

Belties in Trial Breeding Programme with Preferred Angus Breeder

In a positive move for the Belted Galloway breed, Barry Henderson of *Skibo Downs*, near Gloucester, NSW and a preferred Angus Breeder (800 cow herd) for Certified Angus Beef, have joined forces with Terry and Karen Pierce's Peppercorn Belted Galloway Stud, Barrington NSW in a trial breeding programme of joining Belted Galloway bulls to 165 heifers, six months earlier than the normal age of 26 or 27 months.

The aim is to produce a slightly smaller calf ensuring heifers experience problem-free calving. Its intended that the Skibo Downs heifers retained from this mob are likely to have an extra calf during their breeding life.

Steve Murray has been the property manager for Skibo Downs for the past seven years. Born into the cattle business, he used to be a meat buyer responsible for buying meat for Woolworths.

"We have normally calved down our previous straight-bred angus heifers as three year olds as we didn't get the growth in our location as you would in, say, the tablelands," Steve said.

"Now that we have two-year old crossbreds as big as our 3-yr-old straights, we are able reduce the joining age by six to eight months. This is our third group to achieve this."

"This time round we are using beltie bulls. Last time we used Santa and Angus bulls. Those cows are calving now."

Skibo Downs follows Dept. of Agriculture guidelines for cattle production. "Essentially, this means they favour Angus," said Steve.

"We were looking for Angus bulls to lease, not buy. They were to do only the one job and it seemed silly to buy. We initially approached two Angus studs but they wanted to only sell bulls, so we needed to find an alternative."

Despite initial doubts by the owner about using Belties, Steve Murray felt optimistic. "The Belties just fell into our lap. Really, we had always chosen Angus for convenience. As long as someone came in with a low birth weight breed that suited our environment, they would have got the contract. Terry Pierce got there first," said Steve.

"Its basically a dollar decision, not a breed one. If using Belties don't make the dollars, they'll be dispensed with."

Next Newsletter out in August 2009!

Deadline for copy submissions is Friday 17th July 2009 – no exceptions! Earlier submission would be appreciated.

Submissions should be emailed to the newsletter editor, Rebecca Avery at dravery@netspace.net.au

Front Cover Photo: Bekadan Bonnie, Best Exhibit, Sydney Royal 2009 with breeder, Merv Presland.

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Peppercorn Wisdom - Senior Champion Bull Sydney Royal 2004 (also Grand Champion Bull Sydney & Brisbane Royals 2003).

"However, our first priority is to get calves out of the heifers, the second priority is to make a profit."

While the bottom line is of prime importance, Steve is quite positive about using Belties.

"About 30 years ago, I saw Brahman x Beltie cows and consider them as good a mob as any I had seen for that type of country [Northern Rivers]," said Steve.

"I also recently saw a small hobby farmer I know with six new pet belties, sitting on his porch drinking a beer and patting his cow. I thought to myself, if a novice owner can do that with a new cow then the breed must be pretty quiet and easy to deal with."

Eighty percent of the heifers being joined are Angus x Santa Gertrudis, with the remaining twenty per cent Angus or Angus cross heifers.

Four of Peppercorn's Belted Galloway bulls, Peppercorn Xtra (6794-ABGA), Peppercorn Wisdom (6239-ABGA), Peppercorn Albert (7827-ABGA) and Peppercorn Appollo (7824-ABGA), were put to the heifers for a period of eight weeks starting on 1st May.

Two more beltie bulls, Barrington Lazarus (10549 - GC&BMA), from the Pierce's second stud *Barrington*, and Peppercorn Ben (7832-ABGA) will act as cleanup bulls for the following three weeks. All bulls are 100% full blood.

Heifers will commence calving in early January. All calves will be weaned in July 2010.

After having calved their beltie progeny, the Skibo Downs heifers will then be joined to Skibo Downs' bulls, uniting with the main herd's normal calving programme to calve in June/July.

Skibo Downs may retain some F1 heifer calves for ongoing trials with their new crossbreed.

The rest of the trial progeny will be sold privately or to the marketplace, and about 50 F1 heifers and around 80 steers should be available after weaning in July 2010.

One possibility is to unload them into the vealer market via the Northern Co-operative Meat Company at Casino. Steve doesn't anticipate any prejudice. "If they are good enough, they will match other breeds in price. Because in that market, breed is not an issue," he said.

- Terry Pierce (Peppercorn-165), NSW, April 2009

Steve Murray interviewed by Andrew Monaghan, April 2009