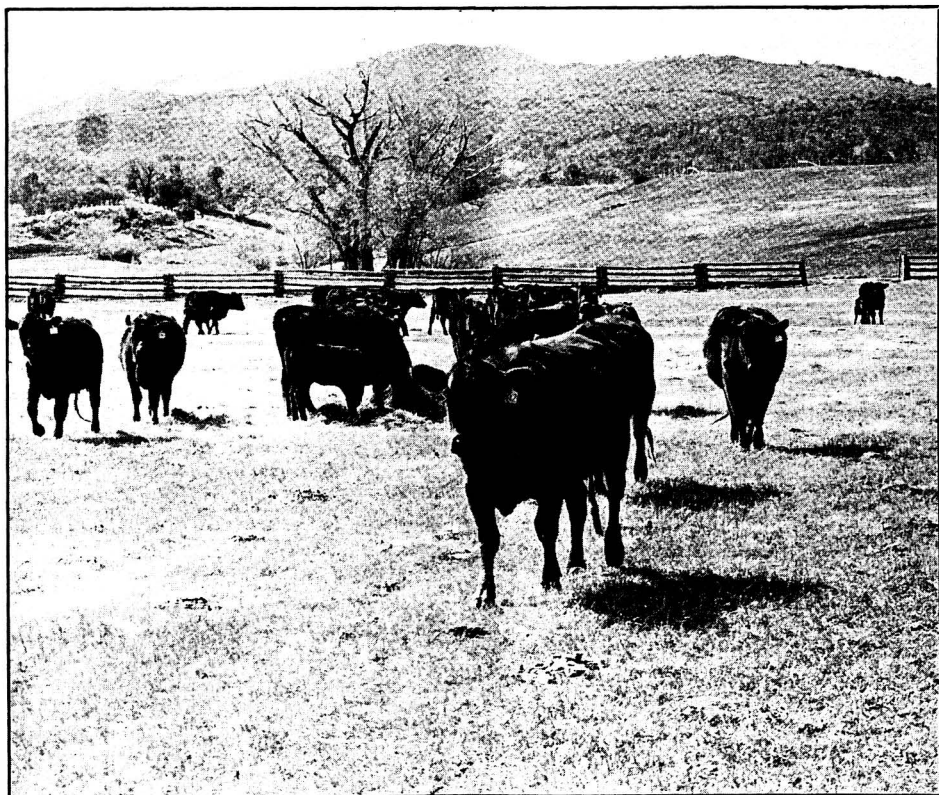
Although he professes not to be a real performance buff, his Black Canyon program strongly illustrates basic performance lessons and range-wise practices. Mott may not live by weights and ratios, but he keeps cows in his herd for just one reason, to perform.

Black Canyon records date back several years, and for the past two years Mott has put stronger emphasis on breeding values in his selection decisions. The most important criteria which his females must meet, however, remain very simple and constant—every individual must settle early, calve easily, milk, mother and breed back quickly. A bad udder is reason enough to cull a cow, and anything that shows up open or a late breeder during the fall pregnancy check will not stay long.

"To sell those is a hard lesson to learn," says Mott. "Especially if you've spent some money on a particular cow. You have to do it though.

"Another lesson I learned from Lee Leachman was never to sell your good females. I've never sold one from my top end."

In fact, Mott has sold very few females as registered stock. A high percentage of heif-



"We're in this for the females," says Mott. And his young females boast of the progress he is making.



The family of Dick and Faye Mott includes five children: From left: Kelly, Todd, Sandee, Troy, Faye, Dick and Darren.

ers are bred as replacement females each year; the majority of the remainder are fed out for slaughter.

Bulls, then, bring in the Black Canyon pay checks. Mott has hosted two annual bull sales, featuring yearling bulls. A few 2-year-olds sell (15 or so April-born calves are carried the extra year), but most area cattlemen

are using yearlings. Mott also participates in the relatively new Western Colorado Bull Test in Delta. This year he entered and sold eight yearlings; he feels that is his best form of advertising.

"Commercial cattlemen come in there from every breed and see what Black Canyon cattle have done," he explains. "Word-of-mouth advertising is really important and it's helped me."

And demand for Angus bulls, he feels, is good. More and more commercial breeders are after the black-baldy female—some are just beginning to cross their Herefords, while others are returning to that cross after breeding a few exotics.

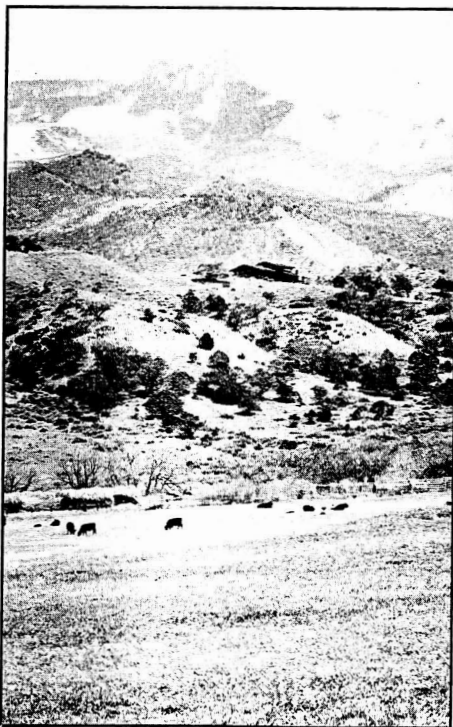
Those men are after efficient females and Mott is supplying bulls that will produce them, predictably. It's the way their mommas are bred.

"A commercial man wants a 1,050-lb. to 1,150-lb. cow that will raise 50 to 60 percent of her body weight each year," sums up Mott. "We don't have cattle bigger than the Simmental, Chianinas or Salers, and if you try to win at that game you're going to lose . . . you get a cow weighing 1,600 lb. and she's got to raise a whale of a calf to pay her way."

For now, Dick Mott is concentrating on the maternal qualities of his Angus cows. He may eventually work up to 500 head in order to sell more females (he could handle 1,000 cows at full pasture capacity), but he feels comfortable with 300 at the present time. He is intent on closing up the Black Canyon breeding season and raising the quality level.

"If we work on maternal lines, we can keep these Angus the best mother cows in the world . . . that's what sells them right now."

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Black Canyon cows graze hay meadows near the ranch's headquarters during the spring calving season. Later they are moved to the cedar-covered hillsides, then up to the 15,000-acre summer pasture at a higher altitude.