

# Quiet determination paid dividends



When Harvey Lemmon began his Angus pilgrimage, the valleys were foggy and the mountaintops weren't that clear either. Like many young men and women with dreams of good cattle and productive herds, Harvey realized he would have to endure slogging through the lowlands before he could begin scaling the heights. Nothing came easy nor were there any gilt-edged promises. It was a familiar route many had trod before. The only guidance was try your best, pray, and hope.

Harvey's first plunge was a risky venture. He told a man he'd buy his herd of 100-plus Angus cows. Problem was, he had no place to put them. The year was 1971.

Fifteen years later, that herd had grown to 537 head when dispersed. The hard work, sacrifice, and careful selection paid off.

The story between those milestones emerges as one any ambitious young (or seasoned) Angus breeder could heed. If there's any capsule description of Lemmon Cattle Enterprises it might dwell on doing common things uncommonly well.

Take selection, for instance. Harvey knew as he "pasture surveyed" a group of commercial cattle one evening that they "were the best cattle I had ever seen in Georgia. So I bought them, knowing I did not have a place for them."

And so too did he borrow the money to bring the cattle "home" to some rented pasture. Now, here was a guy asking his banker to help him build a foundation on what might appear as shifting sand. But Harvey prevailed. He worked off the farm to gain a foothold. An auction barn in Jackson, Ga., custom fitting Angus cattle for sales, hauling stock, and day-working

By Jim Cotton  
Editor

cattle for other producers were some of the incomes he put together during those long and tiring days.

The PCA was convinced.

Maurice Burnum, president of the Flint River Production-Credit Assn., remembers: "His first business transaction with our PCA showed him owning two registered cows and no owned real estate. . . . Since the beginning, PCA has been the major and practically only creditor for this enterprise. It has been amazing to watch and study his uncanny ability to plan his financing. . . . His capital expansions are always prudently planned between retained earnings and borrowed funds, leaving a leverage ratio to withstand adversities that. . . happen in the cattle industry."

Between the two cows and 1988, Harvey has not only built an enviable herd providing a Mother Lode of genetics for many a Southern or national Angus producer, he's gained national recognition as well. He's been elected president of the Georgia Angus Assn., the Georgia Cattlemen's Assn., and has served as president of the Beef Improvement Federation and the American Angus Assn., with both terms overlapping for a period last spring.

Did he ever consider retreat? Cast a longing look at some other option or opportunity? Consider where he might be or what he'd be doing if Angus cattle had not been his single minded objective?

"I have no idea," he says. "I have liked cattle and wanted to raise them for as long as I can remember. I had no other options that I know of. My vision was so tunneled on cattle that I didn't know there were any other job opportunities in the world."

Harvey prepared for this consuming career at the Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, graduating in 1969 with a BS in animal science. While there, he held memberships on both the livestock and meats judging teams. He joined the Block & Bridle, Alpha Zeta, and was a student herdsman enjoying the privilege of leading out the Grand Champion Angus steer at the 1966 Eastern National.

Harvey credits his parents as helping him in "every way possible" and cites Carroll Grove, uncle of Association Regional Manager Chuck Grove, as a fundamental influence in the early years. Harvey recalls this Angus breeder helping him pick out his first bred heifer in

the year 1956. Her first calf was a grand champion at the junior Angus show of the 1957 Virginia State Fair. Les Leachman was the judge.

Of the experience, Harvey says: "This



set me on fire for the Angus business."

Others who made contributions to the career of a young man on the rise include Earl Simms who sold Harvey some of his first seedstock. "He let me work on his farm to earn the feed." There were other such arrangements with breeders who would haul his heifers and let Harvey work on the road to earn expenses.

He pays tribute to Mrs. Ellen Rud-dock, advisor to the Virginia Angus juniors. Dr. Gary Minish of VPI & SU was a source of counsel.

"Erskine Cash and C.K. Allen when we were in school. John Crouch and I have been close friends for more than 30 years.

Moving from home port of Virginia to uncharted waters in Georgia was a gutsy venture, made possible and easier by some folks who believed in a young steadfast cattleman with vision. Bob Blalock, manager of Millarden Farms at what was to become Harvey's new home

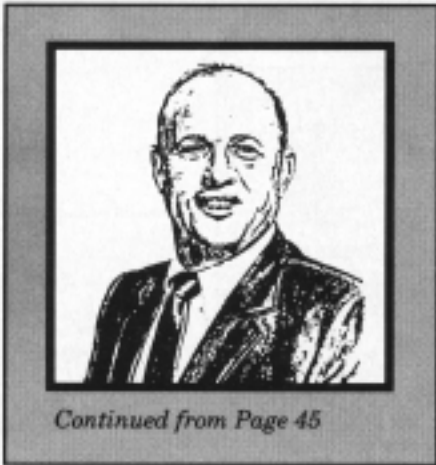
town was instrumental in the transition and sped the process along. "(He) gave me my first job and an opportunity to gain confidence in my ability. Wilma and Ed Minix, Black Witch Farm (Hoschton, Ga.), have always been such great friends and supporters. You had to succeed so as not to let them down.

When acknowledging debts, Harvey goes on record praising his wife of 19 years, Nina, as "the one person that is really responsible for this herd and our business. She had the foresight to make me promise to begin working to have something of our own before she would agree for us to come to Woodbury and accept the position at Millarden. Besides teaching school, Nina takes care of the household and family (sons Donnie and Jonathan), has lent many a hand in getting ready for sales, entertained guests, and steadied the boat in rough waters. I probably wouldn't have stayed hitched many times if it had not been for her," he admits.

Harvey analyzes his management and marketing moves as influenced more by practical economics than theory. "I didn't like it at all back in the early days when I would have to beef a cow that I 'thought' was really good because she had lost a calf or was open." Taking the high and rocky road, however, meant the herd eventually was weeded down to the reliable bedrock of fertility. "It's unbelievable what you can do with cattle through selection if you will put the pressure on and make them perform," he continues. "Slow breeders tend to produce slow breeders."

Other marketing practices he followed making Lemmon cattle and Lemmon Cattle Enterprises distinctive include the bull swap or Bull Trading Day, where a producer could trade his bull up for a newer model. Nationally, the successes of the Dynamic Dams sale drew a lot of attention to the Lemmon program as Harvey and his crew won the Challenge Trophy awarded there several times. It's presented to the consignor with the highest average on three or more lots.

The Lemmon brand on the right hip has established enviable and instant recognition in knowledgeable cattle circles. It has earned respect as it represents bloodlines proven to be practical and productive. And, Harvey believes helping customers with their cattle and cattle decisions gains a lot of  
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mileage and customer satisfaction eventually. He's found customers new and old appreciate his candid opinion of his sale offerings and bloodlines.

His management rules include clinging to no ironclad position that might "tie my hands. I try to make the best decision I can, reacting to the conditions I am faced with at any particular time." He keeps the possibility of adversity always in view as it has been a part of his experience. So, expanding the value and limiting the risk is foremost.

"I try to breed to bulls that will enhance the value of the cows in case they must sell." His selections typically settle on a balance between show and performance. "I want high performance cattle with eye appeal," he points out. "Clean-up bulls must really be good," he says, emphasizing the realm of possibilities: If her planned mating doesn't catch, then the second option must be attractive and marketable.

In the area of husbandry, Harvey's experience convinces him good nutrition from calving through breeding will cure a

world of ills. "Live with them during breeding and calving seasons," he advises, stating bred cows and live calves are essential. "A.I. has been really good to us. Get the job done in these areas and the rest is easier."

Any corrective measures or changes he would employ given the benefit of hindsight? Harvey's been compelled, he notes, to make every decision a realistic one in light of his resources at the time. "Every dollar I spent was with the thought, 'If you have to get out, what will it be worth?' If I had known I was going to be here (at Woodbury) 17 years, I would have spent a little more on permanent facilities to handle bulk feed. That would have saved many dollars."

Harvey relates his "high" experiences in the business and breed include being involved with Certified Angus Beef when it was going through its most critical

## The Magnificent Six

American Angus Hall of Fame principal Tom Burke labels the Harvey Lemmon herd as one emphasizing reproduction.

"Harvey Lemmon has an uncanny ability to identify a young bull with the potential to improve his breeding program," says Burke, including Harvey among the first to recognize the potential in PS Power Play. "He was among the first to use Power Play's greatest son, Lovana.... Harvey Lemmon selected PS Superstar as a young bull from Penn State University... a Pathfinder Sire. Black Witch Corbinaire 95... proved to be a phenomenal growth sire. Leasing to Select Sires Inc. .... Harvey was among the first to use PS High Pockets extensively, and that decision has proved to be a stroke of breeding genius."

The principal Lemmon bloodlines have included the Lemmon Lassie Line, the Lemmon Mercuries, the Doras, Elgas, Blackcaps, Coquettes, Blackbirds, and Barbaras among others.

But Harvey does not approach the pedigree first. He makes them perform, then considers the pedigree. "I believe in placing cattle in the program that best suits their capabilities," he explains.

Eye appeal guided him well in 1971 when he made his first major leap into the Angus ranks.

"I started with 113 cows bought as commercials and found out 33 could be identified to registration certificates. Six of these cows were sired by EE Elban of Nydeck, and these six cows contributed as much as all the other cows I bought over the next 10 years. A daughter of one of these cows by Rito 149 sold for \$17,000 in the first Dynamic Dams Sale. Rito 149, Schearbrook Shoshone, PS Power Play, PS Superstar, Lovana, Black Witch Corbinaire 95, PS High Pockets, and Black Witch Corbinaire 06 were the bulls that have really worked in my program. All were used as yearlings except Rito 149 and Schearbrook Shoshone.

"Check their EPDs. The Good Lord has really looked

after me in bull selection. I bought many cows and kept the ones that worked -- no specific pedigrees. Graham- and Irvington-bred cows have done really well."

Cows calve in the spring and fall. Heifers are bred to calve from January 1 through March 15. A 70-75 day calving span is allowed during both seasons. Harvey will A.I. for 24 days and then turn in a clean-up bull. Females are allowed one miscue as a heifer or later in her career. Twice open and gone.

Spring-born bulls will be offered at 20-21 months of age. Fall bulls will be marketed as two-year-olds. They are under continual observance and scrutiny to insure they measure up.

The Lemmon environment is grass. Bulls must perform as they're expected to when shipped out into the real world: no heavy grain, pampering, or special treatment. Good forage is provided on home and rented pastures in the form of native grasses, some rye, rye grass, and clover. As the resource must support 550 head of Angus, Charolais, and Hereford cattle, nearly 1,400 acres are managed intensively.

The other breeds comprise the Lemmon Connection enterprise. The Connection emerged after the dispersal, and is a marketing team effort by several area producers who share the goals of offering quality seedstock attuned to the progressive commercial breeder. Principals are the Lemmon Cattle Enterprises, Lakewood Angus Ranch of Macon, Ga.; Scratchaway Angus, Newnan, Ga.; and Jarrell Angus, Butler, Ga.

Herefords are offered to those Angus commercial producers looking for predictable performance and heterosis in a controlled program. Charolais bulls were introduced for the three-way impact or as a proven complement to the Angus traits.

"I think the Charolais X Angus animal will prosper now and in the future due to the Certified Angus Beef program," Harvey says of the white breed's niche.

time, March, 1982. The plug was about to be pulled. Then, the worm turned.

“**Seeing the effect** has had on the whole beef industry as well as our breed is very satisfying. This is not to say I had any great influence on the program, but I am proud I was involved and did all I knew how to do for this program.”

He adds seeing the performance concept grow and progress in methodology from ratios to EBVs and on to EPDs has been exciting. Settling the lawsuit between Ankony Shadow Isle Ranch Inc. and the Association was a high watermark in his presidency and one that consumed a lot of time and travel.

And in the more relaxed moments, becoming acquainted with the staff, fellow directors, and other breeders and their families has “really been a pleasure.”

For Harvey and Nina, the struggles and sacrifices of the building years paled when the moment came to tip the balance toward dispersing or ignoring the tax implications of pressing on. Changes in the method of taking capital gains were too important to dismiss.

Harvey characterized it as a head versus heart decision. It was a low point, one he says where he couldn't let sentiment prevent a prudent business decision. The mature cows averaged less than four years of age, so it was a late model herd brimming with proven genetic power and refined by years of testing and trial. Not easy to lay aside such potential or opportunity. He says of the long days and sleepless nights:

“I have never had a really trying time in my life, that is, the death of a child, wife, or a parent or been through a divorce. I had worked 15 years to build the best herd of Angus cattle in the South. I am barn-blind and prejudiced, but I felt I had them. I knew it was a good business decision but it hurt. It was the best business decision I ever made . . . We sold 537 cattle in two days. The greatest satisfaction to me was that everybody who bought cattle was pleased. . . . (I) have not had one complaint . . .

It was an important part of Lemmon history, this dispersion, all the better and more palatable because it was so satisfying in the end. Part of that satisfaction might just lie in spreading the influence of the Lemmon brand. It's possible the impact will become wider over the years and sooner because of the dispersal.

So, Lemmon Cattle Enterprises has had its historical moment but is not yet a part of history. By no means. Harvey is looking for new opportunities and continuing to search for new genetics. He's a performance breeder first.

“(T)he showing is good in that it brings people together, there are a lot of

good contacts made, and we get to see cattle from across the country so we can look at what other breeders are doing. The performance segment is going to be hard-pressed to prevent the wrecks as we have seen with frame. Breeding high EPD trait animals for one trait is just as wrong as breeding the tallest to the tallest. There are going to be a lot of computer matings that don't consider structural correctness, temperament, udder desirability, mature size and yes, eye appeal, and that will produce offspring just as undesirable and hard to merchandise as a 12 Frame Score animal that can't walk and live on grass. We must produce 'all-around performers'.”

Harvey views the seedstock industry as positioned better than it has been in years. “(It) has the best opportunity to entrench itself that I have ever seen. We know the animal we need to be producing, and that's a first. If we make our purebred breed dependable for the traits they are noted for, commercial breeders will want our product because of dependable, documented genetics.”

He considers the emphasis towards growth and frame size as the most significant change in the Angus industry over the years he's observed it. And he finds this putting the breed in an enviable position -- “Desired in most every cross-breeding program.”

"I think there is only one challenge for the Angus business - keep the cattle as relevant or more relevant to the beef industry than they are now. I think the biggest challenge for the Association is to provide the services breeders need, maintain the data base, and be able to maintain the great staff we have while holding expenses down."

The future is open. Harvey claims to not have any 'big game plan. I hope to make a living with purebred cattle the rest of my life, and Angus will always be the star players, . . . They do more of the economically important things than any other."

Recognizing a Providential influence in his life and fortunes, Harvey says, "I've been blessed to be able to make a living with something that is a part-time situation for so many and probably would be for me too if I had been successful in some other field."

That his cattle have "won shows, topped gain tests, performed in the feedlot, produced highly desirable carcasses, performed well in other herds, increased in numbers, and gained in genetic strength while servicing our debt," is testimony to the working ability of Lemmon cattle.

"The one goal for the herd is the same as always: Get better every year and work for us and our customers." 