



The



Magic



Cross

Breeding Hereford bulls to Angus cows results in the perfect female, and the steers hold their own, too.

by Sara Gugelmeyer

Hereford is the new breed of choice for many commercial cattlemen. For ranchers in the Northern Plains, Hereford bulls are providing the magic cross on their Angus cows.

Take Gary and Sharon Romey, Hot Springs, S.D., for example. Gary is a lifelong cattleman and grew up, like most from his generation, with commercial Hereford cattle in the pasture.

He says, "We had Hereford cattle until the mid-'80s, then we started crossbreeding. Baldies (Hereford-Angus F1 females) were in big demand, so we put an Angus bull on our Hereford cows. We got a set of baldie cows that ended up being phenomenal."

About seven years ago, he found what he was looking for from Topp Herefords, Grace City, N.D., and he's been using Hereford bulls ever since.

Ryan Topp says, "When Gary first started to look at Herefords he ended up at our ranch, and wanted to go through the cow herd. Gary took the better part of a day going through the herd. At the end of the day Gary came back with a list of cows. He has never wavered from that list of cow families in all the years of buying herd bulls. He has progressed with some of the more modern up-to-date genetics of those same cow families, but still never wavered from that initial list. Subsequently

Back to Hereford

But after using Angus bulls for nearly two decades, Romey was losing the Hereford influence in his herd. "We used (only) Angus bulls forever, and those good baldie cows were 12, 13, 14 years old and still having calves," he says.

When the baldie cows started disappearing, Romey knew it was time to find some Hereford bulls.



This calf is proof Romey's producing top-quality F1 black baldies.



"I can see where there's a market coming and there's going to be a price increase for the F1 baldies if they're the right kind."

— Gary Romey

what Gary has done is stack several generations of sound, moderate framed, easy fleshing females with exceptional udder quality.”

By using Hereford and Angus bulls, Romey plans to keep his ranch stocked with Hereford-Angus cross cows because he thinks it’s the best cow. “She gets some more hybrid vigor and if she’s bred right she’s going to have more fleshing ability to her,” Romey says. “I’ve seen a little more kick out of these calves if they come out of a baldie female.”

That’s exactly why fellow South Dakota rancher Fred Walker sought Hereford bulls to put on some of his 400 Angus cows. “My dad used to breed Herefords,” Walker says. “Everybody was telling me what a good cross that is. So we bought a couple Hereford bulls and put them with our 3-year-olds to raise some black baldie heifers.”

Walker says he’s wanting some Hereford-sired females to retain in the herd. “The Hereford bulls seem to pass on a good disposition which makes the baldie cows easy to be around and to handle. This gets to be more important every year as we get older. Also, there is the hybrid vigor factor.”

To make these baldies, Walker found a couple of dark red Hereford bulls with a lot of pigment from Jim Lambert, Chadron, Neb., which resulted in 100% black whiteface calves, no reds.

Steer success

Unfortunately for Walker, the first calf crop was all bull calves. His second crop of calves is due to start hitting the ground any day now, but he was not disappointed in the way the Hereford-sired steers performed. “The reason I (bred to Hereford bulls) was to get some black baldie heifer calves, but I am hoping the baldie steers continue to weigh as much or more than the Angus calves. They gained good and I was pleased with them.”

He sells his calves through Crawford Livestock Market, Crawford, Neb. Jack and Laurel Hunter own and manage that auction barn, which is also where Romey does his selling.

Jack Hunter says they’ve been seeing more and more cattlemen switch to or add Hereford bulls to their bull batteries. “In the last few years we’ve seen quite a few guys that have switched to Hereford bulls to get some more hybrid vigor,” Hunter says.

And they’ve had success. “They’ll sell just as good as the straight black-hided ones on the steers. Sometimes the heifers will bring more,” Hunter says.

A good price has certainly been the case for Walker and Romey. Walker says his Hereford-sired steers sold right with his straight Angus calves.

Romey markets his calves when they weigh 600 to 700 lb. “We usually sell about three potloads of steers every year,” he says. “And the baldie calves are right up at the top every year and a lot of the progeny



Breeding Hereford bulls to Angus cows gives the baldie calves an advantage of hybrid vigor.

Baldies in demand

Hereford-sired steers sell just as well as straight Angus calves, but the baldie female is the offspring where the magic of the cross really shines through. Romey keeps many of his Hereford-sired heifers every year to improve his own herd, but those he decides to part with are certainly in high demand.

The key is to buy the best Hereford and Angus genetics possible. (For more on that, see “The right kind.”) Topp says careful selection of seedstock has helped Romey’s success, “One can witness the fruits of that selection by the demand for his calves. They are very simply as good a set of baldies as one can find.”

Good genetics are what lead to top prices for the cattle. With good prices paid for steers and better prices paid for heifers, cattlemen have no excuse not to put some Hereford in their programs and realize the benefits of crossbreeding.

Hunter says at his auction, “If they’re good cattle, feeders won’t shy away from them. A whiteface steer might not bring any more than a solid black steer but on the heifer end they’ll bring more to make a cow.”

Demand continues to rise for Hereford-Angus cross females as more and more cattlemen are realizing the importance of the magic cross of the baldie cow. Both Romey and Walker plan to continue using Hereford and Angus bulls to keep their cow herds as profitable as possible. **HW**

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— Fred Walker



that come out of those baldie cows are better.”

Several repeat buyers bid on his calves every year, and all were receptive to the Hereford-sired calves and liked them, Romey says.

“At the present time we’re marketing the (Hereford-sired and Angus-sired) steers together but we’re probably not too far from marketing them separately,” he says.

“We see more demand for the baldie heifers every year,” he says. “I can see where there’s a market coming and there’s going to be a price increase for the F1 baldies if they’re the right kind.”

By carefully choosing his seedstock, Romey has created quite a reputation for producing quality cattle. As such, all of his heifers are either retained or sold for replacements.

The right kind

It is important for a producer who is shopping for the right bull to have a list of criteria in mind. (See “Buying Bulls” on Page 50 for more.) Seven years ago, when Gary Romey, Hot Springs, S.D., decided to add Hereford bulls to his operation again, he shopped for two years before buying. During that time, he found the now very popular TH 122 711 Victor 719T. “719T” is now co-owned by Topp Herefords, Nelson Land & Cattle and Genex Cooperative Inc., but Romey first recognized his potential.

Romey says for himself, when it comes to bulls, No. 1 has to be their disposition. Then, he says, “I like a long, moderate-framed, deep-sided bull that when you look at him from the back he’s got four legs coming off all four corners. He’s got to have a wide base front and back, be deep flanked and deep stifled.”

Then, especially when looking at bulls to sire females, Romey says it’s important to see his dam. “I am really critical on what his mom looks like as far as udder quality and legs.”

When asked about considering EPDs (expected progeny differences), Romey says it’s important, but he likes to evaluate phenotype first. “I look at the bulls first and then come back to the numbers. The numbers have to be in line. The carcass numbers, the better they are, great, but I am looking for a particular type of bull to make a particular type of calf. Heavy weaning weights and moderate birth weight is what I am looking for. Light birth weight, heavy weaning, moderate frame at maturity.”

Those are all traits he identified in 719T, who has gone on to be one of the breed’s leading sires. He ranks in the top 5% of the breed for these traits of beef production: calving ease, early rapid growth, maternal and muscle.



Romey discovered this bull, “719T”, through his careful selection process. He has since become one of the breed’s leading sires.

Ryan Topp of Topp Herefords says this about Romey’s buying habits. “Gary has always been very thorough in his bull selection, and has never been afraid to step out of the normal parameters of bull buying. A typical battle at the Topp Herefords bull sales is Gary Romey bidding against several of the leading AI studs in the country. Their stringent parameters are very similar to that of this astute rancher.” **HW**