

HEREFORD WORLD

The voice of the American Hereford Association | August 2020

August 2020 Hereford World



The Cadillac of Cows

Hearty and versatile, first generation (F1) tiger-striped calves are built to last.

by *Diane Meyer*

As the days grow longer in South Texas, the afternoon heat climbs higher and the humidity hangs in the air like a fog. Bugs come out in full force, and wildlife seek the shelter of shade trees and ponds until the sun slips behind the horizon. Seemingly oblivious to the stifling summer heat, a few Hereford bulls, a set of Brahman cows and their tiger-striped offspring graze comfortably on Bermuda pastures.

Just an hour and a half north of Houston, registered Brahman cattle are bred to Hereford bulls to develop F1 Brahman and Hereford cross replacement females at Windy Hills Ranch in Madisonville. Combined, the operation is home to 500 head of cows, bulls and heifers. Ranch manager Stephen Trichel says these calves can handle the Southeast climate changes in stride.

In “really good cow country,” as Trichel describes it, temperature change is regular, with sometimes a 30-degree fluctuation from morning to afternoon. Rainfall is decent, the winters are mild, and although the climate is steady during spring, summers bring 100-degree-plus temperatures with high humidity. “The cattle can adapt and make it through year after year,” Trichel notes.

“Heat tolerance in these cattle is very important,” he continues. “The cattle have to be able to handle high heat, high humidity and

stay healthy. But then again, come fall, they better be ready for some cold freezing temperatures and strong north winds that are tough on them.”

Trichel has been working at this particular location for 24 years and manages the property, land, cattle, horses and hay production. He and a longtime team of three other hands do everything from working cattle to haying and planting winter crops. Trichel says breeding has always been the same – using Brahman cattle to raise F1s to keep as replacements or to sell at special female sales.

“We started the Hereford-Brahman cross on this ranch because of the marketing value of the F1 tiger-stripe female. They adapt to this country so well,” he says. “One of the biggest advantages is that F1 tiger-stripe female is very versatile. You can breed her to different types of bulls for different purposes – for feeder calves and replacement females.”

He adds the F1 calves all grow and gain weight consistently and wean off very well. The F1 females hold their value, and there is demand for them year-round.

“The tiger-stripe cattle in this area will perform as well or outperform other breeds, mainly because of the adaptability to the

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— Zach Vigil



climate,” he says. “They can take the heat... they can do their job in the hot weather and sunshine all day long, whereas some other breeds in this type of climate may shade up most of the day.”

The mix of British and exotic genetics produces a hearty, versatile calf with an edge in the marketplace.

Windy Hills’ customers are looking for deep-bodied females with a good disposition and good udders that can stay in the herd 12 to 15 years down the road. “The longevity of the F1 tiger-stripe female is an asset to the rancher that buys them because in that female’s lifetime, she can have quite a few more calves than some other English-type breeds,” Trichel points out.

Tend the land, cultivate performance

Windy Hills Ranch recently became part of the GKB Cattle operation owned by Gary and Kathy Buchholz. Zach Vigil manages the cow herd at each ranch location for GKB Cattle. “The tigerstripe is kind of the Cadillac of cows when you go to South Texas and get into Louisiana, Florida, Georgia and Alabama,” he says. “Our goal there is to make a tigerstripe like no other.”

According to Vigil, tigerstripe cattle are great for that region. “Pretty much anywhere that another cow doesn’t want to live, a tigerstripe will thrive,” he says. “That tigerstripe will not only thrive, but it will also raise an 800-pound weaned calf.”

As cowman for GKB Cattle, Vigil develops cattle primarily for the commercial bull market, as well as improves genetics on the seedstock side.

“What I like about Hereford cattle is the ability to take a Hereford bull and implement him into almost any commercial program and come out with something that you would want to market,” he describes. “If you want to keep females out of a Hereford bull and they’re on Brangus cows, you’re going to have some awesome females. You’re going to do the same thing with the Red Angus — the red baldy program is really, really hot right now.”

With a mix of polled and horned Hereford genetics, the GKB operation runs a 1,000-head Hereford cow herd. “We use both of them to utilize the best of both worlds. Our whole goal genetics-wise... is to create a cow family that’s dependable,” the cowman says. “We really focus on having the genetics in the Hereford breed to make good, sound, functional, performing cattle that have more longevity, better feet and more growth.”

The Hereford breed’s docility is another plus and translates into added longevity. Vigil explains how cattle less prone to stress adapt well to change and can last in new environments much longer.

In order to maximize genetic progress, Vigil’s philosophy is to tend to the land. “As a rancher, we’re really not cattle raisers. In the end we’re grass growers,” he shares. “Our main focus on the ranch at any location is to grow as much quality forage as we can for cattle to perform. The environment has the biggest impact on genetics. Without great environments to raise these cattle in, we can’t reach genetic potential. If we can’t reach genetic potential through our environment, then we’re kind of doing it all wrong.”

With a breed that makes efficient use of the landscape, GKB Cattle can sell bulls that will outperform a buyer’s expectations. “I



GKB Cattle centers around developing strong cow families. Only elite cows are held back in order to capture cattle that are more functional, better-doing and high-performing.



Many Hereford bull customers are seeking out the docility associated with the breed, according to Zach Vigil. “The breed’s docility is another plus and translates into added longevity,” he says.

think the future of the Hereford breed in the South is very, very bright,” he says. “There’s lots of eared cattle programs down here that have implemented Herefords. I think with our data collection at the Hereford Association, we’re giving everybody a good place to start and learn about quality grades and things like that.”

Bar-none baldies

Case in point is Bar Neal Farms, located a few states to the east, in Wetumpka, Ala. Owned and operated by Nealy Barrett and his son, Justin, the operation has used Hereford genetics on its primarily Brangus-type cow herd for nearly 20 years. The commercial cow-calf outfit keeps about 400 brood cows, which are then bred to Hereford bulls to produce black baldy calves, and the baldy heifers are kept back and bred to ultrablack cattle.

“Through all the ups and downs of the market, a good black baldy calf still brings top dollar,” Barrett says.

The black baldy calves also bring tremendous value in terms of weaning weights and docility. “This year, we weaned a lot of calves over 600 pounds, and quite a few of them were at 750,” Barrett shares. “Docile cattle and heifers breed early. We calve all of them at two-years-old and have good conception rates on the heifers.”

Those retained baldy females tend to stay in the herd for at least 10 years. Barrett is pleased with their easy-keeping natures, efficiency on grass and ability to breed back on time for fall calving.

The Barretts also run about 1,200 head of yearling stocker cattle, which are all sourced off the farm. “I’ve always bought some bulls for other folks,” says Barrett, who is also a veterinarian. “I’ve worked with a lot of folks’ herds. Several folks wanted Hereford bulls and I helped line that up. For most of those producers, I buy their calves back because I have the opportunity to get them some good bulls and then I know what genetics I’m getting back from them.”

Recently, Barrett has been buying bulls from GKB Cattle in Texas. “These bulls are able to go out there and go to work,” he says. “There’s two year-old-bulls that I have and other producers here, too, and they all have held up very well, as good as any two-year-old bull they’ve turned out.”

For about 15 years, all Bar Neal calves have gone through a preconditioning program and are sold in lot loads in combination with calves from nearby producers who participate in the same preconditioning program. Barrett says this system helps them get the most value they can for their calves. Although feed prices are high right now, Barrett says he has maintained the preconditioning program because it helps calves when they go to the feedyards.

“Our customers know they are going to get a good, healthy calf when they go to the feedlot because they’ve had all their vaccines and are a very uniform set of calves,” Barrett says.

Whether staying back in the herd or heading to the lot, Hereford-influenced, Brahman-based calves are about as classic as they come in the Southern states. Like the American Cadillac luxury car, these tiger-striped and superbaldy cattle have proven to have the drive and quality to top the market. **HW**



Stephen Trichel explains the Brahman and Hereford cross brings added heat tolerance to their program, and Herefords bring the docility and the genetics to produce pounds of beef in a quick, economical manner.