



PHOTOS COURTESY OF TOM JOHNSON

Tigerstriped Value

The F1 "tigerstripe" Hereford-Brahman cross female is a superior cow for the South.

by Sara Gugelmeyer

These guys know tigerstripe females. If you add them together, Tom Johnson, Mike Armitage and Jay Wright sell approximately 10,000 head of F1 tigerstripe females each year.

Tom Johnson, Wortham, Texas, sells at least 7,500 head of F1

tigerstripe females each year for himself and customers through his marketing business, and maintains a 300-head cow herd of tigerstripe cows. He's the largest marketer of tigerstripe females.

Mike Armitage, Claremore, Okla., started his commercial cow

operation with tigerstripes in 1994, and he continues to buy, add value to, and sell between 1,500 and 2,000 head of tigerstripe females each year.

Jay Wright manages W4 Ranch, Morgan, Texas, where Hereford seedstock and F1 replacement females are raised.

All three agree that the F1 tigerstripe female is a superior cow for the South and Southeast.

What is a tigerstripe?

"Tigerstripe" is a term used to describe the F1 cross of Hereford and Brahman because of the animal's tiger-like striped brindle hair. The cross is traditionally known to combine the beefier Hereford of English descent with the more heat-tolerant *Bos indicus* Brahman.

What's the advantage?

These F1 tigerstripes are ideally suited to hot and humid climates, Wright says. "They will get out and chase what feed is there better than the straightbred cattle; they are more heat tolerant and withstand that kind of climate a whole lot better."

Armitage says they work really well in his environment where sore feet and eye trouble are management issues related to the climate and conditions.

"They fit our country real well in central and south Texas where the climate and the terrain demand that you have some Brahman influence," Johnson says.

Comparing tigerstripes to straight Brahman is where the difference really shows. "Your breed-back is going to be a lot better with F1s, and there's more performance in those cattle as far as weaning weight and yearling weight. And the cattle are going to feed much better and grade a lot better," Johnson says.

One of the biggest advantages, though, is longevity. "Real-world ranchers know that the F1 female will outlive and be productive three to five years longer than a straight English animal because of the Brahman influence," Armitage says.

Wright adds, "You'll get maybe 10 to 12 years out of a straight bred cow. I've seen F1s that will last up to 20 years."

And Johnson's cows prove it. "This week I shipped some packer cows, and some of the cows were 19 and 20 years old and have raised a calf every year. For a cow to last 18 or 19 years and not miss any calves and still have a few teeth in their head is pretty remarkable."

Not only do the cows last 18 or 19 years, but they raise growthy



calves as well. "Tigerstripes will consistently wean from 30 to 50 lb. heavier weights than any other cross in this region," Armitage says.

Johnson explains, "When you breed Brahman to Hereford, you're breeding cold to hot. You get kind of a genetic explosion, and that extra jolt of hybrid vigor just makes a cow that is a real heavy milker and can function in some pretty tough environments."

Are they wild?

Many cattlemen believe Brahman or cattle with "ear" to be wild and unmanageable. Armitage says that isn't the case. "If they're managed properly and handled correctly horseback, they can be the simplest cows to handle and are much smarter than the average bovine. But I don't recommend them to the guys that have portable panels and a four-wheeler. The main difference is you don't need to touch these cows but twice a year. They take care of themselves."

Johnson agrees, "With that tick of Brahman in them they are going to have a little different disposition. It's all in the way you cowboy and how you handle them. We do everything horseback and our cattle work well horseback. You are going to get some (wild ones) every once in a while but those need to be culled anyway. The less time they have to spend in a set of pens the better off they are and you are too."

Where's the market?

Cattlemen do find one disadvantage to the F1 tigerstripe cow. As of now, there is not a great marketing outlet for feeder calves with Brahman influence. Even if they are 50% or more Hereford they are not eligible for Certified Hereford Beef (CHB®) and are sometimes discounted at sale barns.

Wright has developed a relationship with feeder calf buyers who appreciate his F1 calves. "The misconception is that those Brahman-cross steers won't feed as well as straightbred cattle, but that is not entirely true in my opinion. They'll buy them because they come from here and they know they are taken care of, had their shots and everything. And they say they're feeding as well as straightbred cattle."

Johnson hopes that a niche market like CHB will be developed for Hereford-Brahman cross feeder cattle to help maintain and develop the market for Hereford bulls in his area, because many of his customers are using Hereford bulls on F1 tigerstripe cows and taking a discount when the calves are marketed.

But, the good news is the heifers are in high demand for replacement females. Johnson breeds his F1 cows to Brangus bulls and enjoys a good marketplace for his heifer calves for replacements. "I probably get beat up a little on my steers because they get a little too much navel on them and too much ear. But the heifer side of it surpasses and makes up for that."

Armitage says, "The reason for the tigerstripe's value is partly due to the simple laws of supply and demand. There's not many of those females available in this region. We find that in northeast Oklahoma the tigerstripe is our top seller, they will outsell the very best Angus cattle in this region. We buy (tigerstripes) as heifers or young cows in whole herd liquidations primarily out of Texas, mate them to Angus or Charolais bulls and market them through one of our sales." Armitage Livestock organizes about five commercial female sales annually with 800-3,000 head sold at each event located throughout northeast Oklahoma, Missouri and Arkansas.

As the largest marketer of tigerstripes, Johnson buys no less than 2,000 head of open heifer calves each year, usually about 550-600 lb., straightens them out, groups them by weight and resells them. His company, Johnson Cattle Marketing, also sells about 1,400-1,500 head of primarily tigerstripes at six sales in south

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A Bar Ranch/Armitage Livestock

Mike Armitage, along with his wife, Martha, and sons, Merrit, 22, and Turner, 17, own and operate A Bar Ranch and Armitage Livestock near Claremore, Okla.

Mike started his own Hereford herd in 1994 after working for Brushcreek Herefords who owned "Lerch," a record-breaking bull that sold for \$260,000 for half-interest in 1980. "A lot of my original cow herd was Lerch descendants and we decided to use a Brahman bull on our Hereford cows and start raising our own tigerstripe cows."

By 2001 Armitage had grown his A Bar Ranch herd to about 400 head by keeping replacements out of those original Hereford cows and their tigerstripe daughters. Now, Armitage's cow herd consists of about 1,200 head of mainly F1s and F2s sired by Angus bulls.

Armitage says fertility can sometimes be a problem with Brahman crosses. To ensure that would not be the case with his herd, "we decided to ultrasound our entire group of replacement heifers in 1995 and kept only heifers that conceived the first 30 days of exposure," Armitage says. "And since we did not keep any that didn't meet those criteria, all were selected from those cows that were extremely fertile."

Handling cattle horseback isn't just something the Armitage family enjoys, it's business as well. A Bar Ranch maintains a broodmare band of about 100 head of modern cow-bred Quarter Horses. At their annual fall sale, ranch geldings and weanling prospects are sold.

Because of their program of buying female tigerstripes, adding value by breeding them, calving them or simply holding them until the market improves, the Armitages are often caring for as many as 5,000 head of bred cows and heifers at a time in addition to their home-raised cow herd.

Visit www.ArmitageLivestock.com for more information on Mike and his program. **HW**



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— Tom Johnson



◆ Heterosis

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Texas throughout the year, in addition to order buying and marketing F1s for ranches like W4.

In fact, Johnson organizes W4's annual production sale where about 150 F1 tigerstripe replacements are sold each year.

Whether it's raising, managing or marketing females, it's pretty clear these three cattlemen see value in tigerstripes. **HW**

W4 Ranch

W4 Ranch, Morgan, Texas, is a large Hereford seedstock operation that also raises F1 Hereford-Brahman and F1 Hereford-Angus replacement females. Jay Wright is the general manager, and the ranch is owned by James, Joe and Joey Walker. Producing F1 females is something W4 has done since the ranch was started in 1961. "That's been our bread and butter," says Wright. "That's how we got to where we are. We sell more Herefords now, because our Hereford genetics have improved."

In 2002, W4 purchased the K74 herd owned by Cliff Knight, Sulphur, Okla. About 300 K74 females and seven herd bulls were bought by W4 to improve its genetic base and increase the quality of its seedstock.

Encompassing about 12,000 acres, the W4 ranch keeps an average of 1,000 head of Hereford cows and produces about 75% purebred seedstock, and the remainder is Brahman and Angus crossbreds. W4



PHOTO COURTESY OF W4 RANCH

sells about 100 bulls and 150-200 replacement females at its annual production sale the fourth Friday of October.

W4's F1 tigerstripe females are now sold as open heifer calves, Wright says. "We used to sell them as bred heifers or pairs, but in this day and time it's been more feasible for me to sell open heifers. I'll wean the calves, get them all ready to go and the buyers take and raise them in their own climate,

feed resources. It's been more beneficial and economical for me to sell them as open heifers."

Most of the time, W4 heifers are bought by one ranch. "These people are set up so they come in and want to buy large groups. They generally buy from a reputable Hereford place that can put a big group together, because if they get them from one ranch, they know how they're going to perform."

For more information about W4, visit www.W4ranch.com. **HW**

Johnson Cattle Marketing/87 Ranch

Tom Johnson started Johnson Cattle Marketing, Wortham, Texas, in 1991, after working for 15 years as a field representative for *The Cattleman* magazine. *The Cattleman* is the Texas and Southwestern Cattle Raisers Association's publication, based out of Ft. Worth. Because he had been



traveling around the area visiting with cattle producers for many years, starting a marketing business was a simple transition. "I already knew where the cattle were," Johnson says. "And the relationships were in place."

Johnson, along with his wife, Spring, and sons, Josh and Calvin, grew the business to where it is now: one of the largest cattle marketing firms in the country. Johnson Cattle Marketing manages six regular consignment auctions a year, of about 1,400-1,500 head each, plus additional dispersal and special sales for clients, and order buying and selling. The six annual consignment auctions are held in Groesbeck and Navasota, Texas, south of Wortham.

Johnson Cattle Marketing also manages two Hereford production sales each year: W4 Ranch and Powell Herefords, Ft. McKavett, Texas.

Of these approximate 10,000 or more head sold through Johnson Cattle Marketing each year, Tom estimates 60% or greater are F1 tigerstripes.

In addition, Tom has had a primarily F1 tigerstripe cow herd of his own for about 20 years, operating under the 87 Ranch name. The 87 herd currently consists of about 300 head, which are bred to Brangus bulls. The heifer calves are sold as replacements and the steers as feeders.

Johnson says, "The F1 cow for our country is a thriftier individual and will make it on a lot less and wean a bigger calf every year and works the best for us."

A low-maintenance cow is important for the Johnsons, who manage the replacement heifers, cows and sales with only one hired hand and a few day-working cowboys. **HW**