



Arkansas offers more grass than Texas, thanks to more plentiful rainfall, but similar heat and humidity compared to the Texas ranch.

The Quality Beneath The Color

Unconventional appearances belie the quality beef production found in Woodstone Angus cattle.

By Ellen Humphries

There is no correlation between conventional cattle beauty and carcass quality at Woodstone Angus Ranch. “You can guess all you want, but you have to get the carcass data back,” says Bill Woods, who ranches in Texas and Arkansas with wife Yvonne and their son Will.

Data, details, records and research are some of the tools they use to produce shockingly good carcass quality from cattle whose looks are deceiving.

Dale Moore, Cattleman’s Choice Feedyard, Gage, Okla., feeds the Woodstone Angus cattle in his Certified Angus Beef- (CAB) licensed feedyard. “Yes,” he



Bill and Yvonne Woods ranch with their son Will in Texas and Arkansas. They have developed an Angus herd based on Irish bloodlines. In 2004, Woodstone Angus won the champion steer title of the National Angus Carcass Challenge with 43 steers sired by 14 bulls, showing a unique level of consistency in their breeding program.

says, “they are short, squatty and have long hair hanging out of their ears and I just love to show them off.”

Regardless of how unusual the Woodstone Angus appear out in the pastures, on the rail they are a sight to behold.

Woodstone Angus won the champion steers title in the 2004 National Angus Carcass Challenge (NACC), with 43 steers sired by 14 bulls, judged on the Certified Angus Beef® (CAB) grid. Theirs was the only entry that received no penalties nor discounts. Seven percent of the steers were Quality Grade Prime,

and 51 percent met CAB quality parameters. Thirty percent of the steers were Yield Grade 1 and 2, the balance were Yield Grade 3.

So, what’s so different about the Woodstone Angus cattle? They are from almost exclusively Irish bloodlines and the smattering of American and Canadian genetics are sparingly used to add a touch more height and a touch more marbling. Other than that, they are small, compact, muscular and receive no particularly special treatment on either the ranch at New Ulm, Texas, or Hackett, Ark., or at the feedyard. It’s the genetics.

Why Irish?

The Woods family has a history with cattle production. Bill’s grandfather ran Herefords and a medical practice in Arkansas. Woods is an orthopedic surgeon who prefers to spend his time talking about and working with the cattle.

Al Maurer, Magnolia, Texas, possibly one of the most active participants in the Angus industry for at least the last 60 years, heard Woods was looking for something different in the breed, which in the 1980s had become long and tall.

“One day a fella from R&J



Bloodlines for Woodstone bulls go back to Wye and Craigie Angus breeding, with a slight infusion of American genetics to enhance marbling.



“This is my genetic Fort Knox,” says Bill Woods. This young bull is Woodstone Julius Eric 3637, sired by Woodstone Eric 8063.



Woodstone Angus females are easy-keeping and fertile.



Al Maurer (left), Magnolia, Texas, and Bill Woods scoured the Irish countryside looking for pure Irish pedigreed Angus genetics.



Dale Moore owns Cattleman's Choice Feedyard, Gage, Okla., and has worked with the Woods for about five years, feeding cattle and helping them gather important performance data.

Ranch said, 'I saw a fella in Houston by the name of Bill Woods and he was talking about Canadian cattle,'" Maurer remembers. He called Woods, and after visiting in person, they set up a schedule and traveled to Canada to look at Angus seedstock.

Maurer continues, "What Bill was concerned about when he first started in the '80s, he'd tell me these cattle are just long and tall. I told him to change them, we needed cattle that were faster doing cattle, needed to get some outcrosses.

"I'd been to Scotland a few times, but never to Ireland. I knew Wye Plantation had so much success by getting those Irish bulls back in that era that Bill ought to try something like that. So he did."

Woods bought cattle from the Craigie Angus herd from West Virginia, breeding them to sires descending from George of Swiftbrook, one of five Irish bulls imported by the Wye Plantation Angus herd in Maryland.

The size, muscling and efficiency of the smaller cattle

appealed to Woods, who with Maurer traveled to Scotland and Ireland to find more seedstock in the 1980s.

Apparently, they were warmly received by the Irish cattle producers. "You cannot meet a stranger," he laughs. They traveled during the summer months and discovered the long day-length Ireland enjoys at that time of the year. "It doesn't get dark until after midnight over there. We stopped at a gas station at 3:30 in the morning to get some 'petrol' and we went in and had a



Woodstone steers produce consistently high Quality and Yield grade beef, even though their looks – small stature — can be deceiving.



High and dry conditions in the Gage, Okla., area make it a perfect spot for a custom cattle feeding operation. Dale and Mary Moore are committed to providing their clients with personalized customer service.

Guinness at 3:30 in the morning!” Woods recounts. Maurer adds, “That Guinness is a wonderful drink over there.”

Woods and Maurer visited dozens of Irish cattle producers, enjoyed much Irish hospitality and found Angus with pure Irish pedigrees. “A farm in Ireland is 40 to 80 acres,” Woods explains. “They have a milk cow, maybe a Shorthorn and two or three Angus. We literally went all over Ireland looking for pure Irish pedigrees. I’ve probably got more pure pedigreed cattle than all of Ireland and Scotland right now.”

To complement the Irish bloodlines such as Kilkelly Duke and Carrigroe Mark II, Woods has added genetics from older, proven American sires such as QAS Traveler 23-4, RR Traveler 5204, Scotchcap, PAPA Durabull and GAR Precision as terminal sires, selected for additional carcass weight and retail product without sacrificing marbling.

Autry of Woodstone (Art), an Irish bloodline grandson of the Wye and Craigie import, George of Swiftbrook, is the most prolific herd sire with more than half of the Woodstone females descending from him. The Angus association has a classification for heifers that calve at about two years of age, then wean three straight calves with a weaning ratio of 105 or better. These females are known as “Pathfinders.” “There’s a whole bunch of them in here,” he says, waving toward the herd.

Details, records and sales

Bulls are sold only at private treaty at 18 to 24 months. All other male calves go to Gage, Okla., to be fed.

Most of the bull buyers have been local. “Since the carcass award, we’ve had more interest in our bulls,” he says, but the new folks seem to balk at the looks of the Woodstone bulls. “These are carcass bulls and they look different from those being highly pro-

moted. These are all carcass bulls. And, everything is calving ease.” Even with some balky buyers, Woodstone sells out every year.

Some of his buyers in the New Ulm area are putting Woodstone Angus bulls on Brahman-influenced herds, as might be expected in the humid coastal plain environment.

“They are trying to bring their frame down a little and trying to get a little thickness to them,” Woods says, adding that some of the buyers say they want black calves for the market.

“Heifers are priced at \$1,500 to \$1,800 right now and the buyers are saying, ‘Tell me how many I can have.’ Most of the heifers are 50 percent Irish. I breed them to an Irish bull the first time. We don’t watch the heifers. We literally don’t have calving problems unless there is an abnormal presentation. Out of heifers, the calves will weigh about 45 to 50 pounds and they’ll just jump right up and start running.”

Woods says almost all the cattle in the Texas and Arkansas herds are registered Angus. The cattle in the 2004 NACC were from both herds. “Forty-three steers sired by 14 different bulls. People ask me which is the best bull and I say I don’t know. They are very close to the same. We’ll know in a few years.”

The results from the NACC came as a bit of a surprise to Bill and Yvonne. “I thought I could probably guess what would do well. What I learned is you have no idea. That’s why I tell the bull buyers, I know they are all good and solid for carcass, but I can’t tell you which bull is better than the other.”

The Irish-bred cattle are extremely gentle and docile. Woods uses a cell grazing system and allows the cattle four hours on the pastures each day. Conditions are dry in Southeast Texas in the spring of 2005 and they are

trying to stretch the pastures until more rains come. The rest of the day, cattle are allowed as much hay from the ranch stores as they want.

Things are different in Arkansas where consistent rains make grazing plentiful.

When we walked among the cattle taking pictures for this article, they were far more interested in grazing than they were curious about a stranger with a camera.

Woods doesn’t select for milk production in his females, and the udders on the mature Irish cows have held up extremely well. “With the fertility, they automatically have adequate milk to get their calf weaned. The calf is out there eating grass at a very young age and that’s how he puts on the weight.

Before the calves go to the feedlot, they go through a preconditioning program, managed by John and Angela Wiggins at the Arkansas ranch. “He feeds them 12 percent creep-like ration, a standard ration which he gets pretty cheap in the area. Nothing fancy. He brings them up to about 750 pounds, vaccinates with Cattlemaster 4+Vibrio-lepto 5 for respiratory disease and BVD, and 7-Way Ultrabac for clostridium.”

Woodstone Angus actively manages against internal parasites. “We’ll worm calves three or four times before they go to the feedlot. We don’t see losses from worms, but we don’t want to see them. If you are able to see the losses, then it’s out of control. We just try to stay ahead of them as much as we can.”

Bulls are fertility tested before they are sold, but not to use within the herd. “I don’t fertility test any bull that I use, because I have complete confidence in them. But to sell them, we do test.”

Is the compact body type a benefit for the Angus cattle in the hot, humid Southeast Texas? Woods answers, “I don’t have any

big cattle to compare them to, but the heat isn't a problem here because they just stay in the shade during the day and graze early and late. Everybody who comes here who has the Brahman-cross cattle says, 'Well you can't get by without some Brahman in your cattle.' I keep reminding them these don't have any and they do fine." He adds the Arkansas ranch has the same heat and humidity as the New Ulm ranch.

Woods ultrasounds his bulls, not so much for Association-generated expected progeny differences (EPDs), but for in-herd ratios.

This attention to data has made Woodstone Angus an interesting customer for Dale and Mary Moore, Cattleman's Choice Feedyard, Gage, Okla. "One thing I'd like to say about Bill," Dale Moore says, "if everybody kept records like Bill did then we would not have any problems with an identification system, with a genetic system, with a quality system, with anything."

Both Maurer and Moore comment on the depth of knowledge and remarkable recall of details Woods has for his cattle herd. Woods downplays the notion and says he remembers the details because he enjoys the work so much.

"Bill has really helped me see how much detailed service and record-keeping can do for somebody. I probably have 40 percent source-verified cattle right now. I started out with my customers a long time ago suggesting they write down their calf tag numbers and when the calves were born, and sign their name. We may never need it but it's a start," Moore says.

At the other end of the spectrum, Woodstone Angus' data spreadsheet includes calf tag number; tattoo; dam tag number; sire tag number; birth date; weaning weight; yearling weight;

and 90-days-on-feed weight. "My other customers are not so detailed," Moore deadpans. "Somewhere in the middle is ideal."

Moore has been feeding Woodstone Angus cattle for five years and chuckles at the unusual appearance of the steers.

"I sort a lot of cattle face to face, five feet away from them, one at a time. I would say that 90 percent of the time, visual is everything. You just cannot do it with Bill Woods' cattle. I can sort a pen of 80 percent Choice cattle, and I say that with great confidence, but you cannot do it on Bill Woods' cattle.

"If you call an ultrasound technician they want to wait until the cattle have been on feed 100 days. Bill Woods' cattle can be ultrasounded when they come off the truck and they are going to be Choice." Moore knows this because he tried it once. "We ultrasounded 17 head that he sent from his Texas ranch because I had a technician here at the time. All but one was already Choice the day they came off the truck."

Feeding

Getting the cattle ready for the NACC took the combined efforts of Woodstone Angus and of Cattleman's Choice. Being in the contest was a learning experience for Woods. "We understood the contest that you pick a group of steers and feed them out for the contest. Well, that's what we did."

Apparently the other contestants, such as the feedlots, started with much larger groups of steers and heifers and used ultrasound to assemble uniform groups. "They might ultrasound 200 head that they have on feed. He with the biggest feedyard and the most cattle has the best chance," except in 2004 when three registered herds entered the three winning groups of cattle.

"We had zero discounts on 43

head. Now that was luck I'll admit that. We'll probably never do that again," Woods says. "This year we have about 60 heifers and 60 steers (on feed). We'll ultrasound those and pick the 40. We have to play according to the rules that are being used. It's not against the rules, but that wasn't really the spirit when we started."

Yvonne remembers, "When they called to interview us they asked which bull did we use on these steers." Woods interjects, "Thinking which American A.I. sire did we use?" Yvonne answers, "There were 14 sires," which was probably a surprise to the CAB news release writer.

"About half of those bulls have moved on to Arkansas and are being used on commercial cows. We've replaced them," Woods says.

Moore agrees that the high number of sires represented in the uniform 43 steers was unusual, but it didn't surprise him. "It shows that his genetics are not out of one great bull that's going to die and never happen again. He has a true technique and true system.

"My wife rodeos and also works at the feedyard. She and I were talking about this and she put it into a rodeo thought. If these girls that make it to the National Finals, they get nationally recognized year after year because they compete on different horses. Every year they always make it. They don't count on that one horse.

"It's kind of the same thing with Bill. He's not counting on one bull. He knows he doesn't have to because he can turn out however many bulls in his herd and he knows he's going to get the same thing every time."

The Woodstone Angus cattle are not fed any special ration. "We don't feed them gold pebbles," Moore says. "I like good old cow feed — corn, ground alfalfa, molasses, soybean meal supplement."

Moore is also feeding cattle from two of Woodstone's bull buyers. "A Beaumont customer with Brahman-cross cattle has increased his Choice percent by 20 percent at least. He went from typically 40 to 50 percent Choice to — last year — close to 80 percent Choice with Bill's bulls. Another customer from East Texas uses Bill's bulls on Brangus-type cows. They are not going to have a lot of ear. This is the first time feeding for them and they look really good so far."

Moore had explained earlier that a set of Woodstone steers came from the ranch already quality grade Choice. What can feeding do for those cattle? He answers, "It can turn them from Choice to Prime and get the carcass size up there, get the tenderness up there. This was kind of a hand-picked 17 head that Bill sent from the Houston ranch, but I think we could ultrasound his cattle off the truck and they'd be 70 to 80 percent Choice already, where the standard deal without feed coming off grass or wheat is probably going to be 30 percent Choice."

Success in the feedyard is a combination of genetics and feeding, Moore says. "You can feed them wrong and end up with a lot of yield grade 4s and a lot of small carcasses. Whether it's this feedyard or another feedyard, feeding does have an impact on the outcome. Quality makes grade, but corn also helps."

CAB feeding

Being one of the few CAB-licensed feedyards in the country, Moore has committed to maintaining high standards for the yard and for his customers.

"When you go to the steakhouse and pay \$35 for a CAB steak, they want to be able to stand behind that," he says.

CAB-licensed feedyards must feed a certain percentage of verified Angus cattle, must be

upstanding in the community, must maintain a clean, neat facility and mill, and a percentage of the cattle they feed must meet CAB qualifications. They are also trained in CAB quality assurance programs.

The Moore's voluntarily accepted these higher standards because it was best for their customers. Cattleman's Choice feedyard capacity is about 7,500 head and, Moore says, about 60 percent of the cattle are fed to CAB specifications. About 30 percent of those are accepted by the CAB program. Nationally, about five percent of the cattle are accepted by the CAB program.

"Our feedyard is large in technology and small in size. I want to be able to do everything that the big boys can do, but still have the one-on-one customer relationship. Most of my customers, I have been to their ranches, eaten supper with them. We probably have 60 active customers. You can have a 50,000 head feedyard and they might have 50 active customers."

Woodstone Angus sends cattle from the Texas and Arkansas ranches to Moore, which is not unusual. "I have customers from Georgia, Florida, Mississippi, Tennessee, and Arkansas and Texas."

Feeding conditions are good in Gage, he says. "This is almost ideal. We don't get very much snow — last year we got less than eight or 10 inches — and 16 inches of rain a year. We sit on top of a big hill so the wind is blowing and the air is dry."

Customer service is his reason for doing business. "We bought this yard for the customers. We work for the customers. And I'll never sell it to anybody else because I don't want to have to answer to anybody else for the customers."

Ending comments

Looking at Texas' pastures, an observer can see a blacker

tinge to the cattle these days. Could the pendulum swing to too many black cattle? "My attitude is you can do everything with Angus," Woods says.

"I know crossbreeding is very important, but my thing is consistency. I know what's on both sides of the pedigrees and I can fine tune and do everything with the Angus. Obviously I'm extremely biased," he chuckles.

Woods credits Al Maurer with helping him get a good start with the Irish bloodlines. "Al did it all — going to Ireland and making all the contacts."

Maurer smiles, adding, "But it took someone like Bill to follow through. A lot of people go into a breeding program, but Bill has had the courage and foresight to see this program carried out. It's really unusual. We talk about the famous people and herds in the Angus breed, but I think this herd of cattle someday will become just as famous as any of them.■"