

2016 National Western A New Tradition



► Bear Mountain Angus, Palisade, Neb., displays a pen of three registered-Angus heifers down in the Yards at the National Western.

The first Angus Heifer Pen competition showcases consistent, maternal genetics.

Story & photos by *Jena McReil*, digital editor



Denver's historic stockyards have been home to livestock trading for more than a century. It is a marketing venue that has stood the test of time, as proven by the swarms of people bustling through the pens on a crisp January day.

Under the backdrop of the prominent Livestock Exchange Building, Angus breeder Brian Stoller displays his pen of three registered-Angus heifers. His ranch, Bear Mountain Angus, is among the first participants in the Angus Heifer Pen Show during the National Western Stock Show (NWSS).

"You get to see new people and old faces every year, and we try and let people see what we're doing," Stoller says. "There's as many cattle people here as you could find in one place, so it's just a good marketing tool."

The carload and pen competitions at the NWSS are what makes Denver especially unique. It's the only place where exhibitors can present their cattle in groups of 10 and three, respectively. Angus bulls have always been in the spotlight down in the Yards, but this was the first year for heifers to compete.

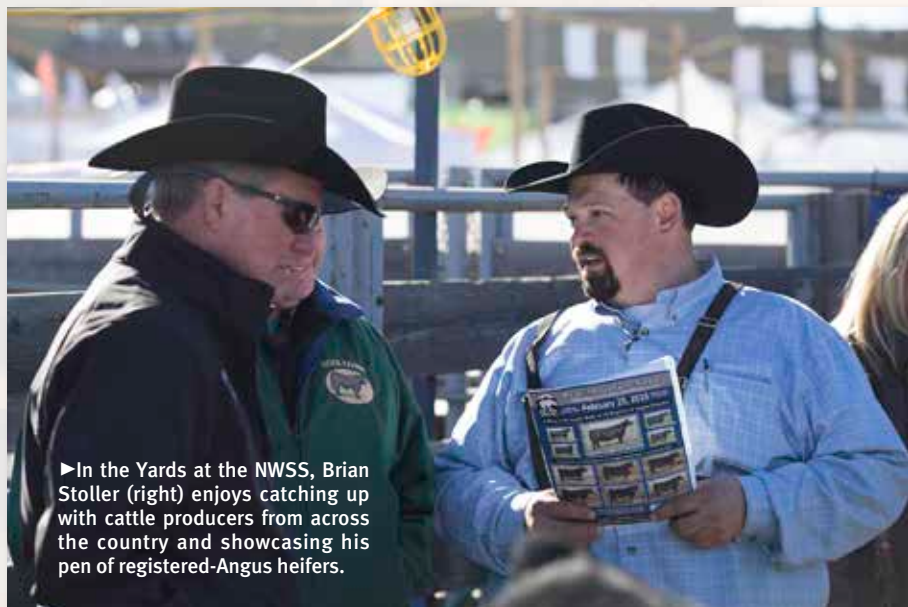
Angus producers presented six carloads and 43 pens of three on Jan. 16. Judges Doug Slattery, Cameron, Texas; Arlen Sawyer,

Bassett, Neb.; and Phil Trowbridge, Ghent, N.Y., evaluated the entries on structure, performance EPDs and phenotype.

"The pen-and-carload show probably lends itself toward the commercial business as much as anything we do in any of the shows," Slattery notes. "The commercial man

is looking for quality and consistency in numbers, and he can come here and get an idea of a breeding program that fits him."

The day started before sunrise for Bear Mountain Angus and the other exhibitors. Animals were rinsed, fed and fitted as teams prepared them for the show. The heifers and



► In the Yards at the NWSS, Brian Stoller (right) enjoys catching up with cattle producers from across the country and showcasing his pen of registered-Angus heifers.

stern Stock Show

bulls enter the ring one at a time, and performance information, including expected progeny differences (EPDs), is displayed on a screen overhead. The judges carefully evaluate each animal individually, and then the entire carload or pen is brought back into the arena.

“On the females, we will be looking for a lot of the same things we do in the bulls,” Slattery says. “Quality, consistency. We want females that are going to go out and make cows, be practical kind of females that can go out in the country and work, and that along with a very consistent package in the pen heifer show.”

After the judges critique the cattle, the exhibitors tie them up outside the building to await the show results. Side by side, one can appreciate the precise breeding decisions that led to each bull or heifer.

At this point in the show, the morning’s sharp chill began to dissipate as the sun rose in the sky. Almost in synchronized fashion, heavy steam escaped with each animal’s breath.

Stock show heritage

Stoller has been attending the NWSS since the late 1980s and has exhibited Bear Mountain Angus bulls in the pen competition since 2001. This year, he says he was proud to have their Angus heifers standing alongside those bulls. Together with his wife, Tiffany, and their daughters, McKinley and Reagan, Stoller manages about 300 mother cows on the ranch and hosts an annual production sale each February.

“Our heifers show off what we strive for in our program,” Stoller says. “Cattle that are moderate, functional, have good EPDs, can go out and work in our environment, as well as other environments.”

With a careful eye on selection decisions, they are always looking for the next great set to take to the National Western. Each of the heifers in this year’s pen traced back to one foundation cow, Bear Mountain Jamie 512.



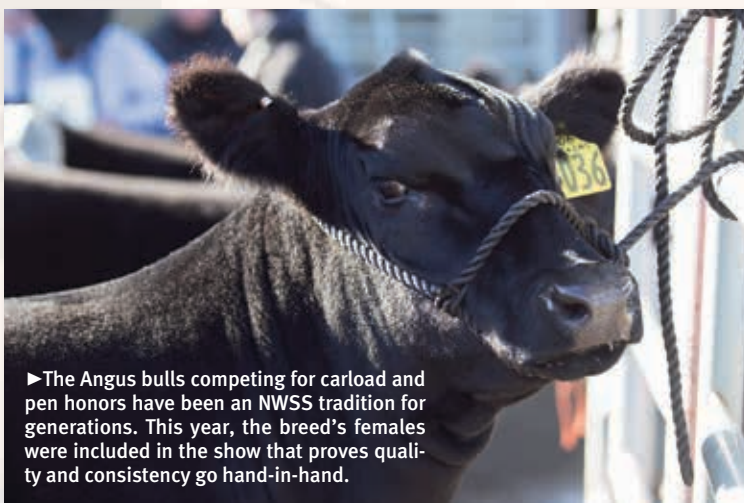
► Always a highlight of the week’s events at the NWSS, the Angus carload and pen competitions take place before a large crowd in the Livestock Auction Arena. Judge Doug Slattery (left) studies each group carefully.

ranch was up to 100 mother cows, and Stoller knew his future would involve Angus cattle. Over the years, he moved from California to Idaho, and settled the herd in Nebraska in May 2008.

“The Angus breed, to me, is a people breed,” Stoller says. “That’s what got me hooked as a kid, everybody helping me, encouraging me and guiding me in the right direction.”

While the cattle are in the limelight during the week’s events at the NWSS, everyone knows it is the Angus community that keeps participants coming back, year after year. At the base of the Rocky Mountains, friendships are made, cattle are traded and the next chapter of the beef business is defined.

“The most enjoyable thing about being involved and judging here at the National Western is the camaraderie between Angus people and just ranching people in general,” Slattery says. “We, all of us, come out here and see people we only see one time a year. It’s a great gathering place and a great place to share ideas and thoughts about the Angus business.”



► The Angus bulls competing for carload and pen honors have been an NWSS tradition for generations. This year, the breed’s females were included in the show that proves quality and consistency go hand-in-hand.