

Livestock Links

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It's Not Always about Beef Sometimes It's About the Buck

Anthony Wiggins, Regional Extension Agent

When it comes to bull selection, most cattle producers are selecting traits for growth, muscle, weaning weights or maybe calving ease, but not Tommy Jordan and his business partner, Tyler Fowler. When they start looking for a bull to breed their cows, they want to know, "Will he buck?"

Jordan, from Excel, Ala., was born into the cattle business and grew up helping his father with his operation. In 1974, Tommy bought his first cow and has been in the cattle business in some form ever since. He's gone from a cow-calf operation, to raising Corriente cattle for roping calves, to now raising bucking bulls.

Fowler, from Theodore, Ala., has a different background in the cattle business. He grew up around horses and did some team roping. Life at the rodeo made his brother to decide that they needed to start riding bulls. After that, his intent was to ride.

Fowler was 13 when he started riding bulls, and he put together an impressive resume over time. He was the Alabama High School Champion twice, Rookie of the Year in the Professional Cowboy Association (PCA), won the southeastern circuit in the Professional Rodeo Cowboy Association (PRCA), qualified for the National Finals Rodeo (NFR) twice, and finished in the world's top ten twice.



Rain Dance (above) and Tyler Fowler (left), Tommy Jordan and Christie Jordan

The differences in the two cattle backgrounds makes this the perfect partnership for a bucking bull operation. Jordan has the knowledge of feeding and raising cattle, while Fowler has the expertise of picking and training cattle to be buckers.

"I've lost count," says Fowler, "but between practice bulls and rodeos, I've probably climbed on the back of close to a thousand bulls. When you've sat straddle of that many, you get a pretty good feel for what makes a good one."

Fowler knows what makes a good bucking bull and what abilities a bull needs to get high scores from judges in the rodeo arena. He is well known in the bull riding circuit, and, when he calls bull promoters and says, "I've got a good one," they listen.

Jordan says, "Fowler is the brains and I'm the brawn of the operation."

Jordan says this about deciding to raise bucking bulls, "It's different and interesting. I used to team rope and have always loved the rodeo. It's fun. It's interesting to watch a calf for 8 or 9 months and wonder if it's going to buck. It's always surprising. Some of the ones you think will be good buckers are not, and some of the ones you think will never make the cut, turn out to be good."

In 2000, Fowler bought his first 15 Braford-type cows from a farm in South Florida to be breeding stock for his bucking-bull operation. At about the same time, he bought four bull calves from a well-known bucking-bull operation in Texas. One of the bull calves, named Smokeless War Dance, became bull of the year in the PRCA.

The offspring of the 15 cows that Fowler bought in 2000 and 25 of Jordan's cows that fit the bucking-bull mold are now their breeding stock. Currently, they are using Rain Dance, a full brother to Smokeless War Dance, as their sire. Future plans are to incorporate artificial insemination (AI) from proven bucking bulls, and, once they get the cows they want, to also use embryonic transfer (ET).

External Parasites of Beef Cattle

Darrell Rankins Jr., Extension Animal Scientist

As the summer of 2010 begins, a topic that deserves some attention is external parasites on cow herds. This article is a summary of a publication written by Dr. Gene Strother, who is now retired from Auburn University. For a detailed discussion of this topic you can access the full-length article at <http://www.aces.edu/pubs/docs/A/ANR-0482/>.

Ticks. Cattle infested with ticks can lose body condition, suffer from anemia and cause the animal to do a great deal of rubbing and scratching, leading to secondary infections. Several species of ticks live in Alabama and all require wooded or brushy areas for development. Heavy infestation can occur in some cattle herds. Most can be controlled with coumaphos or permethrin.

Horn flies. These are the most damaging of the pests. They are blood suckers and will stay on cattle day and night. They only leave the animal to lay eggs in fresh manure. The biggest problem is that they are resistant to most insecticides. Large infestations of horn flies can reduce calf weaning weight by as much as 20 to 40 pounds. The most effective control is use of a rotation whereby one compound is used exclusively for 1 year followed by another compound the next year. Do not rotate compounds within the same year.

Stable flies. These pests are about the same size as the common house fly, and, like the smaller horn fly, are blood suckers. They usually feed on the legs, shoulders and lower sides of cattle. They develop in wet, decaying vegetation, especially in an area where hay was fed last winter. Removing these breeding sites is important for effective control programs. Stable flies rest on posts, fences and shed walls after getting their blood meal. Effective control can be accomplished by spraying these surfaces with pyrethroids.

Face flies. These pests are most common in northern Alabama. They irritate the eyes and nostrils of cattle and feed on the mucous discharge that they elicit. They will fly long distances and can transmit the organism responsible for pinkeye.

Lice. They can cause severe irritation leading to scratching and rubbing by the cattle. However, they are a common problem during the cooler winter months rather than during the hot summer months.

All of these external parasites can be a problem this summer. Effective insecticides for each of those pests and more details can be found at the site listed above or by contacting your county extension office. Always use caution when treating cattle with insecticides. Follow label recommendations closely.

- Never treat sick animals with insecticides.
- Do not combine insecticides.

Jordan and Fowler have only been working together for a couple of years, and nearly 25 percent of their last calf crop were buckers. They hope to keep improving their stock and get to the 40 percent range, which would be similar to other top bucking-bull operations.

According to Jordan, finding the right combination of bull and cow to produce a good bucking bull is no easy task.

"It's a mind game," says Jordan. "Trying to figure out what bull we need to breed to what cow to get what we want, it's just simply a mind game. But that's where Tyler's expertise comes in. He knows the bloodlines and what they are capable of doing."

Beef cattle producers are often concerned with genetic traits to improve efficiency and growth to produce beef. In contrast, a bucking-bull operation is concerned with bucking ability. According to Jordan and Fowler, size of the bull is not relevant; however, they would like for their mature bulls to weigh somewhere between 1,300 and 1,700 pounds. They are not concerned about breed composition, color, or if bulls are horned or polled. They just want an animal that will buck. Ideally, bulls should have a deep chest, reasonable length, narrow hips, a clean sheath and be cut high in the flank.

Jordan says, "I want him to look more like a race horse and be able to move. He's got to be able to spin and kick higher than his back. Remember, we are raising athletes."

This operation has a strict culling process for the cows. The cows still have to be able to calve and milk, but she has to produce calves that buck. The team understands that not all calves will buck, but if a mature cow has two calves that do not buck, then she is culled.

As for the calves, all heifers and bulls are bucked at 10 months of age using a bucking dummy. If they do not buck, they are culled. The heifers that do buck are kept as replacements in the breeding herd and the bulls that buck are kept for further evaluation and training.

Another difference between a beef-cattle operation and a bucking-bull operation is feeding. In a beef-cattle operation, cattle are pushed to grow fast. In a bucking-bull operation, it's much different. Jordan and Fowler do not want their animals to grow too fast or get too heavy because of the associated feet and leg problems that can occur when animals grow too fast. They feed a high-quality ration, but use an intake limiter to keep the animals from eating too much.

"We want the animals healthy, but not fat. They have got to be able to move. Like I said, we are raising athletes," commented Jordan.

As for returns on their work and investments, they say worst-case scenario is that they get average beef cattle prices for their calves. For the most part, the economics are more in-line with a purebred operation, and, just like with a purebred operation, every once in a while you get that great animal that everyone wants and is willing to pay for. Their goal is to one day be sitting in the stands in Las Vegas at the World Finals watching one of their bulls buck.

Like with any business, these two advise everyone interested in getting into the bucking-bull business to do their homework, especially if they plan to stay in the business. Otherwise, they need to be extremely lucky.

- Observe and follow all withdrawal times.
- Be careful not to contaminate feed or water sources.

The use of insecticide-impregnated ear tags have become quite popular over the past several years for fly control. The following table shows the active ingredient in some of the common tags available.

| Pyrethroid | Organophosphate | Both |
|---------------|-----------------|---------------|
| Atroban Extra | Avenger | Double Barrel |
| Cylence Uktra | Commando | Max-Con |
| Ectrin | Diaphos L | |
| GardStar Plus | Dominator | |
| Python | Optimizer | |
| Saber Extra | Patriot | |
| Super Deckem | Warrior | |
| Zetagard | X-Terminator | |
| Z-Permethrin | Z-Diazion | |

Reproductive Parameters

Age at puberty: 10 to 12 months

Estrus cycle: 21 days

Standing heat: 18 hours

Gestation length: 283 days

Cow:Bull Ratios for 75- to 90-day Breeding Season

15:1 for 15-month-old bull

18:1 for 18-month-old bull

20:1 for 20-month-old bull

25:1 to 30:1 for mature bulls

Pricing Bulls

You should be willing to pay whatever five good steer calves bring whenever you market them.

Body Condition Scores

1 to 3: Too thin

4: Marginally thin

5: Ideal

6: Marginally fat

7 to 9: Too fat

Cow needs to gain about 80 pounds to increase one body condition score.

Hay Consumption

About 2.5 1,000-pound rolls per cow for winter feeding

Seeding Rates

Bahiagrass: 15 to 20 pounds/acre

Fescue: 20 to 25 pounds/acre

Millet: 25 to 30 pounds/acre

Oats: 90 to 120 pounds/acre

Rye: 90 to 120 pounds/acre

Ryegrass: 20 to 30 pounds/acre

Sorghum sudan: 30 to 35 pounds/acre

Wheat: 90 to 120 pounds/acre

Salt Consumption (lb/day)

In general, cattle will consume about a tenth of a pound of salt per 100 pounds of body weight when it is used to limit intake of a palatable feed. The accompanying table shows estimated salt intake for various weights of cattle.

| Body weight (lb) | Low | Average | High |
|------------------|-----|---------|------|
| 300 | 0.3 | 0.5 | 0.6 |
| 500 | 0.5 | 0.6 | 0.7 |
| 700 | 0.6 | 0.7 | 0.9 |
| 900 | 0.7 | 0.9 | 1.1 |
| 1,100 | 0.8 | 1.1 | 1.3 |
| 1,300 | 0.9 | 1.3 | 1.5 |
| 1,500 | 1.0 | 1.5 | 1.6 |

Thumb Rules for Cattlemen

Measures

43,560 square feet per acre

One acre equals a square with 208.7-foot sides

231 cubic inches per gallon

8.3 pounds per gallon of water

Bulk Densities and Bushel Weights of Various Feeds

| Commodity | Lb/cubic ft | Lb/bushel | Lb/5-gal bucket |
|-------------------------|-------------|-----------|-----------------|
| corn, shelled | 45 | 56 | 30 |
| corn gluten feed | 33 | n/a | 22 |
| cottonseed | 25 | 32 | 17 |
| cottonseed meal | 38 | n/a | 26 |
| milo | 45 | 56 | 30 |
| oats | 26 | 32 | 18 |
| peanut hulls, loose | 7 | n/a | 5 |
| peanut skins | 11 | n/a | 7 |
| soybeans | 48 | 60 | 32 |
| soybean hulls, loose | 28 | n/a | 19 |
| soybean hulls, pelleted | 40 | n/a | 27 |
| wheat | 48 | 60 | 32 |
| wheat flour | 40 | n/a | 27 |

Feeder Space

When supplementing brood cows, provide about 30 inches of linear bunk/trough space for each cow and about 24 inches per head for weaned calves.

When providing free-choice feed, about 6 inches per calf is enough feeder space. This may need to be increased to 12 inches for bigger cattle in a backgrounding situation.

Creep feeders should have openings of 16 to 20 inches wide and 36 to 42 inches high.

Daily Water Requirements for Various Classes of Cattle From 40 to 90 Degrees F

| | 40 | 50 | 60 | 70 | 80 | 90 |
|----------------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| growing calves | | | | | | |
| 400 lb | 4.0 | 4.3 | 5.0 | 5.8 | 6.7 | 9.5 |
| 600 lb | 5.3 | 5.8 | 6.6 | 7.8 | 8.9 | 12.7 |
| 800 lb | 6.3 | 6.8 | 7.9 | 9.2 | 10.6 | 15.0 |
| pregnant cows | 6.0 | 6.5 | 7.4 | 8.7 | | |
| lactating cows | 11.4 | 12.6 | 14.5 | 16.9 | 17.9 | 16.2 |
| mature bulls | 8.7 | 9.4 | 10.8 | 12.6 | 14.5 | 20.6 |

Calendar of Events

| | | |
|-------|-------|---|
| April | 10 | Beef U Educational Program, Auburn University |
| | 25 | B&B Livestock Judging Contest, Auburn University |
| May | 1 | Dairy U Educational Program, Auburn University |
| June | 7-8 | South Alabama Market Hog Show, Dothan |
| | 15 | District 4-H Meats Judging Contest, Auburn University |
| | 17 | North Alabama 4-H Livestock Judging Contest, Horton |
| | 24 | South Alabama 4-H Livestock Judging Contest, Autaugaville |
| July | 1-2 | State 4-H Animal Science Contests, Auburn University |
| | 12-16 | State 4-H Horse Show, Montgomery |

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