



MOST *of the* BEST

The jingle of rowels is the drumbeat of the morning and signals the start to most days at TD Angus in North Platte, Neb. The lifelong partnership between man and horse isn't lost on this operation.

by Lindsay King, assistant editor



Cow-calf pairs quietly find each other and instinctively move across the pasture toward an 8-foot gap in the fence. Set against the rising sun, cowboys track the pairs on young horses that could easily be mistaken as first-stringers.

The cool morning of this Nebraska Sandhill scene is something many only dream of, and few experience firsthand. The synchronized chirps of the crickets perfectly harmonize the coordinated movements between the three riders.

“It’s so ironic that there are multi-millionaires out there that want our life,” says ranch owner Trey Wasserburger. “They want to go out there and ride a nice horse through a great set of cows on a Sandhill ranch. They want our life and that’s always been humbling for us.”

Trey and his wife, Dayna, took ownership of this purebred Angus operation on Jan. 1, 2017. It’s been a whirlwind of a life for the parents of three ever since.

GENERATION ONE

He’s not the first generation of cattlemen in the Wasserburger line, but Trey is blazing a trail in the purebred industry. He came from two perennial ranch families in Wyoming, one of which just celebrated 100 years – Bootheel 7 Ranch, Lusk, Wyo.

With deed in hand, Trey showed up at his new operation as though he was starting another job as a ranch hand.

“The first day I ever truly worked on a registered outfit was the day I bought one,” Trey says. “I worked on ranches in five different states through high school and college and only one of them was a registered outfit. I was just a cowboy, so I wasn’t involved with the breeding decisions and all that goes into a purebred herd.”

A banker of all people introduced Trey and Bill Rishel to each other. A greater power was at work in that firm, pivotal handshake.

“My wife, Barb, and I were getting ready to retire when we told a business associate what we wanted to do with our operation,” Bill says. He molded Rishel Ranch to become the household name it is today.

Bill focused on carcass merit traits before it was the industry standard. He spent decades cultivating the ideal

Continued on page 62

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— Dayna Wasserburger

cow:
the perfect
balance of
maternal and
carcass traits.

Dispersing the herd was the most financially beneficial option for the Rishels, but it seemed a waste to implode everything they had worked for in their lifetime.

"We had built an elite purebred Angus herd over the years and it had proved itself by the number of bulls that contributed to the breed long-term," Bill explains of the decision to sell Rishel Ranch in its entirety. "The most important thing to us was that we could find someone who would continue this and not just let it get blown apart."

It was a match made in cattle heaven if the industry's ever seen one.

MOST OF THE BEST

Elbow deep in artificial insemination (AI) procedures, Trey heard the phrase that would eventually grace the front gates of TD Angus.

Bill first heard the phrase "most of the best" while judging livestock under Herman Purdy at Penn State University. It's something Bill's cow herd has lived and been culled by.

"At a judging contest Herman once told us 'if you are having trouble starting the class, sorting it or ending it, just pick the most of the best,'" Bill says. "That is something that's been passed down through generations of cattlemen and I have used it my entire life."

Bill is a no-nonsense kind of person who is known to rattle off profound knowledge without warning. The night after Bill said it to Trey, the young cattleman couldn't sleep as he just kept repeating the words in his head.

"Most of the best, those four words have changed



The crew at TD Angus is poetry in motion when it comes to pasture roping on their home-grown colts. Few words are spoken, yet each man knows exactly what the other needs to finish the job.

me on all levels," Trey says. "That includes being a husband, father, horseman and a cattleman."

The proof is in the pasture. Almost identical cows trailed by their fall calves embody the most of the best in their structure, docility and their carcass merit when harvest comes around.

Under Bill's tutelage, Trey learned how to pair the most of the best bulls with his females. He says this usually requires traversing the roads less traveled. The most popular bulls aren't always the perfect complement to the cow herd.

"He is so locked into the most of the best and just gets it," Bill says. "I am thrilled by how Trey captures the value of these cattle that bring the greatest balance of traits to the table."

In everything Trey pursues, most of the best is at the forefront. That includes the relationships forged with the often-forgotten Angus partners: horses.

SWING A LEG OVER

The loyal soldier that is a ranch horse is given a thankless job. Yet, it only takes a full belly to keep him satisfied.

"Horses are an invaluable tool. They've always said a good horse and a good dog is worth two good men," Trey says. "And that's the truth."

Astride 4-year-old geldings, Trey and his crew

make quick work of doctoring pinkeye on a 1,400-pound (lb.) mama cow in an open pasture. The synchronized dance around the cow strung between two ropes wouldn't be possible without horses that know their job and do it well.

"One of my mentors once said 'a good horse is a good color, and good horses make good trainers,'" Trey says.

When Trey was a boy, all it took to keep him entertained was a corral with a horse in it. The same is holding true for his own kids.

Both Trey and Dayna have seen their fair share of horses — good and bad — in their lifetime. Trey grew up learning the ropes of breaking and training while Dayna did the same but also garnered the refined skills only acquired in the show pen.

"I think we can learn a lot about ourselves as a person when we get on a horse," Dayna says of the therapeutic aspect of riding. "There's a lot of heritage that goes with it too."

There is no more picturesque scene than that of a cowboy on his horse trailing a herd. Dayna says it's this western heritage her family intends to preserve through TD Angus.

"That historic value of working cattle horseback is the way it was and the way we like to keep it," she says. "It's something we want to teach our children about so they can carry on the tradition."

TWO FOR ONE

When buyers flip through the TD Angus sale book, they find more than an elite set of Angus females and bulls. Ranch-ready Quarter Horses are quickly becoming a major draw for the sale as well.

"I think it's valuable for bull customers to buy cattle that have been around horses because that's what people do in this part of the world," Bill says. It's not uncommon for bulls and horses to be turned out together in the Sandhills.

Before TD Angus was born, Bill offered ranch horses in his March sale in the last few years it was under the Rishel name. He witnessed horse buyers turn into bull customers and vice versa.

"I can't imagine owning cattle without horses or horses without cattle, they thrive off each

Continued on page 64

A NEW KIND OF FEED TEST

As one of the first cattlemen to use carcass data and ultrasonography for breeding decisions, Bill Rishel was at the forefront of innovation. He needed a like-minded person to continue the legacy of Rishel Ranch in the Sandhills of Nebraska.

He found that in Trey and Dayna Wasserburger, who began a unique feed test just a year after purchasing the ranch from Bill.

"We've been buying a lot of our customers' cattle back to put on the feedyard that Dayna's family runs," Trey explains. "We fed them for about a year and I was getting harvest data back on them that was really good."

Above-average weight gain resulted in a pen grading 30% Prime. Trey knew he needed to help translate the value of that harvest data back to his customers.

"We developed this feed test not only to show where our own program is, but to prove that these bulls can do it all," Trey says. "But it also shows us where we need to go. Our bulls can't change a program over night, but it's going to give us a good idea of where it's at and where it needs to go."

Starting the day after the TD Angus sale in mid-March, cattle of all ages and genders can come into the feedlot for the test. They can stay on test for the full year leading up to the next sale, or they can be taken off early for harvest.

Regardless, all animals in the lot for that year are eligible for the cash awards given out at the sale in these categories: average daily gain, feed conversion-efficiency, highest yield, highest Prime percentage and highest *Certified Angus Beef*® (CAB®) percentage.

"This isn't a terminal deal, you don't have to harvest your cattle if you don't want to," Trey says. "You just won't be eligible for the carcass categories."

The first feed test of its kind, the Wasserburgers have seen everything from steers and heifers to barely weaned calves come into the lot. The spirit of competition is alive and well in the Nebraska Sandhills.

"We're just trying to do something for the industry," Trey says. "That's my job as a seedstock producer."





“I really do believe *God* put us together for a reason,”

— Dayna Wasserburger

other,” Trey says. “Everybody has a job here. As a cowboy it’s my job to take care of the animals. My horses and cattle have jobs as well. We all

rely on each other.”

Prior to moving to the Cornhusker state, Trey and Dayna gained invaluable experience in the commercial sector of the industry.

They met at the University of Wyoming and were married in 2011. In true Wasserburger fashion, Trey proposed in the middle of the sale arena at the Lazy U Quarter Horse Sale – Dayna’s family horse sale.

“I really do believe God put us together for a reason,” Dayna says.

Some things were moving in interesting directions at the time. Those would eventually meet up as the opportunity of a lifetime surfaced.

They initially bonded over a shared love for horses, and that continued to grow as they learned the feedyard trade from Dayna’s father – Kirk Olson – as newlyweds.

“Trey learned some things in the feedyard that I think make him a better cattleman today,” Dayna says. “I worked a couple of different jobs in the year and a half we were living back here near my parents. Those jobs gave me the skills I needed to be here.”

Trey and Dayna both say their preparation was orchestrated perfectly to make TD Angus successful.

MENTORSHIP

“The world of agriculture is full of the older generation who want to help out the younger one,”

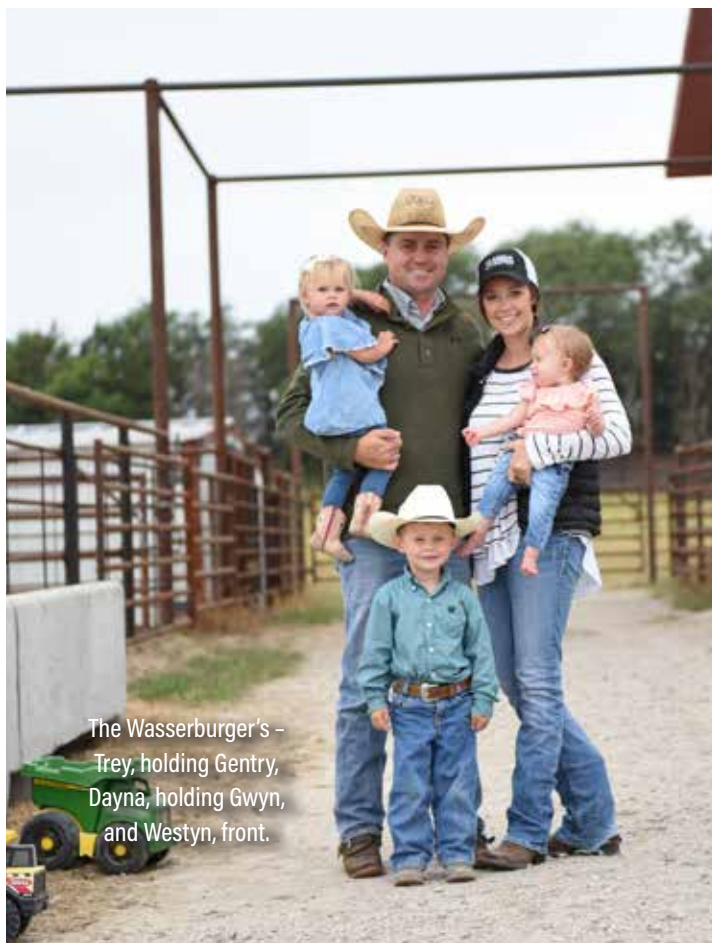
Trey explains of his relationship with Bill. “This older generation wants to give the younger one the opportunity to own a ranch. If you work for it, they’ll give it to you.”

Trey spent countless hours on Rishel Ranch proving himself to Bill. The roles have now reversed and Bill volunteers his time to continue mentoring Trey and Dayna.

The couple was living in Wyoming when Bill presented the ranch to them. In only a matter of 30 days, they held the deed in their hands. With a toddler in tow and another on the way, it was nothing short of a tornado of a life for a while.

“We weren’t searching for a ranch at the time, but there was a reason why it all happened the way it did,” Dayna explains. “We moved to the ranch in April and then had our second child three days later. So, yeah, it’s been a whirlwind, but we couldn’t be more grateful.”

Patience is easily the winning virtue when the TD Angus story is boiled down to its roots. At 31 years old, Trey now has the freedom and the know-how to build a legacy in the Business Breed. **A**



The Wasserburger’s – Trey, holding Gentry, Dayna, holding Gwyn, and Westyn, front.