Pieter van Deventer, owner of the VAN-DEV Beefmaster stud, says the breed’s proven fertility and good performance in weaning weight ensures good returns for cattle farmers.

While unable to buy the calves, he selected cows with the best calves at foot. He considers this purchase one of the best he ever made, as each cow produced a few calves, and so established the herd he has today. Meeting the high selection standards of their former owner, these cows enabled Pieter to introduce top genetics and traits such as proven fertility and longevity, into his herd.

**Establishing the herd**

Thereafter, Pieter bought several culled, mature Beefmaster cows from a well-known breeder. While unable to buy the calves, he selected cows with the best calves at foot. He considers this purchase one of the best he ever made, as each cow produced a few calves, and so established the herd he has today. Meeting the high selection standards of their former owner, these cows enabled Pieter to introduce top genetics and traits such as proven fertility and longevity, into his herd.

**The herd today**

The VAN-DEV herd consists of 130 cows and heifers. Heifers are put to the bull at 14 months in a 45-day breeding season. The cows’ breeding season is 75 days. In summer, the cattle graze veld and pasture, and are supplemented with a salt lick. Heavily pregnant heifers undergo an extensive Phase D test on the veld, after which they continue on the veld with a salt and a bone meal lick. Three months before his production sale, the 30-month-old bulls receive a concentrated feed ration to prepare them for sale. The feed crib is in a camp of about 39ha, placed far away from the water source. This forces the bulls to walk and remain fit, enabling them to quickly adapt to their new owners’ farms.

**BEEFMASTER PHILOSOPHY**

“During the 23 years that I’ve been involved with the breed, the SA Beefmaster has developed into a breed to be reckoned with,” explains Pieter. “I personally made the Beefmaster philosophy my own. I insist on every cow producing a good calf every year; this is the only income a cattle farmer can obtain from the cow. “The philosophy further requires every cow failing to wean a calf to yield her carcass as dividend. It may be very difficult for a cattle farmer to set out with such stringent selection criteria, as many cows in an unselected group simply fail to pass this test year after year. But, by never relaxing these standards, the farmer will eventually reach the point of having a herd of functionally efficient cattle. For many, this only remains a subject to talk about. I conduct fertility selection, and nature selects those animals that continue producing year after year under extensive conditions.”

**Producing an outstanding herd**

Pieter says that a Beefmaster bull exhibits strong genetic prepotency, and its first-crossed calves achieve an immediate increase in weaning weights and strongly resemble Beefmasters. Any cattle farmer using a crossbreeding system will benefit from Beefmaster, as between 67% and 75% of the heterosis (hybrid vigour) is retained even in a three-way cross. Using Beefmaster in a beef enterprise has the added advantage of an outstanding dam line in a production enterprise selling heifers or cows. Beefmaster heifers can be retained to improve the herd for several generations. For the past three years, SA Studbook has listed the VAN-DEV Beefmaster herd as one out of 10 Platinum Elite Beefmaster herds. This year, the VAN-DEV herd produced the Platinum Elite Beefmaster Bull, and is one of the finalists for the Herd of the Year award, to be announced in May. To date, the VAN-DEV herd has produced three Best Elite Cows, and for seven years running was North West finalist for the ARC Beef Cattle Improvement Herd of the Year award.

**Email Pieter van Deventer at pieterv@jonkerv.co.za, or Helga Prinsloo at Beefmaster SA on 056 817 2404, or visit www.beefmastersa.co.za.**