Beefmaster: producing excellent bulls on the veld

Jan du Toit, who runs the Janzel Beefmaster Stud in Lichtenburg, has proved that Beefmaster cattle can excel on the veld with limited inputs. His bulls are sought after at auctions.

Jan du Toit began farming Beefmaster cattle in Lichtenburg, North West, in 1994. Three years later, he joined the Beefmaster Cattle Breeders' Society of South Africa, and subsequently registered the Janzel Beefmaster Stud. Du Toit first became acquainted with the breed when he partnered with Pieter van Deventer, owner of Van-Dev Beefmasters. The pair rented a piece of land and subsequently bought their own farms, but continued implementing the same breeding and management methods they used when farming together.

This year, Janzel Beefmasters was a platinum finalist in the Vleisentraal/Beefmaster: producing excellent bulls on the veld Book competition, placing it amongst the top 10 Beefmaster studs in the country.

During the time Du Toit and Van Deventer farmed together, female animals were not readily available, and the partners had to upgrade their herds using their foundation cows. When they bred Brahman-cross cows with Beefmaster bulls, even the first generation calves demonstrated the positive Beefmaster influence, and each generation since has showed more improvement. However, it was only after the third and fourth generations that uniformity became apparent and wholly functional animals were achieved.

Tom Lasater, the creator of the Beefmaster breed, emphasised the six essentials of selection: fertility, growth ability, milk production, adaptability, conformation and temperament. Du Toit’s goal is to produce balanced, functional and efficient cattle that can adapt to any condition and still excel.

“The only difference is that we’re raising bulls,” Du Toit places great emphasis on fertility and efficiency. Heifers are covered when 14 months old, and produce their first calves at around 27 months. Each cow is expected to produce a calf every year and is given only one chance to skip a cycle. Du Toit adheres to strict selection criteria to choose the animals that join the stud. Rejected animals are rounded off and slaughtered.

“Jan du Toit, owner of the Janzel Beefmaster Stud, provides the ideal as expansion is limited. The animals receive all feed on the veld, and therefore still walk. While they don’t gain as much weight on the veld, the animals develop many masculine qualities, remain fit, and their abdominal muscles stay strong. Between the ages of two- and-a-half and three years, bulls are sold at auction. As these animals have already developed and matured, they adapt easily, even if put to cows immediately.

The grass grows rapidly in the grass time to regrow. Camps are rested completely every three or four years, and are not grazed at all in summer.

BULLS

Young bulls are selected at weaning and go through the Phase D test on the veld. This usually runs from September to March, during which the animals gain between 120kg and 150kg. After the Phase D test, Du Toit places the stud. Rejected animals are given supplementary feed for three months before the sale, the only time this happens. The bulls are sold after buyback, and demonstrate the adaptability, hardiness and cost-effectiveness of the breed.

Production sales

Every year, the Janzel Beefmaster Stud and Van-Dev Beefmasters hold a joint production sale, during which they sell bulls raised on the veld. These are given supplementary feed for three months before the sale, the only time this happens. The bulls are sold after buyback, and demonstrate the adaptability, hardiness and cost-effectiveness of the breed.

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