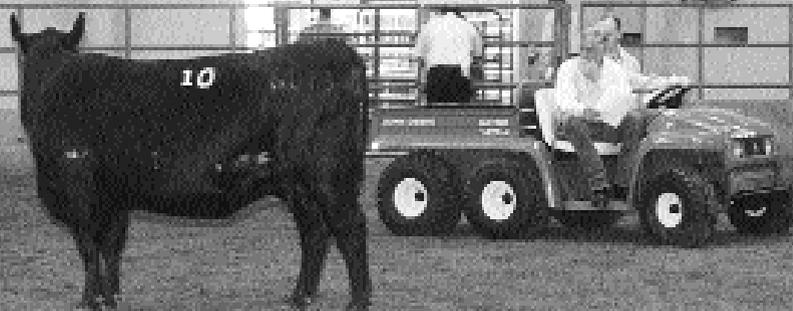


OKLAHOMA
ANGUS
ASSOCIATION



Leave the Show Box at Home

A new show concept puts the emphasis back on the cattle.

BY JENNIFER HOTCHKISS

Imagine this...

A cattle show where the barn is quiet — no hum of fans, blowers or clippers. The spray cans, scotch combs, halters and show boxes are left at home. The wash racks are dry. No extension cords or chutes block the aisles. The cattle are loose in the showring. The exhibitors watch from the stands. The judge makes his way through the cattle on a John Deere Gator® vehicle.

Sound unusual?

While this may not qualify as a typical cattle show, many Oklahoma Angus breeders found this unusual setting to be a relaxing atmosphere in which to exhibit their cattle during the Oklahoma Angus Gathering in Stillwater this past May.

"Our state association was looking for a new way to organize a state-sponsored function that would showcase Oklahoma's Angus cattle," says Mark Squires, director of beef marketing for Accelerated Genetics and owner of Squires Angus Ranch, near Noble.

The Oklahoma Angus Gathering was unique because few states have attempted Angus shows like it, Squires says. However, the concept behind the show is not new. Other breed associations have organized similar shows.

■ Back to bare essentials

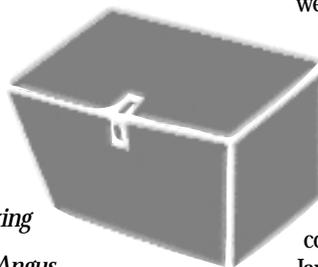
The goal of the Oklahoma Angus Gathering was to remove all the fitting, grooming and politics that sometimes enter into the placing of animals at typical shows. The cattle were exhibited loose as pairs in a split arena. The judge was given performance data, including birth weight, weaning weight, yearling weight and maternal milk expected progeny differences (EPDs).

Even though fitting was prohibited at the show, the cattle could be shaved or body clipped before arriving on the grounds.

"This show allowed everyone to compete on a more level playing field," says Jarold Callahan, chief operations officer at Express Ranches, Yukon, Okla. "You didn't have to be a great fitter to compete."

The show consisted of five divisions: cows with spring calves, cows with fall calves, yearling heifers, fall heifer calves and produce of dam. The produce of dam class required entries consisting of two females with the same dam.

Show staff moved the cattle from their pens to the show arena, allowing exhibitors to watch the entire show from the stands. Judge Galen Fink evaluated the entries for a



Above: Matt Caldwell, American Angus Association regional manager, transported Judge Galen Fink around the arena in a John Deere Gator® vehicle.

few minutes. Then the entries were moved to a holding pen in the other half of the arena. After all of the entries in a class were evaluated, they were brought back together for a final look.

The classes took the same amount of time as a normal show, Fink says. The entire show lasted only two hours and 30 minutes.

■ Motivation

The show committee created a list of goals for the event. "We wanted to provide Angus breeders with an opportunity to display their very best genetics," Squires says. "We also wanted to increase the involvement and attendance of the Oklahoma Angus membership at our annual meeting, help breeders evaluate their own programs in a positive environment, and have fun while generating some excitement about Angus cattle."

In order to keep the environment positive, no placings below second were noted. Squires adds, "We wanted to maintain the idea that this was a chance to display your genetics in a positive light."

Ada Pfeiffer of Pfeiffer's Farms, Orlando, Okla., says, "If you are beginning to build your cow herd, this type of a show promotes your herd. If you know you won't be last, it's not as threatening to participate. You have nothing to lose in this situation."

Initially some people were skeptical about the format of the show. "It sounded like a great concept," Fink says. "But I was unsure how they would pull it off. I questioned if they would get enough entries."

■ The verdict

Numbers were not a problem. More than 120 head were exhibited by 28 Oklahoma Angus ranches.

In fact, many breeders welcomed the new concept and change of pace.

"There is a time and place for every type of show," says Pfeiffer. "Some people don't enjoy the stress, additional costs and hassle involved with typical shows."

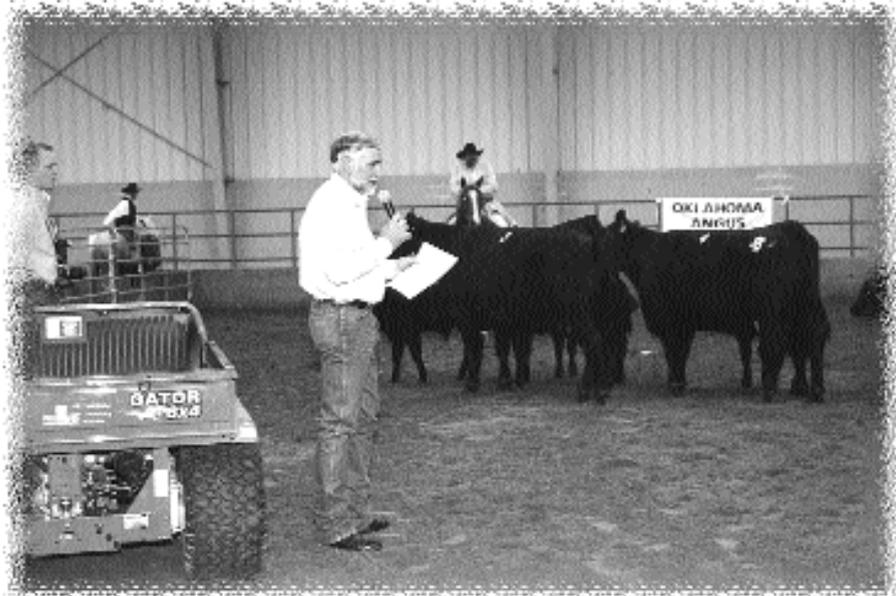
"However, if you don't go to shows once in a while, people may forget who you are. You need to know where your cattle stand in comparison to others. It's important to see how your cow herd is progressing," she says.

Junior exhibitor Kelli Armbruster, 15, of Burlington, Okla., says this show required less work than normal. "Usually, you're so busy fitting, clipping and grooming your cattle that you don't have time to see how your cattle compare to the competition," she says. "I enjoyed learning more about other breeders from Oklahoma and how the production side of the business works."

The attitude of the exhibitors in the stands appeared positive. "I could sense the



Exhibitors at the show watched from the stands as their cattle entered the ring. Judge Galen Fink said this provided a great opportunity for the exhibitors to see the differences between their cattle and the others.



In similar shows hosted by other breed associations, judges evaluated the cattle on horseback. Since EPDs were used in this show, the committee opted for a vehicle to transport judge Galen Fink so he wouldn't have to juggle a horse and papers. This allowed him to see the cattle more easily, without having to chase them around the ring.

exhibitors were having fun," Fink says. "They could really see the differences between their cattle and the others."

Callahan adds the show is probably more "real world" than most because the cattle are presented naturally.

The natural appearance of the cattle made them easier to evaluate, says Fink. "I didn't have to debate with myself about how much fill the cattle had or if they were jockeyed around with," he says. "I felt comfortable that what I was seeing was real."

Plans are already underway for a bigger show next year.

"Because our first show was such a success, we want to increase involvement

from other states," Squires says. "We also are looking at adding a few more divisions such as an udder class, an ET (embryo transfer) class and a natural produce of dam class."

Armbruster says she will definitely attend the show next year. "The show atmosphere was comfortable and relaxing," she says.

The show's over. No cattle to rinse. No combs and brushes to put away. No heavy show boxes to lift. Just load the cattle. It's time to go home. **AJ**

If you are interested in organizing a show like the Oklahoma Angus Gathering, contact Mark Squires at (405) 872-9250 for more information.