



# Merchandising

► by Keith Evans

## Are you advertising photographers or cattle?

*Looking at registered beef cattle ads, one sometimes wonders what's being advertised — cattle or photographers.*

### Diverting attention

Just compare the ads in a consumer magazine with those in virtually any registered beef cattle magazine to see what I mean. The creative photographs that illustrate the expensive ads in consumer magazines give no credit to the photographer. These advertisers who spend millions of dollars on print advertising each year want readers to focus solely on the product they have to sell. As a result, they feel no compulsion to help the photographer advertise his or her business — and neither should you.

In contrast, livestock advertisers often provide free advertising for the person or firm they have paid to photograph their cattle. The photographer's signature or logo is prominently displayed on the front of the photo, usually between the animal's legs. In this location it stands out like the proverbial sore thumb. It's good for the photographer, but bad for the advertiser.

No matter how much you like the person who photographs your cattle, insist that he or she provides you with unaltered pictures. The reason is simple. Anything written across the front of an advertising illustration is distracting. Furthermore, if it is necessary to reverse the photo to improve the ad layout the signature or logo is also reversed — and the photo is even more distracting. It can sometimes be good for

a chuckle, but this too takes the reader's mind off the advertising message. Anything in an ad that diverts the reader's attention from the basic sales message costs the advertiser money.

### Make them yours

My advice is to insist that the photographs you pay for become your property, not copyrighted property of the photographer. Copyrighted photos are not yours, and legally cannot be altered in any way without the permission of the photographer. Advertising layout artists told me at a recent Livestock Publications Council (LPC) meeting that the copyright printed on the back or front of the photo prevents them from removing the photographer's signature, even if the advertiser requests it.

For most of my career in advertising management, we paid photographers to take pictures. When they were finished with an assignment they turned the negatives or transparencies over to the American Angus Association. That allowed the organization to create a valuable photo file and use the pictures however we decided to promote the Association and its breed of cattle. And you can do the same thing. Remember, however, that photographers need to make a living, too. If you want full ownership of all your photos, then you should be prepared to pay more for the service.

### Photo history

The practice of signing livestock advertising illustrations goes back to the 19th century, before photographs were generally used in livestock advertising and promotion. In those days illustrators were hired to make line drawings of animals for both editorial and advertising use. The drawings weren't always accurate depictions, but rather artist impressions, and were signed. When photography replaced artwork for livestock advertising, many of the early

photographs carried no photographer identification.

This changed dramatically in the 1940s and 1950s with the trend of small, compact cattle. Photographers took a step back in time and combined photography with hand illustration. The practice was to dig a shallow pit and fill this pit and the ground ahead of it with straw. The animal would be photographed with its rear legs in the pit using 4×5-inch (in.) sheet film. Next, the photographer retouched the photo by smoothing out the animal's top line and adding additional heft and roundness to the rump. The retoucher also filled in the flank and the area behind the front leg and increased the size of the front and rear legs to make them appear "heavy-boned." About all that remained unchanged in the photo was the head. These photographers signed their creations and the tradition of signing has continued.

Today's ethical standards don't allow altering the outline of the animal. But photographers still sign their photos. Our industry would be better served if we discarded this tradition, along with others that keep registered cattle breeders from doing the best job of advertising their herds.

Advertisers and photographers need to understand that the best animal photo may not be the standard side shot that appears in nearly every cattle ad. Different animals look better from different angles. Photos should emphasize the animal's best features. Keep in mind that ads should have a distinctive appearance and not look like all the rest. We need to get rid of ad labels like "Jones Angus Annual Production Sale," and replace them with real headlines that get a reader's attention and promise a benefit. Instead of trying to tell a sales message with numerous lines of headline-size copy, write a copy block with a reasoned sales message that includes reasons to buy and a reason to act now.

Cattle breeders invest a sizable amount of their hard-earned money in advertising and marketing programs. It makes no sense to continue to follow traditions that dilute the value of this investment.

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