

THE MAKING OF A GRAND CHAMPION STEER.

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In the beginning of the discussion of this subject it will be well to have the term "grand champion" defined as it is meant here. The expression is a show ring term and applies to the animal of any age or breed, that has won first honors in his class, championship over all animals of his age and grandchampionship over all breeds and ages.

Most of the larger fairs have classes made up of the champions of different ages from the first prize winners, so that in a season there may be numerous so called grandchampions of every degree of merit, but the term "grandchampion steer" as used here shall be taken as applying only to the winner over all animals of similar nature, of any breed or age, at the world's greatest live stock exposition, "The Chicago International", held annually at the Union Stock Yards of Chicago, Illinois. The entire live stock world is represented at this great exposition and each year produces but one grandchampion beef animal, hence it is easily understood how keen, almost bitter, among breeders and feeders is the competition for the coveted honor of having bred or fitted the animal that for the time is the center of attraction in the cattleman's world.

It is hardly necessary to describe the grandchampion here—indeed it is hardly possible to say what distinguishes him from the other champions because the contest is often so close that the most expert judge can scarcely choose between them. The grandchampion steer is simply the highest type of beef animal that the best skill and highest intelligence in breeding and feeding can produce. He must have sufficient size for his age, neither of which, however, are strictly defined, the greatest possible amount of flesh of the highest

possible quality. He may be of any breed or of no breed or of any color. Such points as the latter are supposed to have no influence in the choice of a grandchampion, although personal preference in regard to color and breed, especially the latter, may sometimes be a judges only means of deciding between two animals.

The subject of making a grandchampion steer divides itself naturally into three heads, viz., breeding, feeding and showing the championship candidate. The first includes the selection and mating of the parents, the second the feeding and general care of the steer, and the third the preparation for the show ring and the actual performance in the ring.

In breeding for a grandchampion the breeder must have an ideal in mind- a mental picture of the animal he wishes to produce; without such an ideal- breeding simply for a chance of producing a suitable animal, he is like a rudderless ship adrift upon a boundless sea. His chances of "getting anywhere" are about one to infinity. Even with the highest ideal and the most skillful and judicious selection of the parents his chances of producing a successful candidate are still small; yet this small chance is sufficient to induce many breeders to sacrifice what might otherwise make valuable breeding animals and go to great expense to fit them for the show ring in the hopes of making them winners in the beef classes.

It would be difficult to say just what kind of a sire or dam should be selected to produce an animal of the desired type; in the fact it cannot be said that any particular type must be used since the prepotency of the individuals has such a large part in determining what the offspring will be. For instance if a male of high quality and good beef ^{type} with sufficient prepotency is accessible he may be

mated with common or even very plain females and through his superior prepotency effect the desired results; or the case may be reversed. In general however it may be said that both male and female should possess as nearly as it is possible to have them the characteristics desired in the offspring, and should be mated with the view to overcoming in the progeny any defects that may be present in either parent; for example, if one parent is high in the flank, weak in the back or loin, inclined to "legginess", or have other undesirable characters, the other should possess the opposite characters in these regards. It does not always happen that defects can be overcome in this way but it is a good rule to follow; animals that are weak in the same points should never be mated. Occasionally, from almost any kind of mating, due to the laws of variation or ^catavism, the unexpected will happen and an unusually good animal will be produced; and since, in steer classes, pedigree is of little or no importance such occurrences should be taken advantage of.

Nothing need be said in regard to the mating of the parents after they have been selected more than that it should occur at such a time as to permit the offspring to be shown to the greatest advantage. According to present International ruling, grade steers must ^{be} calved after the first of January, but pure breeds may be shown if calved after the first of December.

Other things being equal it is preferable to have a dam of sufficiently high milking qualities that she will be able to properly nourish the calf herself, since the necessity of using another nurse cow, if not actually injurious to the calf, is often attended by considerable inconvenience to the attendant. And whether or not the dam is to rear the young animal after birth she should be well fed

and carefully attended during the gestation period ^{that the} fetus may be properly developed and provide a good foundation for the development after birth.

For several weeks after the birth of the calf little can be told of its possibilities, from its appearance, but if there is any chance at all that it can be made a show ring favorite, feeding with that end in view should begin at once. Until it is old enough to eat for itself, indeed up to twelve months of age or until ~~or until~~ it is too large to suck its dam the latter should be fed for a heavy flow of milk as there is no better feed for a young growing animal than its own dam's milk. It not only forms a balanced ration, producing better gains than any other feed, but has a stimulating effect upon the whole system that keeps it in proper tone and gives a finish to the calf that no other ration will give.

Of course milk must not constitute the whole ration any longer than is necessary. Coarser and bulkier feeds are needed to develop the digestive capacity and should be supplied as soon as the calf will use them. A little hay will be in order when the calf is not more than a few days old and within two or three weeks bran, corn meal, crushed oats or other ground feed may profitably be used. It is safe and advisable to let the calf ^{have} all of such feed ~~as~~ he will use. Hence it should be kept before him all the time and fresh supplies added frequently to call his attention to the feed trough and induce him to eat.

It is not possible to state what feeds are best to be used nor just what the nutritive ration of the combined feeds should be. These will depend largely upon the individual animal. A ration well suited

to one animal might give very unsatisfactory results if fed to another. Some steers are especially inclined to lay on fat very readily, and to become hard and patchy, while others are oppositely inclined, turning the greater portion of their food into frame and muscle. It is easily understood that such animals should not be fed the same ration. In the food of the former, protein should be largely used while the ration of the latter should contain considerable fat producing elements. In general it may be said that the ration should be comparatively narrow for the first eight to twelve months in order that the frame may be well developed, and for the highest quality of flesh should never be too wide, a very wide ration tending to produce an excess of fat without a proper "marbling" or mixing of fat with lean. Highly concentrated feeds should not be used except in combination with bulkier feeds for the reason that a too concentrated ration tends to decrease the digestive capacity and has an injurious effect upon the general health of the animal; the opposite is just as carefully to be avoided, however since it is likely to unduly distend the digestive apparatus and give a very undesirable "paunchy" appearance.

If a number of feeders should be asked to name six feeds that they would choose if limited to that number, there would probably be as many different replies as there were inquiries. The feeds most generally named perhaps, would be corn, bran, oil meal, grass, alfalfa hay and roots. The palatability of a ration is no less important a consideration than its amounts of nutrients, and should receive the feeders careful attention, because if the feed is distasteful to the steer or becomes so through long continued use of the same ration, he consumes less, feeds less eagerly, his digestion

becomes less active and a consequent loss, or decrease in gain which amounts to the same thing occurs. Hence it may be advisable to change the ration occasionally, substituting a small amount of oil cake or similar feed for part of the bran ration, adding sugar, or providing succulent feeds such as ensilage or roots, especially in winter. In summer, of course, grass will universally be used. Sorghum molasses is sometimes used quite extensively, not, however, so much as an appetizer as an actual fat producing food. In such changes the feeder must guard against varying the nutritive ratio of the ration too greatly.

In feeding beef animals for the show ring it must be remembered that the object is not to secure the greatest possible amount of fat but to secure the maximum amount of flesh of the highest possible quality, the latter being ~~being~~ perhaps the most important of the two and decidedly the more difficult to accomplish. It must also be remembered that a fattening animal becomes ripe, if fed to the finish, just as an apple becomes ripe; that there is a point at which the steer is at his prime and beyond which he begins to decline in quality, becomes "over done", even though he may continue to gain in weight. In view of this fact the expert herdsman will have some standard well in mind to work to, and will handle the steer he hopes to make a world's champion daily that he may detect any faults at their first appearance and correct them before they become pronounced.

By feed alone the feeder of long experience can direct the handling qualities of his animals to a remarkable extent, although this is accomplished more easily in some directions than others-- An animal kept soft by the use of light, laxative feeds such as bran and roots can easily be hardened by the use of heavier rations; but when ^{once} since a steer has become hard and rough or "patchy" it is a much

more difficult task to reduce his hardness by a change of feed. In fact it is almost impossible to soften him without greatly reducing his weight and building up new flesh which, of course, is an expensive and wasteful practice.

The problems of the feeder as a feeder, then, are these: to force his charge from the day of birth without "burning out" his digestive apparatus with too concentrated foods and throwing him "off feed"; to provide sufficient variety of feeds in order to induce the greatest possible consumption, without too widely varying the nutritive ratio of the ration; to keep the handling of animals mellow and even, seeking to have them ripe but not "over done" by the time they are to go into the show ring. But even if the feeder is able to solve all of these problems he can never be sure of victory because of the difference of opinion of the judges before whom he must appear, each judge having his own standard and giving his decisions according to that standard which may or may not correspond to the standard of other judges.

While feeding is probably the most important item in preparing ordinary cattle for market, it has scarcely more weight, in the case of the grandchampionship candidate, in determining whether or not he will be successful than the general care and treatment he receives and requires no greater intelligence or skill on the part of the attendant.

Castration is one of the important events in the life of the show steer. Like many other points the time at which it should be done will depend largely upon the individual. Some advocate performing the operation immediately or within a few days after birth but in case the subject is inclined to "over quality"--i.e. to be too light of bone or neck, or lacking in style or stamina, these defects may

extent
to some[^] be corrected by delaying the operation until the calf begins to show the development of masculine characteristics of form and temperament. Of course, however, it should never be put off long enough that the steer will have the appearance of a stag.

n In any case, it goes without saying the work should be done in the best possible way and the animal carefully protected for a few days from cold, inclement weather or flies, for at best the operation is accompanied by more or less danger to the health and development if not the life of the calf. In feeding show animals every week should count for some substantial gains. In consideration of this alone castration would better be performed early as it is then attended with the least danger and loss, but circumstances and the judgment of the herdsman must decide this.

Feeding for the show ring is not always profitable to the feeder for each individual steer and if it were not for prize money and the extravagant price paid for the winners, even the grandchampion would be a source of great loss because of the time and labor expended in fitting him for the ring. The show steer must be pampered. The draft horse whose first three years are simply preliminary to a long life of usefulness is better fitted for what is required of him if not too tenderly reared, but the beef steer reaches his goal at the end of three years if not before, whether is grandchampion or a common feeder, and since the time is so short, if he is to be the former, no pains can be spared in his preparation. Hence the care given him is often, or always, extravagant in the extreme.

He is sheltered from inclement weather as carefully as a child, in winter being kept stabled and blanketed in severe weather, and only taken out for exercise or let out for a while when the weather

is clear. Cold alone is not especially harmful, but storms, "raw" winds, and damp foggy weather is likely to induce disease, especially of the lungs or air passages. Protection from heat must also be provided since a steer carrying heavy flesh is unable to stand high temperature and still make the desired gains. In hot weather, too, flies are a source of annoyance^{and} consequent loss and for this reason as well as the harmful effects of direct sunlight upon the coat of the steer, he is usually kept stabled through the day and turned out on grass at night. For these purposes as cool and airy stables as possible, and small pastures with abundant grass are desirable. If pasture is not obtainable the steer should be "soiled" in an open lot during the night.

The exercise the steer receives is a most important feature of his care. Upon it the herdsman depends largely to keep the handling uniform, and to make it of the proper firmness. Without sufficient exercise the steer, if fed upon rations that will make his flesh sufficiently firm, will lay on rolls of hard fat-become patchy. This will be especially noticeable just below the loin over the short ribs and is very objectionable. At best such conditions are hard to avoid, some animals being especially hard to control in this respect. Up to a year old the steer is not hard to exercise but as he becomes heavier he becomes indisposed to move about more than he is required to do. Hence it becomes a daily task of the attendant to lead or drive the steer about, the distance depending upon the condition of the animal.

With the competition so keen that men work a whole year with the thought of the ten or fifteen minutes before the final judge, in

their minds it is to be expected that every possible means will be employed in the preparation for that time. For the greater part these means are legitimate and fair ~~and~~ since they are universally employed, but, as will also be expected, there are some men so unscrupulous as to resort to any kind of trickery in the hopes of pushing their animals to the front.

The judge that has had enough experience that he is considered competent to pass judgment upon a grandchampionship class at the International, of course knows all ^{the tricks} ~~off~~ the trade represented by the animals before him. It is not his business to know whether the steers are entitled to an entry in the class or not, whether the weights and ages as given are bona fide; but it is his business to discover the defects of his subjects that may have been concealed by the herdsman.

An abundant coat on his animal is one of the herdsman's chief concerns. To secure it he will stable and blanket the steer early in the spring to induce the earliest possible casting of the old coat, and then will expose him to rains, to promote a heavy covering by the time for the fall shows. When the steer is to be taken into the show ring the skin and coat are washed thoroughly, the hair combed as carefully as a courtier's. Having previously been clipped and trimmed to suit the particular conformation of its owner, it is combed down over the prominent points, puffed up over ^{hollows} the curled and crimped till the steer bears little resemblance to his former self. When the class is assembled it is ^{steers} the ~~steers~~ that hold the breathless attention of the spectators, but it is the reputation of the feeder that is at stake and to one who does not handle the entries the the contest seems to be as much of the herdsmen's skill as of the

merits of the steers. Knowing this the cattle judge must resort to the sheep judge's methods and handles each animal noting the amount and quality of flesh and the uniformity of its dept. These are the points by which the judges ~~is supposed to~~ come to his decision and name the winning entry, but herdsmen know that minor points will have their influence and take great pains to make their charges have as pleasing an appearance as possible so polished horns, handsome switches, etc. are part of the show steers adornments although they may often be artificial.

Formerly the International ruling was that the grandchampion of the show must be slaughtered at once but ^{since} this ruling ended the possibilities of valuable animals in case the grandchampion was only a calf or a yearling it was repealed. Now the same steer has a chance to be three times a grandchampion although the chance is extremely small, since the steer that is sufficiently ripe to win highest honor as a calf is quite likely to be over done by the time he shows as a yearling and scarcely worth showing by another year.

Since the organization of the International the following are the steers with their respective breeds, ages, owners and selling prices that have won the coveted grandchampionship of the great show.

1900--Advance, pure breed Angus yearling, owned by Stanley R. Pierce of Illinois; selling price \$1.50 per pound live weight. This is probably the highest price ever paid for a beef animal in the United States.

1901-- Wood's Principle- pure bred, Hereford yearling, shown by John Latham, selling price \$.50 per pound.

1902-- Shamrock- grade Angus two year old, owned by the Iowa

Agricultural College; selling price \$.56 per pound.

1903--Challenger, grade Hereford two year old, owned by the Nebraska Agricultural College; selling price \$.26 per pound.

1904--Clear Lake Jute II, pure bred Angus two year old, owned by the Minnesota Agricultural College; selling price \$.36 per pound.

1905-- Black Rock, grade Angus two year old, owned by the Iowa Agricultural College; selling price \$.25 per pound.

1906-- Defender, pure bred Hereford calf, owned by Frank Nave of Indiana; not put on the market but sold to the Iowa college.

Why these facts show so strongly in favor of Angus and Hereford is probably due to the following reasons, more than to any superiority of these breeds over other beef breeds as beef produces:--

First, objectionable color markings and other show ring disqualifications occur more frequently in animals of these breeds than among Shorthorns and Gallaways; thus animals of the highest type may be fitted for beef classes because of a "line back" or spotted face or too much white on the body, in the Herefords, or because of white legs, white spots, or scurs among the Angus. Then the large demand for Shorthorn breeding males has caused Shorthorn breeders to be much less strict in their selection of breeding stuff than Angus or Hereford breeders have been. From this reason the Shorthorns have not been as well represented in the fat classes as the Angus and Herefords, and the Gallaways are not numerous enough to furnish many entries in these classes.

The general favor of two year old stuff is also noticeable, showing that, as a rule, younger animals have not the maturity or quality desirable in the highest type of the beef steer.