



PHOTO BY SHEILIA STANNARD

► Lydell Meier (left), Clinton, Tenn., receives the 2005 Herdsman of the Year Award from James Fisher, director of activities and junior activities for the American Angus Association.

A True Success Story

Lydell Meier turns hard work into wins and earns the respect of his peers.

Story & photos by **Brooke Byrd**



► Lydell considers fitting and clipping cattle an unteachable art. "It's something you've just got to pick up on your own," he says.

Denver, Colo., and the National Western Stock Show (NWSS) have become something of a tradition for Lydell Meier, Clinton, Tenn. In the fourth year he has attended the NWSS with Gamble Angus, Lydell won the 2005 Herdsman of the Year Award, voted upon by fellow Angus fitters and showmen.



"I was shocked," Lydell says. "What makes me feel so good is that all the friends I've made across the country who didn't know me from Adam three years ago voted for me and have appreciated what I've been able to do."

What Lydell has been able to do in those three years is impressive. After joining up with Gamble Angus, Lydell's management and strong work ethic have brought him from a few class winners at the 2002 NWSS to winning the Roll of Victory (ROV) bull show in 2003 to winning both the ROV bull and female shows in 2004. This year, his success was rewarded with admiration.

"To have the success we've had at Denver and then for people — friends, peers and competitors — to actually vote for me was incredible," he says.

The story begins

Lydell, originally from Stonewall, Texas, was raised around show cattle. "I grew up knowing nothing but cows," he says. His family raised Hereford cattle with a fitting service on the side. Lydell got his first taste of Angus when he showed some heifers in high school. While attending college at Texas Tech University, Lubbock, Lydell got even more involved with fitting and showing Angus by helping Doug Satrie, Montague, Texas,

His success story truly began in May 2001. While helping Doug at the Atlantic National ROV show, Lydell met his future wife, Holly Gamble (now Holly Meier). "We happened to meet and hit it off immediately," he says.

Holly, her father, John, and brother, Ben, operated Gamble Angus. In 2001, the operation was very small, with only 25-30 cows. "Holly and her dad were trying to do things with the cattle, but they were so involved with their funeral home business that they just weren't getting done what they wanted to," Lydell says. Since he was frustrated with his job as a bank loan officer, Lydell and Holly made a deal.

"If I took over their cattle operation, that would allow her and her dad more time to concentrate on the family business," he says. The Gambles had gathered a good genetic foundation. Lydell reworked the breeding scheme and nutritional program, and created a show program. "We just blossomed from there," he says.

Changing for the better

Now married and with a young son, Tristan Andrew, Lydell has helped increase the herd to approximately 150 purebred Angus and commercial recipient females.

Cows calve from January to May to have different-aged show heifers, and there are usually at least 20 show cattle in the barn to be worked every day.

"Since Lydell came up here, our numbers have increased and the quality of our cattle has improved dramatically," Holly says. In the past Gamble Angus sold cattle mainly at local consignment sales, but with Lydell's marketing talents, she says, "we've moved a lot of cattle throughout the U.S."

With a more efficient breeding schedule and increasing use of embryo transfer (ET), Holly says Lydell has enabled Gamble Angus to build upon its strong foundation in a way she and her father never had enough time to do.

Gamble Angus has thrived in the showing due to Lydell's direction and management. "Before, most of the cattle that we would win with in the ring were cattle that we had bought. Now most of the ones we take on the road are ones we've actually raised," Holly says, adding they're taking more numbers to shows now. "Lydell does such a good job feeding and getting them ready, and in the way the cattle are presented in general."

Lydell is able to give the ranch the attention that it needs to succeed, Holly continues. "His number one priority is the cattle. He works from seven in the morning to 10 at night during the summertime," she says. "Instead of giving 99%, he's always giving 110% when it comes to the cattle, the farm and our partners. He'd do anything for anybody."

True work ethic

One of the main things that struck Doug about Lydell was his drive. "I could tell he was going to succeed, because he had that want-to and he had the desire," he says.

"He's very versatile, very ubiquitous in anything you need him to do," he continues, "whether it's sticking, leading cattle, washing — anything from the most menial thing to the most intensive thing."

Doug says Gamble Angus had a tremendous amount of promise and cow power, but Lydell helped put things on the right path. "He had the work ethic and the desire to take those cattle and develop them and hit that show road," he says.

Among those he has worked for and those he has worked with in the barns, Lydell is known as an expert fitter. "He knows cattle real well, and he knows how they're supposed to look," Doug says. In a show world where judges' preferences can range widely, Lydell is able to adapt, Doug says.

"Change is always hard for anybody, but he can see that, and whether he likes it or not, he realizes that's where it needs to go, that's how they need to look and that's how we're going to make them look."

Bruce and Amie Stertzbach, Louisville, Ohio, say they believe Lydell was voted Herdsman because of the extreme effort that he offers. Competitors in the showring and friends of Lydell and Holly in the barns, Bruce and Amie say Lydell wants to be the best at what he does. "He gives the effort to get it done," Bruce says. "Some people just go through the motions. He gives 24-hours-a-day effort to this.

"You have to breed good cattle, but then you have to take care of them right," he continues. "Lydell lives and breathes the cattle business. Some people do it as a part-time thing — it's everything to him."

Bruce says that it takes time to earn the Herdsman Award, and Lydell has spent his time wisely. "He's shown the ability to compete with the best and shows them at every show that he can have those cattle at 12 o'clock, and that earns the respect of people in the barns."

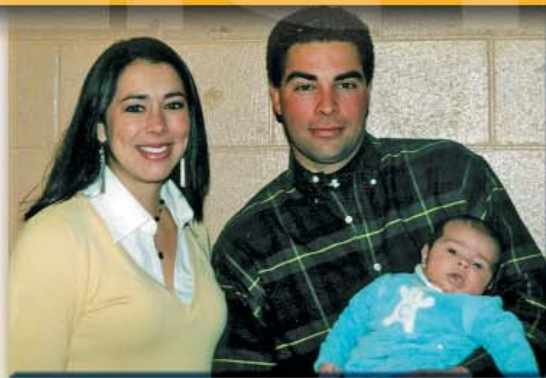
"You can't just care about it when you're at the show. It starts from Day 1 when you're at home and working the 10 to 12 hours that it takes every single day," Amie explains. "He's proved that he's done it at home, and it pays off when he gets to the shows.

"If something isn't quite right at the last show you were at," she says, "on your drive home the first thing you think of is how to fix it and make it better. You take them seriously when you find out they're in your class, because you know that's where a lot of your competition is going to come from."

The road to success

Before he does anything with his cattle, Lydell relies on his ability to envision the future. "You have to evaluate cattle when they're young. I try to take a mental picture of what I think they can and what they could look like if I do certain things to them," he says. "You've got to know what that end product's going to look like before you ever start."

When he does start, Lydell focuses heavily on nutrition and hair and skin care, the knowledge of which he attributes to Doug and to his father. "When you get them on the right program and the right nutrition and



► Lydell's son attended his first NWSS in 2005. When accepting his award, Lydell remarked that Denver had become a tradition for him, and he hoped it would be for his son also. Pictured are (from left) Holly, Lydell and Tristan Andrew Meier.

you do the right things to them," he says, "you can take an average one and make it meet its genetic potential."

In the first two years he worked with Gamble Angus, Lydell and Holly would stay out in the barn until 9 or 10 p.m., just working hair. Even now, he washes and rinses the show cattle every day and pays close attention to individual animals' hair care needs. "It's just a daily thing," he says. "If they have a little bit of dandruff, you just change something else until you get it right."

Lydell lives by two lessons learned from his father: (1) success takes an extreme amount of work, and (2) the only things in life that you can ever call your own are the things you earn yourself.

"To have that extra-special look at shows and stay fresh, to really be on top of the game, it takes a lot of time and a lot of work," Lydell says. Luckily for Gamble Angus and Lydell, that's exactly what he loves to do.

"We've got to work harder and longer and better than everybody else if we're going to try to make a splash in this deal," he says.

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► In 2005, the first year Gamble Angus ever brought cattle to the yards, their pen won its division. Lydell considers Denver the Superbowl of all shows and tries to have his cattle in peak condition.

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“The guys that help me hate the fact that we’ve got lights around the barn.”

Lydell is quick to note that Gamble Angus is operated by a team. Ben helps when he can, John hays and does all the artificial insemination (AI) work, and “Holly could replace about two or three guys at the shows,” he says.

He also emphasizes the important roles that friends and luck have played in his success. He gives thanks to Bruce and Amie for helping Holly and John build a strong group of cows to found the show program.

The motto that the only things in life you can call your own are the things you earn yourself reflects one of the main reasons Lydell loves the showing, as well as his competitive nature. “It’s a way that you can judge your work at home versus how everybody else does it,” he says. “If your cattle look better than everybody else’s at the show, you know you’re doing something extra special at home that’s above and

beyond everybody else.”

Lydell also believes the showing is one of the best ways to advertise the ranch and its genetics. When people notice how much work you put into your cattle, he says, “they’re going to want to buy cattle from you.”

Shifting perspectives

Lydell has come away from the showing with a different perspective than when he started. “Used to be that if you didn’t win, everything was lost, but now it’s not,” he says. “You’ve got to be able to take whatever you get and go home and build from it.”

He has strong hopes and goals for Gamble Angus. “I want to be able to produce cattle that are so phenotypically superior and sound that when people mention buying Angus cattle, the first name that pops in their minds is our farm’s name,” he says. “I want every calf that we wean to have the potential of being shown, because if you can get that type of quality in numbers, then you know that your

breeding program is really going well.”

In focusing on producing show cattle, Lydell is also focusing on helping out an important group. “Our whole program is geared toward the juniors, and we help them as much as humanly possible,” he says. “It’s two ex-juniors trying to raise cattle for juniors now.”

His perspectives have also shifted to another Angus junior, his and Holly’s young son. “Ever since he’s been born I find myself leaving the house a little later, and I get in a little earlier,” he says. “Now the gear of the program and our success is going to be more focused toward him.”

With plans for building a small cow herd of his son’s own, Lydell says that when he’s old enough, he should be ready to jump into the showing.

“He’s got about two options,” he says. “If he’s not going to be showing cattle, he’d better be playing football.”

