

# Groomer

*Tomas “Poncho” Toucedo has spent years helping Hereford cattle look great in the showring.*

by **Tosha Powell**



Since its conception, America has been known to give people of all denominations equal opportunity for freedom. With settlers from all around the world, the U.S. is sometimes referred to as the “melting pot” of the world. In 1955 Tomas Guillermo Toucedo was offered the chance of a lifetime to leave his home in Argentina and travel to Senatobia, Miss., for the summer. His godfather had connections with someone at CMR Polled Herefords, leading to a summer job for Toucedo. Toucedo grabbed the opportunity with both hands.

That summer Toucedo learned about raising cattle and realized that it was something he could see himself doing on a day-to-day basis. He spent three months working at CMR, then returned home to Argentina. He was to return to law school that fall; however, he told his

father he wanted to return to the U.S. and continue working with his godfather’s cattle. And so he did.

Eventually, Toucedo, or “Poncho,” as he became known as, returned to work for M.P. Moore at CMR Polled Herefords in Senatobia, Miss. Poncho served as herdsman and took his responsibilities very seriously, as he did his dedication to the cattle he managed.

In 1961 Poncho became herdsman for Dean Thompsen at Thompsen Farms in Peru, Ind.

“Though Poncho did all sorts of work on the farm, his main responsibility was to work our show cattle,” Thompsen says. “During his time he fitted many state and national champions. No one worked harder for us or tried to do a better job than Poncho.”

While Poncho was working for Thompsen, the farm was able to register a bull for the Register of Merit. Out of 246 bulls listed, only 12 were polled, and one of Thompsen’s made that list, with the help of Poncho.

“Poncho won the herdsman award at whatever show we went to,” Thompsen says. “He was such a hard worker and really did have a heart of gold. It was such a pleasure to have worked with him, and I am glad I can still call him friend.”

Although he has been in the U.S. since 1955, Poncho still speaks with a heavy Spanish accent. The language barrier made things rough at times but was never a huge issue. “On occasion he would misunderstand something I would say, but for the most part, we spoke the same language: Hereford



Tomas “Poncho” Toucedo’s passion for cattle and herdsmanship qualities have paid off in the showring.

cattle,” Thompsen says. “Poncho would care for the cattle like they were his own kids.”

Thompsen isn't Poncho's only previous employer willing to praise his name. A long list of cattlemen compliment the herdsman qualities in Poncho. While he was working for House of Herefords, he met young Susan Spanton Scherber, who served as the ranch secretary and showman.

“I knew Tomas to be hardworking, honest and always presenting the cattle that we took on the show road to be at their best,” Scherber says. “When it came to grooming, he was a taskmaster. ‘Sue-san,’ as he called me, ‘You have to brush the hell of ‘em to get their coats to look like velvet.’ So we did, and they really did look like velvet.”

In 1972 the showing duo did well at the Wisconsin and Minnesota State Fairs and exhibited at the Chicago International. Poncho won the Herdsman Award and the Klussendorf Award for Herdsmanship in Wisconsin. The next year Scherber won the awards. “But I know it would not have been possible without Tomas as my co-worker,” she says. “Between the two of us, we won the Klussendorf and the Herdsman Awards three years in a row. We had a lot of fun trying to outdo each other, and as a result, the House of Herefords string always looked pretty damn good.”

The House of Herefords saw a great show year in 1974 with Scherber and Poncho working together, winning best six head in the polled Hereford show. Later in the week, the ranch also won best six head over all breeds with six yearling bulls.

“We had also won premier breeder and exhibitor,” Scherber says. “One thing about Tomas, he is a pretty mellow fellow, but he was ecstatic about those wins. More so, I think, than the personal wins he had made for himself. He is a very

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No stranger to the winner's circle, Poncho poses for pictures with the 2009 Iowa State Fair reserve champion cow-calf pair.

modest man, although I think he was more excited about how well I did than how he did himself.”

They may not work together anymore, but Scherber and Poncho developed a friendship that has lasted through the years.

Poncho then returned to Argentina to spend time with his mother and sister. Through a mutual friend, Rob Helm of Candy Meadow Farms in Lexington, Tenn., heard Poncho was wanting to return to the U.S. to get closer to his son and daughter. Helm was a little apprehensive to hire someone without ever having met him, but Poncho came highly recommended and was willing to travel halfway around the world to work, so Helm took his chances. Looking back, Helm says it is a decision he will never regret.

“Tom's work ethic and attention to detail was beyond reproach,” Helm says. “He did his job and took care of the cattle as if they were his own. Tom was a worrier,



Proud of his accomplishments, Poncho shows off the House of Herefords' third Herdsman of the Year trophy, awarded to him at the Wisconsin State Fair.

and he was never satisfied. He was always looking for a better way. The welfare of the cattle always came first with Tom, even if that meant sacrifice on his part.”

Helm recalls one occasion — not too long after Poncho began

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At each show ET Polled Herefords attends, a sign is up in the stalls with an American flag and Argentine flag and a welcome, "Beinvenidos, se habla espanol." Many people enjoy stopping by the stalls to visit with Poncho, since he rarely leaves his cattle alone.

work for him — taking a young bull to the Tennessee State Fair and the bull not fairing very well. "Tom could see the disappointment that I felt. He said, 'If you give me a chance with this bull, we will bring him back next year and see what happens.' I agreed, and when we returned the next year — he was champion bull," Helm says. "To say the least, I was very pleased. But to see the happiness and sense of pride in Tom's face made it special."

Glen Klippenstein of Maysville, Mo., recalls Poncho as a miracle worker in the showring. "Poncho's sense of pride goes back to his Argentine roots," Klippenstein says. "They are really competitive and have a good feel for cattle."

Poncho later went on to work for Quirk Land & Cattle Co. in Hastings, Neb., and Huber Ranch, Schneider, Ind. He has also helped at production sales for O'Neill Angus in Logan, Iowa. However, after many years of working for others, he now has his own cattle in cooperation with his daughter, Sara, and her husband, Alan Eggerss.

ET Polled Herefords is located in Avoca, Iowa, and although it may be a smaller herd, its owners know how to compete with the big boys.

"This year and in the past years, we generally take six to eight head to a show," Sara says. "That means that the majority of our herd is at the fair. Basically, what you are seeing is it!"

But don't be fooled by the herd's size. Just this year at the Iowa State Fair, Poncho and his family took home top honors including the following: reserve champion cow-calf pair, premier breeder and premier exhibitor. This year marks the fourth consecutive premier breeder award for ET Polled Herefords. Also showing at their local county fair, the family has won awards such as reserve champion bull, champion and reserve champion cow-calf pair, along with premier breeder and exhibitor awards.

"Tomas and I have kept in touch over the last 35 years with phone calls three to four times a year," Scherber says. "Nothing made me happier than to hear how well he had done with his family's Herefords at the Iowa State Fair. I can tell you, no one is more deserving of finally showing his own cattle and doing so well after making other's cattle look so good for years."

No matter whom you talk to that knows Poncho you hear the same report: passion for the cattle industry, pride in his cattle, infectious enthusiasm.

"I just think the world of Poncho," Klippenstein says. "He could make  $2 + 2 = 5$ . He has done a great job with his cattle in Iowa. He really knows how to make the best of his cattle's genetic situation. He's getting some age on him, but I don't think he's ready to hang up his saddle quite yet."

That Argentine pride fairs well at cattle shows, but another place

Poncho's pride lies is with his six grandchildren. And they share the same pride when it comes to talking about their "Cedo."

"My grampa is the greatest grandpa ever; he is so fun," Nathan Eggerss says. "He is giving us advice all the time. When we are outside playing some type of sport, he comes and plays even though he is old and says his legs hurt all the time. He still has time to play with his favorite grandchildren. He buys us donuts about every day because he likes them and he knows we like them. His cattle are very important to him."

Poncho's son, Dino "Tux" Toucedo, doesn't work on the family ranch but is always available to help at shows and stays close to spend time with the family. "There's a lot to say about Cedo; I love him dearly," Tux says. "My dad has a passion for cattle. He gave up school to come to the U.S. to work with cattle. He was studying to be a lawyer. It's what his dad wanted him to do."

"Cedo is very serious when he works, but is really a big kid at heart. For someone that is close to 80 years old with a very bad knee, throw a soccer ball at him and watch him play like a kid with his grandkids."

At home with his cattle is where Poncho is most comfortable. His hard work and dedication to his family's herd is well known by his friends. Daughter Sara says, "My dad is very compassionate and very cautious about his cows. We have a little grass lot that has electric fence on three sides, and when the weatherman says that there is going to be a storm, those cows have to come to a different lot that has 'real' fencing! And we know how often the weatherman is wrong, so do you know how often we move those cows?"

Light-hearted and loved by many, Tomas Toucedo, or Poncho, or Cedo, or Tom depending on whom you ask, can set a great example to all he knows on how to bring his love for the cattle to day-to-day relationships.

"If we could all be a little bit more like Poncho, the world might be a little bit better of a place," Klippenstein says. **HW**