

PUREBRED CATTLE - AN HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

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The history of modern beef cattle breeding began in the British Isles in the mid 1700's when farmers began recording ancestry and developing local breeds. The same trend occurred later on the continent of Europe. The early British cattle were used mainly for draft and milk. They were large framed, late maturing and were not finished until 3 to 4 years of age. The British breed improvers reduced frame size, hastened maturity and the ability to fatten earlier. This trend continued until the 1960's.

Since visual appraisal and comparative evaluation at livestock shows were the primary criteria for selection of breeding animals until the mid twentieth century, we have chosen paintings and photographs to depict the purebred cattle trends over the last two centuries. They represent the "ideal" beef cattle of their respective eras.

Early explorers brought cattle with them to feed their soldiers and settlers when they came to North America. The early cattle, mostly of British origin were used by the colonists for draft and milk.

Shorthorn cattle were exported from England to Virginia in 1783. The first herdbook to record ancestry of Shorthorn cattle was established by George Coates in 1822. Henry Clay imported Hereford cattle from England to Kentucky in 1817 and George Grant imported Angus cattle from Scotland to Kansas in 1873. James Davis imported the first Zebu cattle to South Carolina in 1849.

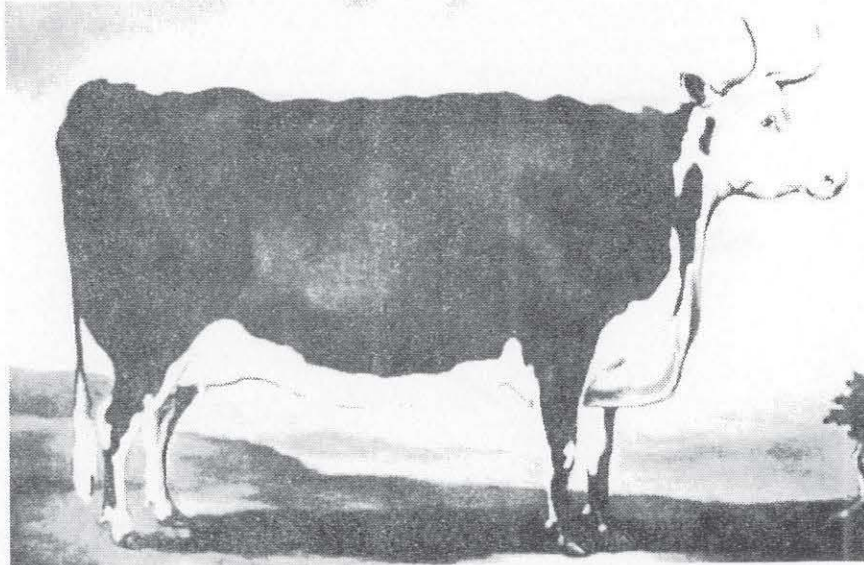
The descendants of the Spanish Longhorn cattle populated the western ranges in the 1800's. Trail drives started after the Civil War and Americans acquired a taste for beef. In the late 1800's several of the American British beef breed associations were organized (American Hereford Association 1881, American Shorthorn Association 1882, American Angus Association 1883, American Polled Hereford Association 1900). Simmental cattle were introduced in 1896, but had little impact on the industry at that time.

During the first third of the twentieth century a gradual trend developed toward the earlier maturing smaller framed cattle. From the mid 1930's to the late 1950's intense selection pressure occurred for the smaller, earlier maturing, earlier fattening cattle. The term "baby beef" came into use. Surplus feed and an increased demand for grain fed beef led to the start of the commercial feedlot era following World War II. "Snorter dwarfism" was reported in 1951, which is generally believed to have been the result of the intense selection for extremely small framed cattle.

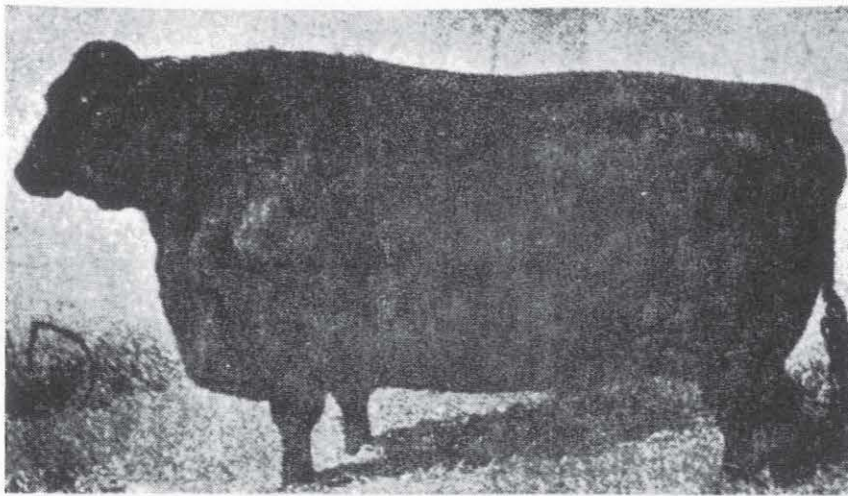
In the mid 1960's, the beef cattle industry began searching for cattle that could be pushed to desired slaughter weights without becoming over fat. The carcass yield grading system was adopted in 1965. Charolais cattle had been imported to the U.S. from Mexico in 1936, but the feedlot performance of the Charolais crossbred steer in the 1960's created an awareness in the American cattleman for the lean growth potential of some of the Continental European breeds. In the late 1960's the breeders of all breeds began selecting within their breeds for larger framed, growthier and leaner cattle. Simmental cattle were reintroduced in 1966 and other breeds including Limousins were imported at that time.

The intense selection for large framed lean cattle over the last two decades has caused concern among many segments of our industry regarding increased carcass size, carcass grade, maintenance cost and efficiency of resource utilization. Selection trends appear to be moderating selection for extremely large framed, late maturing, hard doing cattle. Increased selection emphasis for easy fleshing, muscular cattle of moderate frame and stature is occurring.

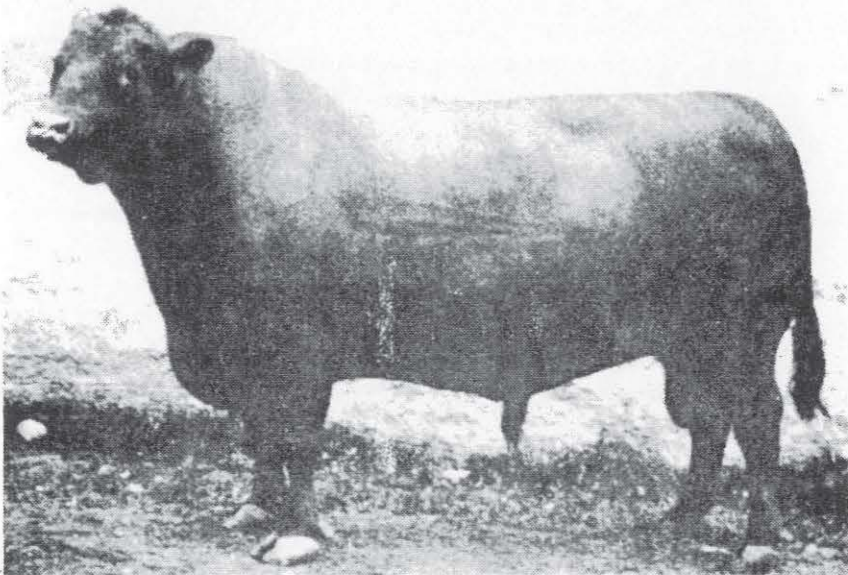
The advent of computers and the first National Sire Summary published by the American Simmental Association led the way toward the development of breeding programs for specification beef. The success of branded beef products has increased awareness of beef carcass qualities on the part of the cattle producer. These will likely impact the type trends and changes of the next decade.



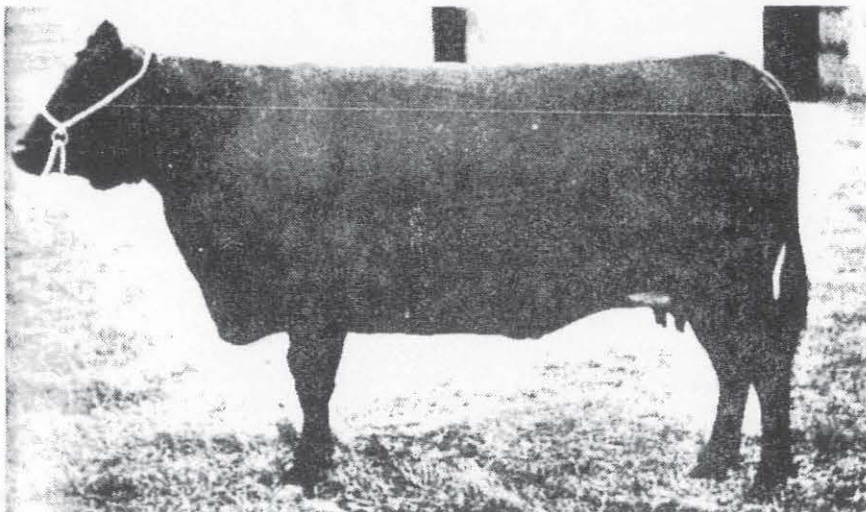
A - Oil painting of the "Silver" cow. Foundation cow of the Hereford breed. Benjamin Tompkins breeder, 1742.



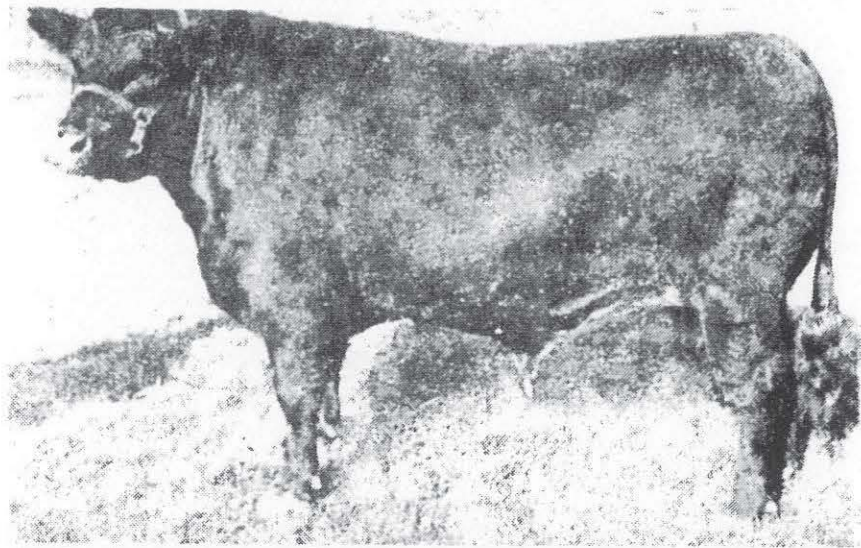
B - BLACK PRINCE - Grand Champion Steer at the 1867 Smithfield Royal Show. 2,200 lbs. at 4 years of age.



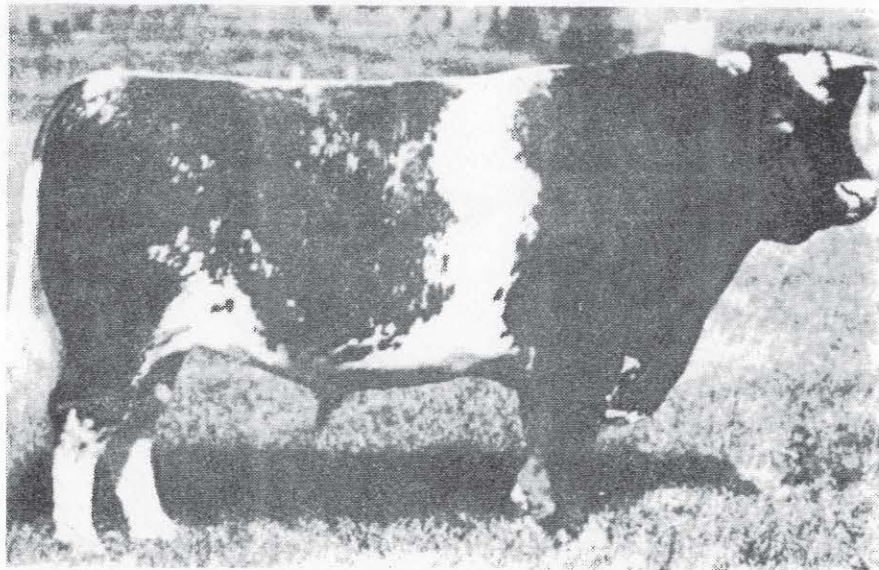
C - THE BLACK KNIGHT - Grand Champion Bull at the 1883 and 1885 Royal Highland Show. Born in 1880.



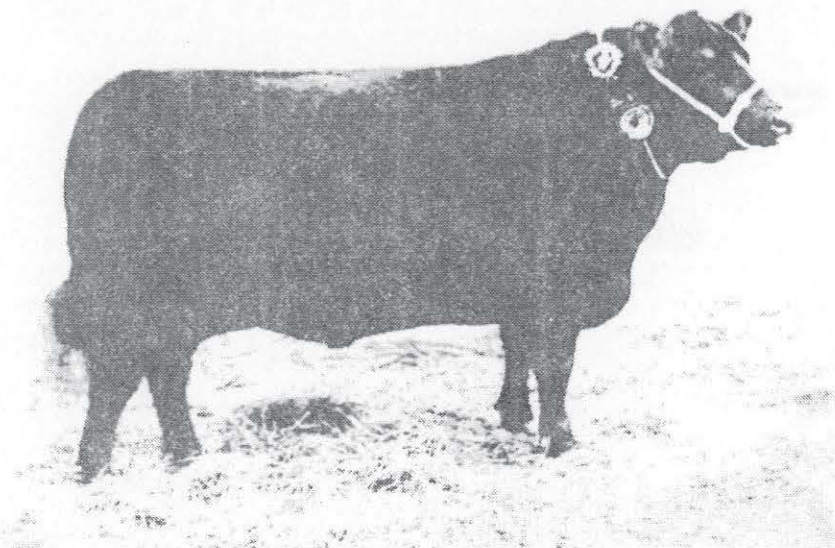
D - MISS PRETTY - Grand Champion Female 1892 at the Royal Highland Show at 6 years of age. Owned by Queen Victoria.



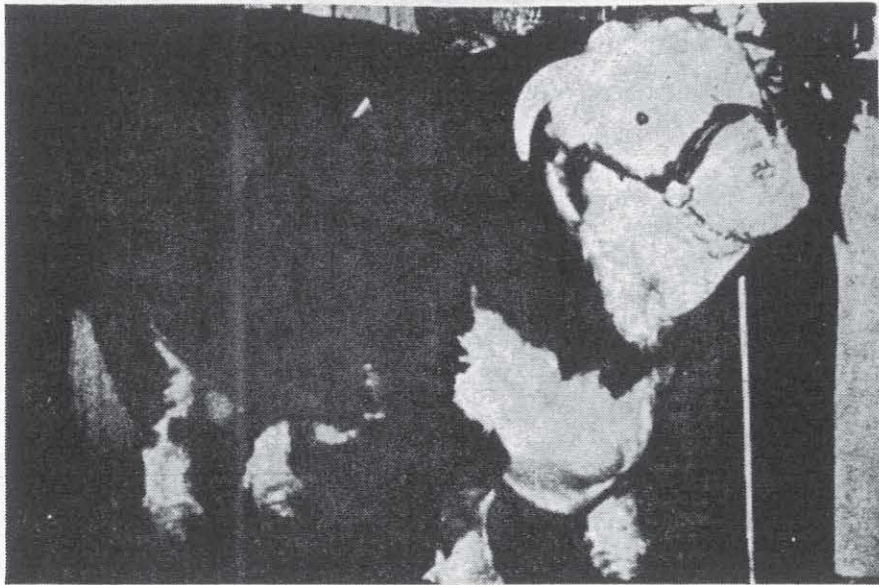
E - CLEAR LAKE JUTE - Grand Champion Steer 1904 International Livestock Show. Exhibited by Minnesota Agricultural Experiment Station. (1050 lbs. at 14 months - 1902; 1895 lbs. at 38 months - 1904.)



F - RINGMASTER - Grand Champion Bull 1910, 1911 International Livestock Show.



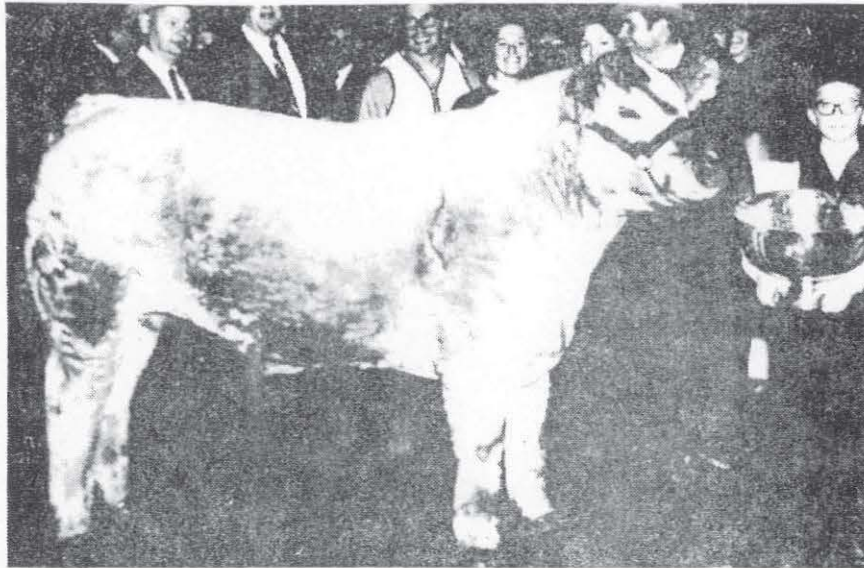
G - NEBRASKA - Grand Champion Bull 1915 Aberdeen, Scotland; Grand Champion Steer 1916 Smithfield Royal Show.



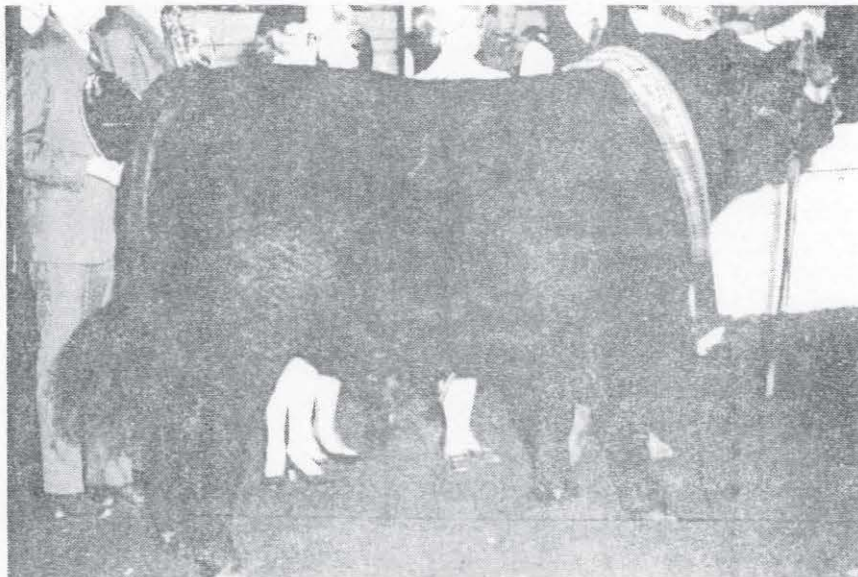
H - HILLCREST LARRY 62 - Grand Champion Bull 1952 International Livestock Show. A 2-year-old bull that came to the belt buckles of his handlers.



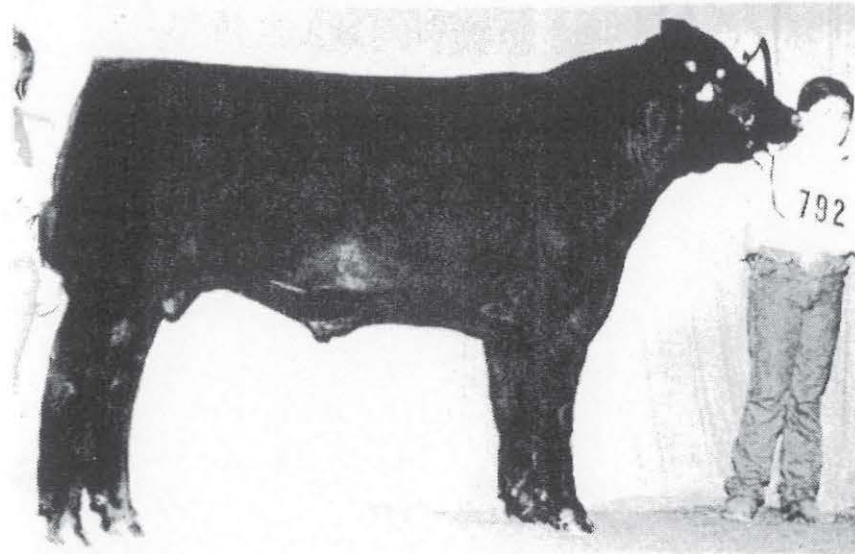
I - SHADOW ISLE BLACK JESTRESS 2 - Grand Champion Female 1953 International Livestock Show. She depicts the trend to extremely small cattle at its zenith.



J - CONOCO - 1969 International Grand Champion Steer. This Charolais Angus crossbred weighed 1250 lbs. and graded Choice, yield grade 2. Dr. Don Good helped to change the direction of the industry when he selected this outstanding steer - the first crossbred to win a major show.



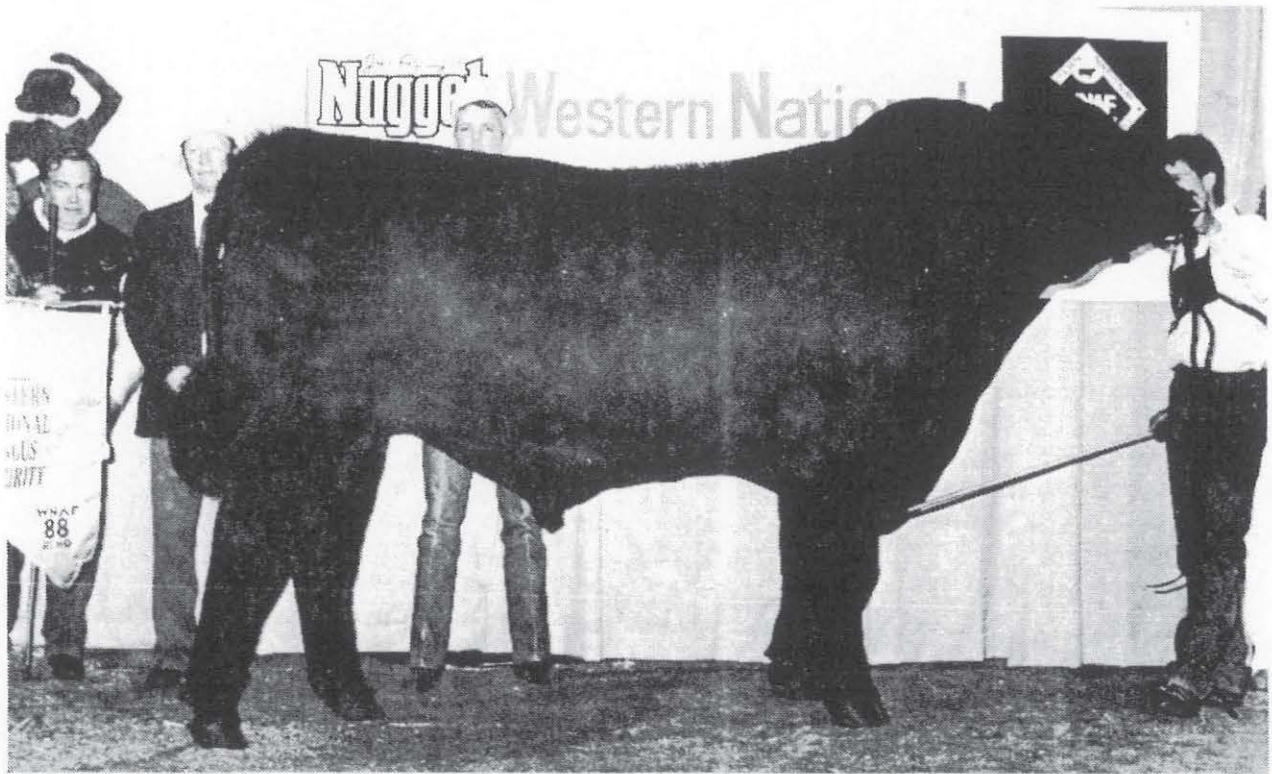
K - GREAT NORTHERN - 1969 International Grand Champion Bull. This Canadian bull was the largest trimmest bull of his time when Dr. Robert Totusek selected him and set a trend toward larger, growthier cattle.



L - Reserve Champion Angus Steer 1985 Houston Livestock Show. He weighed 1180 lbs. The crossbred steers were larger yet.



M - TOP MSU KNIGHT RYDER - Reserve Senior Champion Bull 1987 National Polled Hereford Show.



N - DAMERON LINEDRIVE - Grand Champion Bull 1988 National Western Stock Show. He weighed 2,527 lbs. at 32 months.



O - Grand Champion Steer 1988 National Western Stock Show on foot and on the rail. Live weight 1272 lbs. Hip height 54.5 inches. 0.3 inch fat. 16.4 square inch LEA. Average Choice. Yield grade 1.9.