



Pictured at the 2015 National Western Stock Show (l to r) are: Curtis Curry, AHA board member; Tammy and Tom Boatman, 2015 Herdsman of the Year; Eric Walker, AHA president; Katie Nolles, National Hereford Queen; and Craig Huffines, AHA executive vice president.

Living a Legacy

Tom and Tammy Boatman, Rockford, Ill., were honored as Hereford Herdsman of the Year.

by Julie White

One is a fifth-generation Hereford breeder and the other a third-, and together with hard work, an attitude of humility and being life-long learners, Tom and Tammy Boatman, Rockford, Ill., were recognized as the 2015 Hereford Herdsman of the Year at the National Western Stock Show (NWSS) in Denver.

“We were both blown away and very honored to receive this award,” Tammy says. “To be listed with the ones named before us is very humbling. All in all, our feelings are mutual, as I don’t think

I would have won this without Tom, and he doesn’t think he would have won this without me — we are a team.”

Tom and Tammy were selected for the award by their peers — other Hereford herdsman and breeders — and were honored prior to the selection of the supreme champion Hereford on Jan. 17.

Growing up with Herefords

Tom and Tammy both have been involved in the cattle industry all their lives and grew up showing

polled Hereford cattle. Tammy, a fifth generation Hereford breeder from Kansas, says her great-great-grandfather, Isaac Riffel, was the first in her family to raise Herefords. Her great-grandfather, Jesse Riffel Sr., started Plain View Farms in Enterprise, Kan., in 1918, and the farm was passed on to each generation including her grandfather Donald and her mother, Margarete.

“I was very involved with the operation growing up and through college before I ventured off to work for someone else,” she says. “With it being a family farm, I was involved in all aspects of the cow herd, from breeding and calving to showing, and did whatever needed to be done for the day,” Tammy explains. Margarete had a custom fitting service which Tammy helped with. “To pay my way through college, I would help my mom at a show and then stay for the second shift to come in and work for breeders of different breeds, including Angus, Charolais, Gelbvieh and Salers. I learned a lot of different points of view and that everyone has different pet peeves.”

Tom’s family originally raised Brahman cattle in Alabama. “My granddad was at the age where he couldn’t get away from them, and I was 4 years old (and) wasn’t scared of them,” Tom says. “So my dad sold them out and got into Herefords for their docility and something for me to show.”

Tom began showing at age 7 on local and state levels. “I went to my first junior national in Mufreesboro, Tenn., in 1987



Tom attributes his work ethic to his upbringing.



Tammy says managing a ranch is more than a job — it’s a lifestyle.



at age 9 and exhibited at each one after that while I was eligible to show.”

Tammy also began showing at a young age and was involved in the state and national polled Hereford associations. Her first junior national was in Hutchinson, Kan., in 1981. The Boatmans have exhibited cattle at national shows including the NWSS; the Southwestern Exposition and Livestock Show, Ft. Worth, Texas; the American Royal, Kansas City, Mo.; the Dixie National Livestock Show, Jackson, Miss.; and the North American International Livestock Exposition, Louisville, Ky.

“When we were younger, we thought our favorite part of showing cattle was the competition and clipping and fitting,” Tammy says. “But as we get older, we’ve realized what we enjoy the most is all the people we’ve met, the lifelong relationships we’ve formed and only getting to see these people at shows. Shows are like family reunions or holidays to us.”

Finding their niche

Following their junior show days, Tom and Tammy remained actively involved in the Hereford breed. After Tammy graduated with a bachelor’s degree in animal science from Kansas State University, she worked on her family’s farm and continued working freelance at shows. In 1998 she was hired as manager of Highpointe Farm in Alpena, Mich. “This was a small Hereford operation that had primarily bought from my family’s operation,”

she explains. “I was basically in charge of everything.”

Upon graduating from high school in 1994, Tom landed a job at Tennessee River Music, Ft. Payne, Ala., as assistant show barn manager. “Then after a year I got promoted to show barn manager,” Tom says. “I was in charge of show and sale cattle and also helped calve cows.” In 1998 he became show barn manager at McMinn Ranch, Burton, Texas.

In 1999 Tom and Tammy got engaged and moved to Alabama. They were married the next year. “We tried to run our own cows with my family in Alabama, but funds were tight,” Tom says. “So we started a custom fitting service as well, which is how we met Wesley Rakestraw, owner of JWR Land & Cattle, Dallas, Ga.”

In 2003, Tom and Tammy became co-managers of JWR Land & Cattle.

“We were in charge of everything from breeding decisions, breeding and calving cows, the embryo transfer program, record keeping, customer relations and show and sale cattle,” Tom says. “We also managed a production sale that was hosted the first Saturday in May, and also started hosting a junior show clinic during the summers for our customers which was a huge success.”

Due to Wesley’s passing in 2008, JWR dispersed in 2011.

Currently the Boatmans are co-managers of Perks Ranch in Rockford, Ill. “It’s the same situation as JWR, we basically do it all,” Tammy says. “We treat this ranch like it was



PHOTO COURTESY OF TAMMY BOATMAN

Tips from the Hereford Herdsman of the Year

Tom and Tammy Boatman, Rockford, Ill., were recently named the 2015 Herdsman of the Year at the National Western Stock Show. They share these tips with youth for success in the industry.

Get involved. Take advantage of the many activities, events and programs that your local 4-H and FFA clubs, state livestock and Hereford associations and the National Junior Hereford Association have to offer. You will be glad that you did!

Learn the basics first. A lot of people want to dive into clipping and fitting, but if you take the time to learn the proper nutrition, health and daily hair care of your animals, the clipping and fitting process will come with time and be much easier to learn.

Don’t be afraid to try. You will never learn to clip and fit unless you pick up the clippers and start.

Work hard. Hard work will be noticed and will benefit you in the long run. Whatever you do in life, whether it be cattle related or not, give 100% of yourself.

It’s not all about the purple. Don’t take this the wrong way, as everyone should have the goal of going to a show and winning a purple banner; however, if things just don’t go your way, take advantage of meeting new people who will become your lifelong friends and help you make connections in your future.

Never stop learning. Don’t ever think you are too young or too old to learn something new every day.

Stay true to yourself. Stay humble, take time to listen to and observe others, and thank the people who deserve it. **HW**



The Perks Ranch crew at the National Western Stock Show (l to r) are Jimmy Bernard, Del Adcock, Tom and Tammy Boatman, Matt Johnson, Locke St. John and Carter St. John.

Tom and Tammy, both former members of the National Junior Hereford Association, judged showmanship at the 2013 Junior National Hereford Expo in Kansas City, Mo.



our own with the decisions we make. We feel like the show cattle are a small part of what we do, as we also manage the ranch's annual production sale the second Saturday in October (Fall Celebration Sale). Managing a sale is a full time job in itself."

Perks Ranch will also host their third annual Customer Appreciation Show Clinic in May. "Our goal has always been to raise good functional cattle and show the good ones," she adds.

Help along the way

Tom says there are many people in his life he would like to thank for guiding him as he learned about the industry and grew professionally. "My family taught me about good work ethic and I'm thankful they bought

those first Hereford cows when I was 4 years old and provided me opportunities in life," he says.

"Growing up, Perry Debter of Debter Hereford Farm, Horton, Ala., and Daryl Hicks, Cullman, Ala., got me involved with the right people and helped me make good connections. And when I worked at Tennessee River Music, Todd Edwards taught me how to feed show cattle and Chris Charnesky taught me how to breed and calve cows and gave me the cow herd point of view of an operation. When I worked at McMinn Ranch, Steve Osborne taught me how to clip and fit better."

Tammy echoes her husband saying, "There are so many people in my life that have made an impact on me, but I'd like to recognize the people who

were involved in major turning points in my life. My mom raised me as a single parent, whom I respect, and because of this my grandparents were also a big part of my upbringing. My mom taught me how to work hard, my grandma taught me how to be a well-rounded person and my grandpa taught me how to be the showman I am today.

"I owe Mike Runner from Oklahoma a lot, as one year when I was in high school, my mom had broken her arm, and we hired Mike to come and help us out. Since my mom was laid up, it was him and I in the barn, and he took the time and pushed me to start clipping. He said 'you will never learn if you don't try.'"

She adds that when Rich Bates pursued her to manage his cattle in Michigan, he gave her confidence.

The Boatmans say Wesley Rakestraw taught them about business on a large scale and general people skills including how to treat everybody equally and how to have fun and enjoy life. "He was truly an inspiration and a one-of-a-kind guy," they say.

"We both really think of each other as the other's mentor," Tammy says. "Tom has always admired how I got into the business — born into it — and I have always admired how he got into the business. He was the first one of his family to show, and he had to go outside of his family to learn the ropes."

The next generation

Tom and Tammy have two children, Kade and Kendall, 8-year-old twins, who are active in the National Junior Hereford Association and exhibited in their first Junior National Hereford Expo in 2014.

"We both absolutely love what we do, mainly because we have a passion for Hereford cattle and couldn't imagine our lives without waking up to feed and care for livestock," Tammy says. "What we do is a lifestyle and don't really consider it a job. We can't think of a better way to raise our kids, by giving them the same upbringing that we had with cattle and teaching them about hard work and responsibility." **HW**

Herdsman heritage

Tammy is a third-generation Herdsman of the Year, following in the footsteps of her grandfather, Don Riffel, the 1969 winner, and her mother, Margarete Riffel, who won in 1993.

"It is kind of surreal now, and I feel like I am a part of Hereford history," Tammy says. "It's pretty remarkable to say that we've had three generations win Herdsman of the Year."

Tammy describes her grandpa as a great cowman and showman. "He even had to do it the hard way, hauling cattle by train boxcars and working hair without a blower," she says. "I know he's looking down on us and smiling."

Tammy was present when her mother won in 1993. "She was so honored and proud to say that she was following in her father's footsteps," she says. "She is the hardest working woman I know, besides my grandmother.

"It's very humbling, and I am very proud of this accomplishment for our family," Tammy says. "Plus the fact that I won this with my best friend and partner in life, Tom, just adds to the dream." **HW**



Pictured at the 2003 American Royal in Kansas City, Mo., are Tammy's grandfather, Don Riffel, 1969 Herdsman of the Year; her mother, Margarete Riffel, 1993 Herdsman of the Year; and her grandmother, Ladell.