

The Day Pedigrees Came Alive

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My interest in purebred livestock was kindled at a tender age. My grandfather and an uncle were breeders of registered Shorthorns. Their work with pedigrees and the presence of the breed journal to which I was summarily exposed was enough. Though my father used registered bulls, rams and boars, these animals were as close as I got to registered animals until I got to college.

College for me came in the first half of the 50's; just about the time performance testing was making its debut. About the time, too, when some prominent cattle breeds were in the mire up to their necks with dwarfism. I was exposed to a course in breeds which wound up being a breed history and pedigree course which, incidentally, I enjoyed immensely. I wished many a time that I could have seen some of those prominent animals which made breed history. Though the animal breeding course I

took exposed me to the latest in genetic and biometrical theory and calculations, which went hand in hand with performance testing, I could not see for the life of me how to relate this to breeding better livestock.

When I went out from school with my shiny B.S. degree, I made sure I would change the world, or part of it certainly, as I went about being a county agent in Tazewell and then Russell counties. Though I worked with a number of registered cattle breeders and a few registered sheep breeders too, I really was powerless to help them. Performance testing was in the arguing stage of development. Some were in favor, some against. Breeders who did test paid no attention when it came to making selections. They used the eye and the pedigree.

During these years, it was my good fortune to attend a number of registered cattle sales. I marveled at the knowledge of ped-

igrees that certain sale managers and auctioneers had. I remember seeing an Evermere T Angus heifer sell for \$20,000 and she was a terrible individual—but her pedigree was right.

I've always maintained that pedigrees only contributed something when one could relate production, good or bad, to the ancestors in the three generation tabulation. Other than hearsay about production or fact as to show record, little knowledge about the animal in question could be transferred to another individual until recent years. Some very astute cattle breeders have in recent years formulated their own performance pedigrees on individuals in their own herd.

Actually, for me, pedigrees came to life in two or three stages or ways. Since I, and almost everyone else, was totally ignorant of Simmental pedigrees, the early Simmental sire summaries beginning in 1971 made pedigrees in those breeds take on special meaning almost from the word go. The other cattle breeds still operated on hocus focus for the most part until years later.

In 1978, when the first Angus performance pedigrees were made available, great chunks of ignorance for me were abolished. I had the good fortune to get hold of performance pedigrees on the top 100 Angus sires of the breed for 1978 in terms of numbers of progeny registered. This was truly an eye-opener. After carefully studying through this storehouse of information, Angus pedigrees began to take on new meaning.

The final chapter in my pedigree knowledge though did not come along until the American Angus Assn. came out with their first AHIR Field Data Report late in 1980 listing 564 bulls. Careful analysis of this body of data and that on the 516 Hereford sires in the first American Hereford Assn. Field Sire Summary which came out in spring 1981, convinced me once and for all that pedigrees could be really valuable. Only, though, after reading and studying these sire summaries.

I am convinced that no cattle breeder today can go it alone. If real progress is to be made, sires wherever they're to be found, must be considered for use A.I. so long as they are truly superior in the traits desired based on the performance of their progeny, including maternal.

What do you do at night? Do you go to the movies? Do you read good books? Do you play bridge or poker? I submit that if you are a seed stock cattle breeder, you'll find that the study of pedigrees will compete with any other activity for your attention—if you'll get a copy of these breed sire summaries and go to work. You'll learn what expected progeny difference in a trait is. Maternal breeding values will become part of your conversation. You'll be a pedigree nut! Then in the future, you will require that a young replacement breeding animal for your own herd will be superior and surrounded by superior kinfolks. Give it a try. 