



# Across the Border



Al Fenton of Fenton Hereford Ranch, Alberta, says his parents chose the Hereford breed 70 years ago because it was the most adaptable breed for their environment.

## ***A Colorado breeder utilizes Canadian genetics to diversify his operation.***

by **Heather Smith Thomas**



American breeders have often taken advantage of the benefits of new bloodlines from other countries, and there are a number of Hereford breeders who utilize Canadian genetics. Shane Truby, Durango, Colo., has been purchasing Canadian Herefords for his seedstock business from several Canadian breeders, including Al Fenton from Alberta, for about eight years.

### **Truby Ranch**

Truby comes from a long line of Hereford breeders that date back more than 120 years. He says his family came to the United States from Tyrol, Austria, in 1900 and homesteaded the ranch they still manage today. Their cattle were always purebreds, but not papered until recent years. Truby says they have bought bulls from many breeders, one being Sandburg Herefords at Cedaredge, Colo. In fact, it was a visit there to pick up bought bulls that first sparked Truby's interest in Canadian genetics.

"When I pulled into Hugh Sandburg's yard I saw some spectacular bulls and asked what they were," he says. "Hugh said they were some Canadian bulls he'd purchased at the Calgary bull sale. I was so impressed with those bulls that I asked Hugh where they came from. He told me about some breeders in Alberta, including Al Fenton in Irma, Alta., Hans Ulrich, near Claresholm, and Andy Schuepbach at Lilybrook Herefords. That's as far as the conversation went, but I couldn't get those bulls out of my mind," he says.

It was on the drive home that Truby first told his wife, Jennifer, he wanted to look at some cattle in Canada. He says since she is a native of Canada, it was convenient to look at cattle during the next visit to see her family.

"After I met those ranchers I got hooked on those cattle, and started bringing some home," Truby says.

Since then, Truby has bought semi loads of bred heifers and purchased bulls at the Calgary bull sale, the Medicine Hat bull sale, Andy Schuepbach's production sale and Al Fenton's production sale.

Today, he says, about three-fourths of his herd is registered stock. All of his papered animals are Canadian, and most of them are from Al Fenton. He explains he has also bought about 60 heifers

over the years from Andy Schuepbach and Hans Ulrich at Lilybrook Herefords.

"I can't say enough good about the Canadian ranchers I deal with. They are always ready to bend over backward and go out of their way, beyond being a good neighbor. The excellent relationships we have are hopefully for a long, long time," he says.

Truby says he has grown a great appreciation over the years for the Canadian ranchers with whom he has done business.

"The Fentons are an incredible family, as straight as an arrow, and so are the Schuepbachs. They are good people, with good livestock — no disappointments whatsoever," Fenton says. "I plan on keeping this going with those Canadian breeders. It's been a really good deal for me."

In addition to valuable relationships with the ranchers, he appreciates Canadian cattle because he says they are the kind that can thrive in any environment. In fact, Truby says some people in Louisiana wanted to buy bulls from him, and although he was at first skeptical of how his bulls would perform there, he has been pleasantly surprised with their performance.

"These cattle can go from the harsh winters of Canada to that low wet country in Louisiana — with bugs that would eat you alive," he says. "At first there was some concern about how they would handle it, but those cattle are so hardy that they can handle any environment and thrive. They are feed-efficient and

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Shane Truby, Durango, Colo., has been purchasing Canadian Herefords for his seedstock business for nearly eight years.

also good-natured, with good disposition. Longevity in these Canadian Herefords is second to none.”

Truby says the quality found in Herefords can aid in improving the cattle industry as a whole.

“We want to show that these Herefords can help correct problems that have cropped up in the black breeds,” he says. “We started out with one semi-load of females and I’ve gone back every year and bought 30 to 40 heifers. So now we have our own purebred program going and are starting to get some doors opened up. People are taking a closer look at our cattle. I live in an area dominated by black cattle, but soon people will see the advantages of these Herefords for their longevity and growth. The F1 [black baldie] is the most sought-after cow in the commercial business.”

Truby says he and Jennifer hope to continue building numbers and quality on the operation as their three sons, Granite, Flint and Quaid, get older.

“I’m still a long ways from where I want to be, but we’re working at it,” he says. “Like I told Al Fenton, we are both paddling upstream and I’m behind him by several boats — but we are both trying to go the same direction.”

During the many years in the business, the Fentons, now with a 700-cow operation, have seen many highs and lows. Truby says because of their years of experience, he still sees the value in utilizing their genetics.

“It’s been a blessing for me to be able to utilize their bloodlines,” he says.

### The downside and plus side

Truby notes the positive aspects of bringing Canadian genetics into the U.S., but doesn’t ignore the less than ideal challenges that come along, as well.

“Everything in this international exchange is a positive, in terms of the Canadian people and the Canadian cattle,” he says. “The only downside is

what you have to contend with when it comes time to sell any of these Canadian cattle — such as an older cow or bull.”

Truby explains when at the sale barn, cattle that carry the CAN brand seem to fall short simply because of the Canadian name. In contrast, he says calves born to Canadian cows that he can put his brand on sell very easily.

“I don’t want to discourage people and have them thinking they can’t do it, because they can — but it’s not easy,” Truby says. “I could have gone to many good breeders here in the U.S. and my distance and costs would be less. But the Canadian thing has worked consistently well for me and I can’t say enough good things about it.”

In addition to working together to improve their Hereford genetics, Truby and Fenton broadened their partnership to include Quarter Horses.

“I’ve raised registered Quarter Horses for 25 years and when Al comes down here to look at his stock to see how the bulls and heifers have grown out, he’s also seen my horses,” Truby adds. “He twisted my arm hard enough last year that I let him take one of my stallions to breed his mares for that year. So the relationship has been a pretty good deal for both of us.”

### Fenton Herefords

Similar to the Trubys, Al and Lori Fenton have been raising Herefords for a long time.

“My parents started this outfit in 1946,” Al Fenton says. “We started in the Hereford breed because at that time it was the most adaptable breed for our environment. This breed, like any other, needed some revolutionary selection and culling to make it a lot better. I think the Hereford is one of the best breeds out there right now.”

He explains they hold production sales every November with 100 bulls and 150 heifers. Last fall was the outfit’s 51st sale. Additionally, the Fentons have had a Quarter Horse broodmare band for the last 30 years and have started selling foals and geldings in their sale within the last ten years.

Fenton recalls the first time Truby came to their place and says Truby was looking for cattle with more bone, hair and volume — Fenton’s cattle suited Truby’s eye for more reasons than one.

These cattle work for a living, with minimal labor. He says he has two hired boys to help with the operation in addition to his family, who are all busy outside the operation.

“In order for us to run this place, these cows have to be run as simple as possible, with the least amount of equipment. We hire all our seeding done and we just look after cattle,” he explains.



Shane Truby says the Hereford breed can help improve the cattle industry because of their longevity and growth.

With few people to help, Fenton stresses the importance of culling yearly and retaining quality replacement females.

“The number one thing that has probably helped our herd is that we’ve been keeping 100 heifers each year for a number of years, and we don’t give excuses to any cow. If she doesn’t bring in a calf, for any reason whatsoever, even if it isn’t her fault, she doesn’t stay — because there are cows in the same conditions that have calves,” Fenton says.

One of the many criteria Fenton utilizes is checking udders regularly. He says this is crucial to bettering his herd and the breed.

“On day one we rate udders on a score from one to five with one being very good and two being good, but not perfect,” he explains. “If the cow is a score three, she’s gone. A three usually means the calf is able to get on the teats and suck them, but the udder isn’t acceptable.”

He reiterates the importance of checking udders because a bull’s daughters tend to have udders like his mother’s.

“If you stay with that plan long enough, you will win,” Fenton says. “With the numbers we have, it’s a constant culling system, but if you keep enough heifers every year you can reinforce your program.”

By implementing this program, Fenton says he has attracted a stable customer base.

“I think one reason a lot of people are attracted to our herd is that they can select from a large group of bulls and heifers. There will be something they want because there is volume to pick from and they have options,” he says.

### **Crossing the border**

Truby and Fenton can concur the process of transporting cattle across the border can be challenging. There are many benefits in having this opportunity, but Truby says it has to be something a person really wants to do.

“The sheer distance would deter a lot of people, and the border crossing is also a challenge,” he says.

Although Truby only has to bring a truck to the border to pick up cattle, he explains that the process as a whole is still a challenge as cattle can be taken across the border only from Monday to Friday.

“The ranchers on the Canadian side have to go to all the trouble to make it work,” he says. “They must have appointments at the border, and the officials want you there at a certain time.”

He and the Canadian ranchers have such a good working relationship, however, that they all put up with whatever they have to do in order to get these cattle across.

“It’s not easy, but it’s something we feel is worth the hassle,” he says.

*“Probably the most rewarding thing about dealing with Shane and other American cattlemen is the people. We enjoy the people.”*

— Al Fenton

Fenton notes the process takes three weeks and a lot of paperwork on his end. Beyond that, he says although the process is challenging, it is also rewarding.

“Probably the most rewarding thing about dealing with Shane and other American cattlemen is the people,” he says. “We enjoy the people. We enjoy our cattle

and horses, but the people are what make it work and make it fun. Going

into somebody else’s yard and seeing different ways of doing things and looking at their insights on breeding programs and corral setups and everything else is always enjoyable. A person can always learn something from other cattlemen, and it’s fun to learn about their history and the way they’ve done things and have built their ranches.”

Fenton says although the Trubys and he are miles apart, their lifestyle is similar, and he values the relationship he has made with them.

“Shane and his family are extremely hard-working, honest people and we appreciate them. A lot of stockmen look at things the same way you do; even though there’s a border between us there really isn’t much separating us in terms of how we make a living,” he says.

Fenton feels the biggest similarity between the Canadians and their export partners is a shared goal to raise good beef.

“Shane and I are trying to do it a little more hands off. We calve out over 100 heifers, but we don’t night check, since about 85 to 90% of our heifers calve on their own. We help the odd one now and then that needs a little help getting started, but most of them calve just fine,” he says.

He explains how the partnership has aided them both and provides Truby a unique herd to his region.

“Shane has a great opportunity in his area to sell cattle with genetics that are not readily available around him,” Fenton says. “I think these thicker-hided cattle with a little more hair and a little more bone seem to suit that area pretty well.”

Fenton says these cattle are hardier, raise a good calf and breed back readily.

Fenton says at the end of the day, he really enjoys working with Truby.

“With Shane and me, we do things the same way. I run everything with horses and all these cattle know what horses are,” he says. “He can ride through them and they are at ease and don’t move. He can pick up a pair and take them out of the herd, and that cow knows what is going on and is easy to move because she’s already horse broke. We are on the same page and enjoy one another’s company. Even though we are a long ways apart, our way of living is very similar and we are fortunate to share the lifestyle we have.” **HW**