

PHOTOS COURTESY CERTIFIED ANGUS BEEF LLC

► Winning the 2005 National Junior Angus Carcass Contest took a combination of leanness and marbling. Glen Mommsen's champion carcass (left) graded low-Prime with a 1.27 YG. The heaviest-marbled carcass (middle) and the leanest carcass (right) were sorted to the bottom of the group.

# More than 'Meats' the Eye

The NJAS Carcass Contest offers opportunities beyond just meat cooler competition.

by Kindra Gordon

Nearly everyone associated with the beef industry recognizes there is a certain thrill that goes with the anticipation and competition of a cattle show. Similarly, the annual National Junior Angus Show (NJAS) Carcass Contest has that element of excitement to see who the winners are when carcasses are hung on the rail. But for many who enter animals in the carcass contest, the event goes beyond winning or losing and offers some important life lessons as well.

## Real-world experience

"Just as anything that surrounds the NJAS aims to give educational experiences, we want the carcass contest to offer participants a real-world experience in feeding and marketing an animal. Then, by marketing on a grid, it helps participants recognize that the

industry wants maximum marbling and minimum fat and, if they meet that, they'll reap the monetary benefit," says Clint Walenciak, Certified Angus Beef LLC (CAB) packing division director.

Walenciak adds that the base price of the grid offers an additional educational opportunity. He explains that each year there is a different base price on the grid, which reflects current industry prices. For instance, in 2003, there was a base price of \$1.35. This year it was \$1.25.

"For kids who enter this contest year after year, there's an opportunity to learn about market trends and why the base price is different," he says.

Through having their four children involved in the NJAS Carcass Contest, Randy and Varee McCabe of Kim-Mac Farms, Elk City, Kan., say their children have learned they are producing food. The contest keeps that in perspective.

The four McCabe children — Flinton, Ethan, Esther and Hannah — enroll several steers each year in the contest and had grand and reserve grand champion carcass steers at the 2004 NJAS, as well as the grand champion state carcass group. This year, Flinton had reserve grand champion carcass steer, and seven of their animals were in the top 16 out of 34 animals in the competition.

Mulhall, Okla., Angus breeder John H. Pfeiffer counts the carcass contest as the second-most important Angus youth competition besides the speech contest. His two sons have enrolled steers in the contest the past five years.

"This is what the cattle business is about," he says. "It teaches kids that the goal is quality and to get them to Prime — that's where the money is." His oldest son, John C., has won grand and reserve grand champion with his carcass steers in past years, and this year his 16-year-old son, Andy, entered animals that finished third and sixth out of 34. The Pfeiffer boys also won reserve grand champion state carcass group.

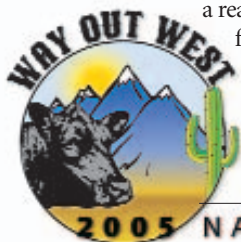
## Family value

For several of the carcass contest participants, the event has special appeal because it also allows for the whole family to be involved. For instance, all four of the McCabe children work together with their parents to select their animals and then get them ready for the contest. With oldest sibling Flinton now in college, Ethan, Hannah and Esther get the animals broke to lead and feed them daily through the winter and spring. Varee makes sure all the animals are registered in the kids' names and reminds everyone to double-check tattoos.

For 16-year-old Glen Mommsen of De Witt, Iowa, feeding and showing cattle has been a family tradition dating back to his great-grandfather and grandfather — who started a winning legacy when they had the champion carload of steers at the Chicago International eight times. They were all loads of Angus cattle.

Growing up, Glen has been no stranger to the showing, though this was the first year he entered the NJAS Carcass Contest. He proved his family's winning ways when his steer came out as this year's NJAS grand champion carcass steer with a Prime Yield Grade (YG) 1 carcass.

Glen's father, Norlin, says they recognized all along this calf was an excellent carcass steer. "We fed him with a goal of having him at 1,300 to 1,350 [pounds (lb.)] for the Iowa State Fair in mid-August, but then decided



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because of his ultrasound numbers to enter him at the junior Angus show carcass contest.”

For the Pfeiffer family, raising cattle has also been a family tradition since 1959, when a then-6-year-old John H. got his first Angus heifer from his grandpa. He’s been raising and showing Angus ever since. He and his wife, Gaye, enrolled their two sons to become junior Angus members when they were infants.

When youngest son, Andy, suffered a brain injury when he was 3 years old, they realized he wouldn’t be able to compete in traditional junior Angus events. But, over the years, Andy enjoyed the cattle and built up his herd of Angus, and in 2000 he and John C. entered the NJAS Carcass Contest for the first time. Since then it has become a meaningful way for Andy to be involved in NJAS activities.

John H. says, “Andy gets real excited about the contest. He helps me feed his calves every morning and rub and brush them. He can’t lead them, but at the national show he helps carry the feed pans and take care of them.”

### Focus on genetics

These participants will also tell you that the biggest lesson learned from the carcass contest is that the secret to having a high-performing carcass is to focus on genetics.

“In our first years of entering, we didn’t do so well,” Randy says. “Since then, our herd has changed, and we’ve put more emphasis on carcass traits. It’s not our sole focus, but we’ve moved it up the ladder in our selection,” he says.

Today, the steers his children enter in the contest are selected from their cull bulls — those that don’t meet the criteria for their bull sale offering. They do use ultrasound expected progeny differences (EPDs) in making some of their selection choices. The McCabe cattle aren’t castrated until between Thanksgiving and Christmas, because that’s when bulls are selected for their production sale. The steers are then roughed along on silage and protein through the winter. At the end of May, the steers are shifted from roughage to a primarily grain ration over a two-week period and then fed until the contest.

“I’ve learned how much of a role good genetics play in having a good carcass,” Flinton says. “It’s been interesting to watch over the years, as an animal that looks good phenotypically may not grade. So, you really recognize the importance of genetics.”

Walenciak attributes a focus on genetics to



PHOTOS BY TANVA PEEBLES

► **Glen Mommson** (left), De Witt, Iowa, and **Flinton McCabe**, Elk City, Kan., claimed grand champion and reserve grand champion carcass steers, respectively. Both winning carcasses graded low-Prime.



► Oklahoma won reserve grand champion state carcass group. Pictured are (from left) **Andy and John Pfeiffer**, Mulhall, Okla.



► Kansas won grand champion state carcass group and third-place state carcass group. Pictured are (from left) **Ethan and Esther McCabe**, grand champion state group, and **Hannah and Flinton McCabe**, third-place state group. All are from Elk City, Kan.

the exceptional performance in the carcass contest as well. For instance, in this year’s contest he reports that:

- Eighteen of the 34 carcasses qualified for *Certified Angus Beef*® (CAB®), which translates into a 53% acceptance rate. For perspective, the CAB-acceptance rate nationwide in June 2005 was 15.8%.
- Seven of the 34 animals were Prime, which is a 20% acceptance rate compared to the national average of 4%-5% Prime.
- One animal in the contest was YG 4, which is a 2.8% acceptance rate and well below the national average.

Walenciak says, “I think these results tie back to the fact that these steers come from guaranteed Angus genetics versus just the average black-hided steer. It shows that Angus genetics come through.”

In dollars, CAB Supply Development Director Mark McCully also points out that genetics that perform on the rail pay. He says, “On this year’s grid there was a \$34-per-cwt. (hundredweight) difference between the highest-paying carcass and the lowest. On a 750-pound carcass, that is a \$250 difference.”

McCully’s advice to future carcass contest participants — and the industry — is to recognize that YG 3 and 4 animals will definitely be penalized. He adds, “It’s a balancing act to maximize cutability and quality grade, but obviously our winner did it — YG 1 and Prime — that’s a carcass contest curve bender.”

For those who have figured out the genetics for high-performing carcasses, the NJAS Carcass Contest can even be a marketing tool.

John H. says his family has used their favorable carcass results as a tool to help merchandise cows and bulls from their herd. “We primarily sell to commercial producers, so to be able to tell them how our cattle ranked over the years in the carcass contest has been a valuable marketing tool.”



**Editor’s Note:** A complete listing of results from this year’s contest, along with ribeye photos from each animal, can be viewed at [www.angus.org/aims/carcass/2005carcasscontest.htm](http://www.angus.org/aims/carcass/2005carcasscontest.htm). Also see page 202 in the September 2005 Angus Journal for further coverage.