Texas Longhorn (cattle)

The Texas Longhorn is a breed of cattle known for its characteristic horns, which can extend to 7 feet (2.1 m) tip to tip for steers and exceptional cows, and 36 to 80 inches (0.91 to 2 m) tip to tip for bulls. Similar cattle were imported by Spanish colonists into other parts of North America, including California and Florida. Horns can have a slight upward turn at their tips or even triple twist. Texas Longhorns are known for their diverse coloring. The Texas Longhorn Breeders Association of America and the International Texas Longhorn Association serve as the recognized registries for the breed. Texas Longhorns with elite genetics can often fetch $40,000 or more at auction with the record of $170,000 in recent history for a cow. Due to their innate gentle disposition and intelligence, Texas Longhorns are increasingly being trained as riding steers.

The Cattlemen’s Texas Longhorn Registry (CTLR), is the recognized breed registry dedicated to preserving the purest Texas Longhorn bloodlines. Using visual inspection of cattle by the most knowledgeable Texas Longhorn breeders and the use of blood type analysis to further identify parentage, CTLR has the ideal of preserving fullblood Texas Longhorn cattle that are genetically and historically correct for posterity.

History of the breed

The early Texas settlers obtained feral Mexican cattle from the borderland between the Nueces River and the Rio Grande and mixed them with their own eastern cattle. The result was a tough, rangy animal with long legs and long horns extending up to seven feet. Although this interbreeding was of little consequence to the makeup of a Longhorn, it did alter color. The varieties of color ranged from blue and all hues of "yellow" to browns, black, red and white, both cleanly bright and dirty-speckled. Portuguese cattle breeds, such as Alentejana and Mertolenga, are the closest relatives of Texas Longhorns.

As Texas became more heavily settled following annexation by the US, the frontier gave way to established farms and ranch lands. The leaner longhorn beef was not as attractive in an era where tallow was highly prized, and the longhorn's ability to survive on
the poor vegetation of the open range was no longer as much of an issue. Other breeds demonstrated traits more highly valued by the modern rancher, such as the ability to gain weight quickly. The Texas longhorn stock slowly dwindled, until in 1927 the breed was saved from near extinction by enthusiasts from the United States Forest Service, who collected a small herd of stock to breed on the Wichita Mountains Wildlife Refuge in Lawton, Oklahoma. A few years later, J. Frank Dobie and others gathered small herds to keep in Texas state parks. They were cared for largely as curiosities, but the stock's longevity, resistance to disease and ability to thrive on marginal pastures quickly revived the breed as beef stock. Today, the breed is used as a beef stock, though many Texas ranchers keep herds due to their link to Texas history.

Characteristics

In other parts of North America this breed is used for much more. Longhorn cattle have a strong survival instinct, and can find food or shelter during times of rough weather. Longhorn calves are very tough and can stand up sooner after birth than other breeds. Longhorn cattle can breed for a long time, well into their teens. There have been cows that have bred for up to thirty years. Some ranchers keep Longhorns for their easy calving. A Longhorn cow will often go off on her own to a safe place to have the calf then bring it home. They are also known to hide their calves in safe places to avoid predation, sometimes causing difficulty for ranchers, who may need to work on the animal.

Purpose

Most breeds of cattle fall into either beef or dairy. The Texas Longhorn is a beef animal and is known for its lean beef, which is lower in fat, cholesterol and calories than most beef. Texas Longhorns are also used to add hybrid vigor and easy calving when crossed with other breeds. Moreover, they continue to represent the romance of the American Old West and are often retained for their beauty and intelligence.

- **Tip to Tip** - The length from each tip of the horn, a straight line. This is a common measurement.
- **Total Horn** - The total length following the horn and always greater than the Tip to Tip
- **Composite (or Base)** - The circumference of the horn at the largest point.

These measurements can be adjusted to a Horns per Month of Age (HMA) which is calculated by dividing the number of months of age into the horn measurement. For example, a 48 month old animal with 50” of horn would be 50 / 48 or 1.04” per month of age.

It is not uncommon for commercial ranchers to cross breed longhorns with other breeds, thus increasing hybrid vigor and easy calving characteristics. Smaller birth weights reduce dystocia for first-calf heifers. The breed is claimed to do well in warmer climates.
Notes

References
- Will C. Barnes, "Wichita Forest Will Be Lair of Longhorns", The Cattleman, April 1926.
- Premier Longhorns-Information About Texas Longhorns

External links
- Cattlemen's Texas Longhorn Registry (http://www.ctlr.org/) organization that preserves and certifies the purest breed of Texas Longhorn cattle
- Longhorn Cattle (http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/LL/atl2.html) from the Handbook of Texas Online
- The Longhorn Roundup News (http://www.longhornroundup.com/) monthly newspaper to the Texas Longhorn industry
- Texas Longhorns in State Parks (http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us/spdest/parkinfo/longhorn/)
- Texas Longhorns Breeders Association of America (http://www.tlbaa.org/) organization that promotes and preserves the Texas Longhorn cattle history
- "The Gathering of the Texas Herd" (http://www.luckysnrlranch.com/articles/33.html) - early development of Texas Longhorn breed by Graves Peeler, Sid Richardson, Gene Autry, J. Frank Dobie, there are also many important and relative historical library references.
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