



MAKING ANGUS MEASURE UP

by Linda Wells Kiger
and Doug Perkins

Long-time Angus breeder Ned Biffle of Allen, Okla., was severely injured by a silage bin power take-off mechanism Oct. 25, approximately one month after the following interview took place. One leg was severed directly above the knee and the other leg was broken. In the struggle to free himself from the grinding force of the machine, Ned's hand was severely lacerated but, fortunately, doctors were able to repair it. Friends and relatives reported that only 24 hours after the accident occurred, Ned, in his stubborn yet determined manner, was delegating ranch duties to those at his bedside. Six days later, Ned was taken into surgery to remove more of his remaining leg-gangrene had been discovered. As of Nov. 7, Ned was still recovering at Valley View Hospital in Ada, listed in critical but stable condition. However, optimistic doctors report that the odds are in Ned's favor. He will survive. The ANGUS JOURNAL staff wishes Ned Biffle, a man with a strong will and an even stronger determination to live, a fast and successful recovery.

Measurements don't lie—at least not at Biffle Angus Ranch in Allen, Okla., where measurements mean profit in the Angus business.

Ned Biffle is a devout believer in measurements. Says he can go into a man's herd and buy the best ones without looking at them—merely by relying on measurements. That's why nine years ago he devised a system of measuring his Angus calves at birth. The measurements tell him whether or not the calves will become fertile breeding stock when they mature. His system has been immensely successful for him. He can channel his money toward the calves that show potential.

It all started 18 years ago. Just by measuring the length of a calf's leg from the point of its elbow to the extended length of its leg, which includes the hoof, Biffle can ascertain which animals will be lively breeders in his herd. "We measure the calf at birth, as soon as the slime is off," Biffle says. "We flank the calf and stretch its leg out and with a yardstick take our measurements."

Length of Leg

"I've found that the best breeding heifers are from 18.181/2 inches long at the leg. Bulls must be 18 1/2-20 inches long to be saved as bulls. Calves that are born 17 1/2-18 inches can never catch up to a 19- or 20-inch calf. Occasionally a bull that measures 18 inches will make it, but that doesn't happen very often. If he is under 18 inches, we put the knife to him." After 10 years, however, Biffle discovered that he had extended the hook to pin measurements from 20 inches to 22 inches. For eight years now, he has measured for comparison.

Through Biffle's measurements, a brief glance at the future breeding potential of the animal before him becomes possible. "Height and measurements at birth can tell you immediately if the animal will be any good. You don't have to wait until they're grown," says Biffle. If the animal makes the average, Biffle pours more money into its care and handling. If the animal doesn't make it—well, it's just an extra freeloader where only the top animals are wanted.

A Living Laboratory

Ned Biffle is a man of high standards and boundless ingenuity. That's why his ranch, located a few miles south of Allen in the woodlands of south central Oklahoma, is a laboratory in which he experiments with conservation, breeding Angus, ranch improvement and grass development. Nothing on his ranch, including his herd of registered Angus cattle, escapes his intense scrutiny. He owns a Midas touch that improves the land, the animals and the ranch. His system of measuring, a crystal ball of sorts, is just one of the many improvements this amazing man has introduced to his business.

"In this herd only," Biffle stresses, "measurements tell me which bulls I can afford to creep feed and which heifers will be fertile. I have never had any reason to doubt the measurements."

The extent of his measuring goes even further on his bulls. Just like heifers, the bull calves have their legs measured at the same time they are ear tagged. But they undergo one more measurement before they are legitimate members of the Biffle herd. Once the bull reaches 13 months of age, Biffle measures the circumference of his testicles. If the bull passes this test, Biffle then has an extra indication that the bull will be a hearty breeder.

Measuring Tape

"A company in Denver, Cob., manufactures the tape I use to measure the bull's testicles. It says that the circumference should be 38 cm., but that company is not using improved bulls. I'm now producing 14-month-old bulls with a 40-cm. testicle circumference.

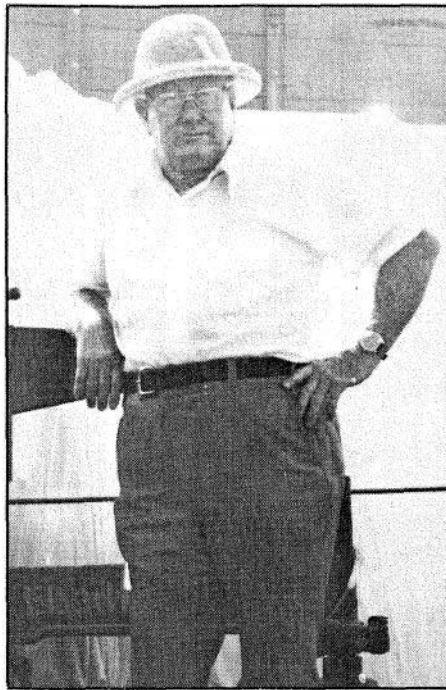
Anyone that knows anything about the cattle business understands there is a direct correlation between the circumference of a bull's testicles and the volume of its semen production. That's the reason we measure. Anything below the average circumference is culled as undesirable."

A driller of oil wells for most of his adult life, Biffle bought some \$19-an-acre land back in 1957 and started making his debut in the Angus world. Biffle says people thought he was crazy when he started raising his kind of black cattle in Allen.

Described as "horsey," the cows ranged from 1,400-1,600 lb. He says he had to buy two different herds to get the type of cattle he wanted. The results from his new herd were not to Biffle's liking—"good calves but they didn't wean out like I had hoped."

Started Testing

Performance testing was getting underway in Oklahoma and breeders were getting weight-conscious. A bull was found that would turn the trick. He was Stidham Eibenmere King, by Eileenmere of Eufala. "His first crop of calves averaged well over 100 lb. heavier at weaning than those by the other bulls. He made some changes in a hurry." Then immediately after establishing his herd, he joined Performance Registry International.



Ned Biffle

"I've been performance testing since the first test was held," Biffle says. "I'm the only man in the world that I know of that measures bulls' testicles and places this information on the animal's performance information."

How did Biffle begin measuring in the first place?

"You just wonder how you come about things like this," he replies. "I guess I first got the idea when American Breeders Service came to the ranch about 10 years ago to buy some bulls.

"I've been measuring nine years and I find it a useful tool in predicting fertility. If you don't measure the legs of Angus, you miss a lot. I knew that extremely large Angus cows were hard to breed and found that largeness was highly hereditary. Heifers that exceed 19-19/2 inches at the leg when they are born have problems with fertility, and when you get Angus bulls too tall you lose their testicles."

Same Conclusions

"The only other man that I know of who is measuring Angus cattle is Dr. J.T.

Pinkerton of Tyler, Texas. And he has reached the same conclusions as I have on measuring."

Naturally, one would think that some cows would consistently produce the better calves while others didn't. Ned says this may be so, but he hasn't noticed any difference. "I don't know which cows are having the best calves," he says. "Man can't plan for a perfect calf. Mother nature has a lot to do with it. I know some cow families do better than other cow families, but that's about the extent of it."

Cows whose bull calves do not meet the required measurements are separated, and only the top calves are put on creep feed. The cows with sub-par calves are returned to the breeding herd next time around. And Biffle adds that he has never been confronted with the problem of a female who has consistently delivered calves that were eventually culled.

Cow Nutrition

Does cow nutrition enter into the picture?

"That's a complex question to answer," Biffle says. "You just have to assume that all the cows have good nutrition. You can't have a good calf without nutrition but, on the other hand, the genetic ability of the animal gives it the good calf rather than the nutrition."

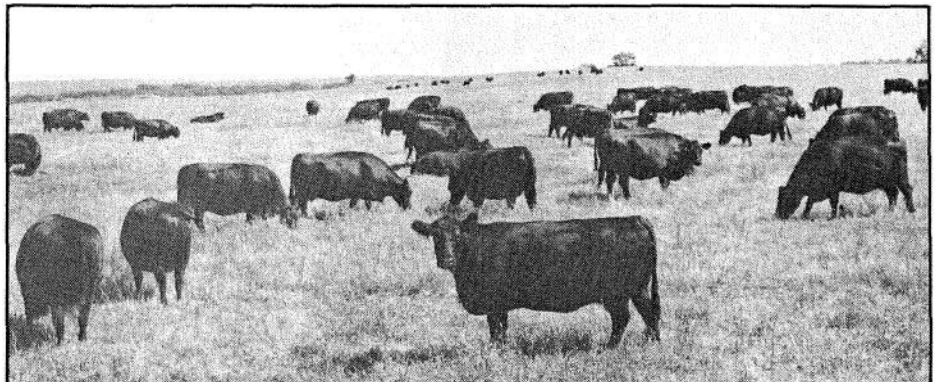
The measuring system works, Biffle says, and he has statistics to back up his confidence. For instance, a 3-year-old son of Emulous TN 70 measured a 19 1/2-inch leg length at birth. He has proven to be "the best improvement bull in my herd," Biffle says. Another bull, Biffles Emulous 007, consistently sires progeny with the largest testicle circumference ever measured in Biffle's herd bull prospects. In addition, there are scores of females that exhibit femininity. In fact, all the Biffle cattle are breathing testimonials to the accuracy of his measuring system.

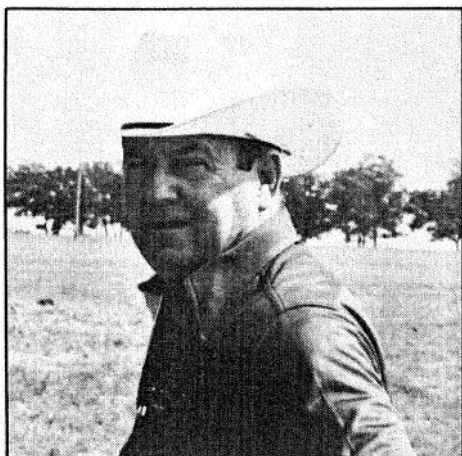
Sire of the Year

In 1970 Emulous TN 70 was named Sire of the Year. Biffle owned the bull in partnership with UT Farms, Tuttle, and Ankony Angus, Highmore, S.D. At that time no bull's progeny had set more records in both performance and show ring winnings.

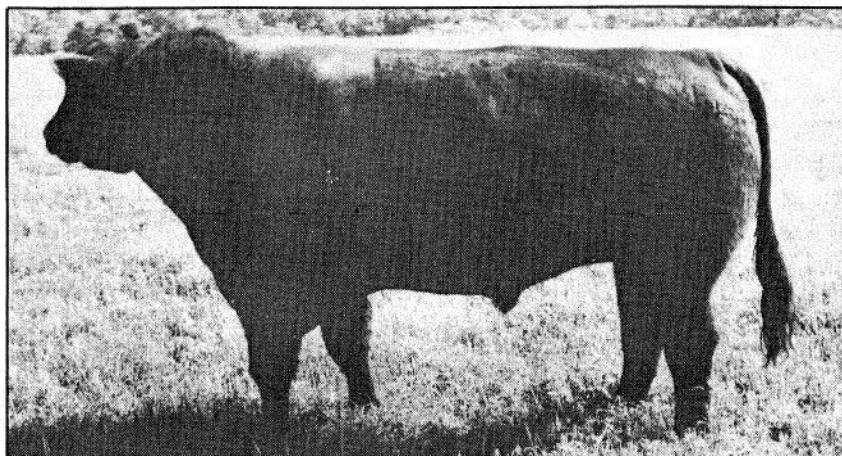
Within a year's time, his calves shown by

These are part of the cows at Biffle Angus Ranch.





Former Okie Billy Yarbrough purchased the Biffle herd this past August.



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LIT Farms had won 52 championships and 58 class blues. At eight shows, including the International, American Angus Futurity and American Royal, TN 70 calves took both the get-of-sire and junior get-of-sire awards. Another record was set at the International when TN 70 sons and daughters took all four calf championships.

In addition, Biffle is an intense conservationist. In fact, he has won every conservation award given by the National Wildlife Federation. The mantle in his living room bends under the weight of his awards. Biffle says he doesn't take anything from the land that it can't do without.

He is also a grass farmer. His theory is that grass, not heavy amounts of grain, should make red meat. He calls himself a "coastal man," but he also has pastures of fescue and clover.

"I also double-crop Bermuda grass by planting wheat, then take the wheat off in the form of silage and feed it to cattle with hay."

Test Station

His bull test station is another wonder to behold. It too is of his own invention. He can gain test approximately 50 bulls in it. The test station is probably one of the aeriest and best you'll ever come across. In the winter, doors come down to protect the cattle. And it all cost him less than \$10,000 to construct with salvage pipe.

Close to retirement, Biffle sold his herd in August to former Okie Billy Yarbrough, a land development and concrete tycoon in Fairfield, Calif. The sale involved approximately 150 registered Angus cows bred to Wandering Creek Dynasty, Bon View Connection, Masterpiece, Byergos Black Revolution 36, Powerplay, Patriot and Early Sunset Emulous 60E. Ned's wife, Mae, kept 28 cows of her own that she manages and cares for herself. Yarbrough purchased land just 8 miles northwest of the Biffle ranch where he plans to keep his new cow herd.

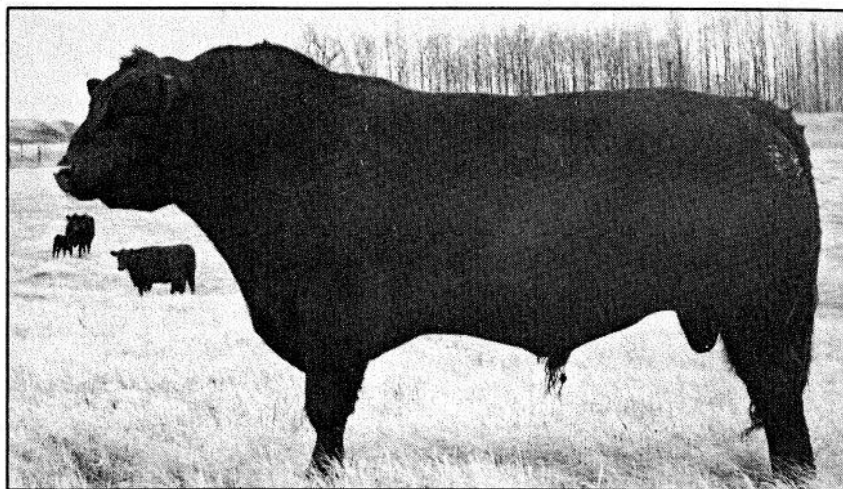
The cows will stay at Biffle's for the winter, however, since plans for the Yarbrough ranch will not be completed till next spring.

His Plans

What does Biffle plan to do now?



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I've got 600 bales of rolled hay and two silos full. I've kept some bulls that I would eventually like to breed some commercial cows to. Guess until then, I'll just set back and let the grass grow for a while," Biffle also plans to act as a consultant, contributing 22 years of experience to Yarbrough, a newcomer to the Angus business. Better cowmen than Ned Biffle are few

and far between. Known to some as cantankerous, stubborn and set in his ways, a tougher gutsier individual would be hard to find. And if you ever visit Biffle at his ranch, look at everything and you'll see that his ingenuity has no boundaries. But be sure to take a long look at his Angus cattle. Every inch will measure up to your expectations.