

From Behind the Mic

The judges from the 2005 National Junior Angus Show give junior members their reasons.

by Jen Biser



► Vance Uden, Franklin, Neb., uses a discerning eye during the cow-calf show.

PHOTOS BY SHAUNA ROSE HERMEL

The National Junior Angus Show (NJAS) and the National Junior Angus Association (NJAA) are dedicated to enhancing the Angus experience of young cattlemen and women across the country. Among the many educational arenas is the cattle show itself. By listening to the judges' comments during the show, junior members and their parents can glean a wealth of information for improving their herds and future show projects.

Although subjective, judges give their opinions based on their own extensive experience within the cattle industry. It is important to be able to listen to and to understand the judges who evaluate each animal at the show.

This year, three judges — Randy Daniel, Vance Uden and Mike McGuire — were on the microphone evaluating the animals and giving their reasons for placing the animals the way they did. They have offered some of their basic viewpoints to help juniors take home a greater learning experience.

From the ground up

“One thing that I would stress more than anything in the showing is structure and the foundation of these cattle in their feet and legs,” says Uden of TC Ranch, Franklin, Neb. “I don't want to put down all of the figures and the EPDs (expected progeny differences), but if you don't have a foundation to put them on, you don't have anything.”

Daniel, of Partisover Ranch in Colbert Ga., says, “Longevity is the key to profitability in a cow herd, so structure, in relation to longevity, has to be a priority.”

Daniel points out that structure is one of the most common problems he sees in the showing. “We've made Angus cattle so much more efficient with all of the tools available today,” Daniel says, “but we don't have that tool to measure structure.”

All three officials say an animal that is both too straight and upright in its feet and legs will be fast to break down. Uden says a common side effect can be visible swelling and fluid on the joints, specifically in the animal's hocks. Alternatively, too much set to the hock is aesthetically distracting, but is not as detrimental to the animal's existence within the herd.

Ideally, the judges agree, an animal that has some slope to the shoulder, some flex to the hip and pasterns, while standing on a large foot, should offer greater longevity and, ultimately, a larger profit. There should be adequate bone and angle to the joints, toes should point forward, and animals should track square, meaning they should walk with a long, wide stride vs. a narrow, short or labored stride.

Structure is imperative to an animal's ability to move, Uden says. “A bull that walks out with a good stride, puts that foot down and moves ahead with a long stride, can cover the pasture and do his job. That's what makes structure so important.”

Breeding stock

According to Uden and Daniel, heifers and bulls are evaluated based upon their ability to influence the Angus breed in a positive direction, and all three officials agree that an animal's longevity is what will ultimately determine its efficiency within the herd. Longevity encompasses many different traits. Balance, muscle, capacity and soundness are a few that can be evaluated visually.

When describing a heifer, Uden says, “She has to be balanced. You like to have them feminine, long-necked and clean through the front end. She should have depth of rib and capacity, and actual muscling, but not be coarse. She should have some muscle shape while still looking like a female.”

A producer should use some caution when mating females, Uden says, as heifers that are more extreme in their muscle shape can pass the trait on to their offspring and potentially increase their amount of dystocia and fertility problems. “A heifer should have a longer, smoother muscle shape, and not be round and bulky,” Uden says.

Uden also says a heifer should not have a coarse navel. In addition to being aesthetically undesirable, it may be an indication that her sons would have some extra sheath, which would affect their longevity in the herd by making them more prone to reproductive tract injuries.

Capacity in a heifer can be visualized by her depth of body and rib shape. It is important for her maternal ability to carry a calf as well as have enough room to “convert



► Mike McGuire, Waverly, Ala., handles Taylor Clarke's steer to evaluate finish. Taylor is from Rocky Ridge, Md.



grass and feed herself,” Uden says. “The cattle that I’ve seen perform well have some rib and some volume and some body.”

Including a few different traits, capacity requires that a female have adequate width of structure and an outward curvature to her rib while being open through her forerib and deep through her flank, Uden says.

Fleshing ability refers to the ability to maintain a functional body condition score (BCS). A BCS is a numerical score indicating how much backfat an animal has and is generally measured on a 9- or a 10-point scale. To learn more visit www.cowbcs.info.

It is possible to overfeed and make a female sloppy in appearance, which will detract from her balance, as both Daniel and Uden consent.

It is always good to know what the udders will look like on a heifer when she matures. Uden says, “They don’t have to be big, sloppy udders to have a lot of milk. I want them pretty tight and short, with a more refined teat, especially in these younger cows, because that’s a point of longevity if the udders break down.”

When describing the differences between a heifer and a bull, Daniel says, “Naturally, masculinity and femininity priorities are different.”

Daniel and Uden agree a bull has to be masculine and rugged in appearance in addition to having the body capacity and soundness required for production.

“A bull needs to have some turn to that top and some power from behind,” Uden says. “He needs to be able to bring some strength to these cows, some width of base, along with a more pronounced muscle shape.”

“A good indicator of muscle, especially in bulls, is the stifle. It usually is more honest, as the bull will stand down on a wider base.”

Uden adds, “They have to have a symmetrical scrotum that has some pear-shape to it. They also should measure at least 34 to 40 centimeters (cm) scrotal circumference (SC) as a yearling show bull.”

Market steers

“In showing or judging, it’s an animal’s first impression that hits me,” says McGuire of McGuire Cattle Co. in Waverly, Ala. “For me, when he walks in the ring, his balance has to catch my eye and offer a combination of things for me to evaluate him further. An animal that walks in up-headed, is clean-fronted, strong-topped and sound will get my attention and then get studied further from there.”

McGuire adds, “It goes without saying that a good steer needs to have adequate muscle,

Resources for judging terminology

Several universities offer guides to judging terminology. Here is a small sample.

- ▶ “South Dakota State University Livestock Judging Manual,” South Dakota State University, available at <http://ars.sdstate.edu/AnimalEval/LivestockJudgingMan.pdf>
- ▶ “Breeding Beef Cattle Judging Outline” and “Reasons Terminology for Breeding Cattle,” Texas A&M University, available at http://animalscience.tamu.edu/ansc/publications/youthpubs/youth_all.html
- ▶ “Mississippi 4-H Livestock Judging Manual,” Mississippi State University, available at <http://msucares.com/pubs/publications/p2289beef.pdf>

but, at the same time, that animal has to be finished. He has to have a muscular shape to his top, upper rump, forearm and stifle and a deep-centered quarter, while also handling with adequate finish. Finish is important, as it is a good indicator for quality grade and market readiness.”

McGuire says the muscle shape can be distracting on a steer if too extreme and round in shape. He also expects a little more finish on registered Angus steers, but, at the same time, steers should not be sloppy in appearance.

The big picture

“The junior nationals are about developing young people with the aid of their junior projects,” Daniel says. There is a lot more to learn from the NJAS than just what is shown and what is said.

“I am big on courtesy, showmanship and sportsmanship in the showring,” McGuire says. “That’s why I enjoy the junior shows — you get to see the good sportsmanship and the desire in the kids as they are showing.”

Uden encourages juniors not to put all

their emphasis on the showring from just one day, but to use all of the tools available to them in the industry to learn and gain a better experience.

“A lot of the best cattlemen have had to learn and work their way up,” Uden says. “Those usually are the ones who have been a success. They have had more to work for.”

Collectively, the judges say, juniors shouldn’t get discouraged, especially after just one show. That’s just one opinion on a given day, and there will always be another day.

“Juniors should try to get to know people and just enjoy the experience,” McGuire says. “Like always, I stress to them to pay attention to what their parents and leaders are trying to tell them.”

He adds, “Don’t get intimidated. Someone may have a lot more background and experience, but that doesn’t mean that you can’t learn it if you want to. Look at the people who are successful, and see what you can use from what they do to help yourself to be more competitive.”

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▶ Randy Daniel of Colbert, Ga., judged the 625 entries in the owned female show.

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