

BY: GILDA V. BRYANT

Passion, a cowboy work ethic, cow savvy and a smidgeon of luck? These are the elements that helped a determined Texas Longhorn breeder define a new era.

Texas Longhorn breeder, Dale Hunt, owns the Rocking H Ranch near Ardmore, Oklahoma. His picturesque spread has around 40 head of registered Texas Longhorn cows sporting the distinctive Rocking H brand on their left hips. Protected by gently rolling hills, they graze on Bermuda grass pastures.

Although Hunt grew up in town, he began learning about cattle when he was nine from his grandfather, Glen Evans.

"He's my hero," says Hunt. "Granddad lived on a small ranch in Butler, Missouri. He slowly went blind because of a disease of the retina. . . I was always out there. We were big buddies. As he lost his eyesight, he taught me what to do with the cattle."

Hunt's grandfather used his Angus herd as a living classroom to patiently teach his grandson cattle basics, such as how much to feed them and what to look for when they got sick. He stressed being a good steward of the herd as well as the value of hard work.

"You need to have a passion for the cattle if you're going to take care of them," Hunt says. "He taught me that. We fed them before we ate our breakfast."

Hunt learned other lessons from his grandfather.

"Back in those days, you didn't throw anything away. He had two galvanized water tanks and the bottoms had rusted out. He told me to throw out 15 square bales in the two tubs, because he didn't want cows wasting hay. I only put out nine bales because the tanks were full."

Laughing, Hunt recalls, "Granddad said, 'What the hell is wrong with the other six bales? I said for you to put out 15!'"

Hunt's granddad may have been blind, but with his keen hearing, he knew exactly what his grandson was doing.

As Hunt's interest in bovines grew, he bought a registered Brahma bull for his granddad's cow herd.

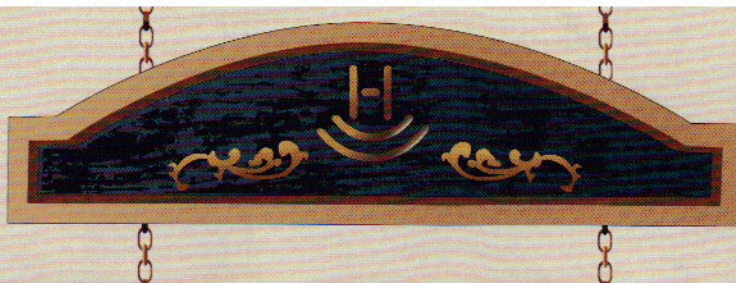
"We crossed those little short Angus cows with that gray Brahma bull," Hunt remembers. "Our calves brought top money at the feeder calf sale that year. Granddad always had low-end cattle, so he was proud to be with the big ranchers that year." Laughing, he adds, "He never would have let the bull out of the trailer if he had seen him. In that northern country, they didn't like the hump and skin that Brahms have."

Hunt also played Little League baseball, which unexpectedly led to additional cattle contact.

"We were playing All Star Little League baseball and the baseball field was at the fairgrounds near the rodeo arena. Mom couldn't come get me until she got off work. After the games, I watched guys riding bulls and steers. One day I came home and my mom wanted to know where all that hair on my uniform came from. That was the first time I got caught riding steers."

At age eleven, Hunt began his 16-year bull riding career in the Junior and Little Britches Rodeos and continued this rough-and-tumble sport in high school, becoming the Missouri State Bull Riding Champion. During the finals in Yakima, Washington, a scout with Fort Scott Community College in Fort Scott, Kansas, offered Hunt a full scholarship to attend college and ride on their rodeo team.

"We weren't a wealthy family," Hunt says. "For any of us to go to college was out of the question. When I won State and got to go [to college] on a scholarship, that was cool. I took agri-business classes and competed at the intercollegiate rodeo level and did well there. My second year of college, I earned the Professional Rodeo Cowboys Association (PRCA) card and rode as a pro for three more years."

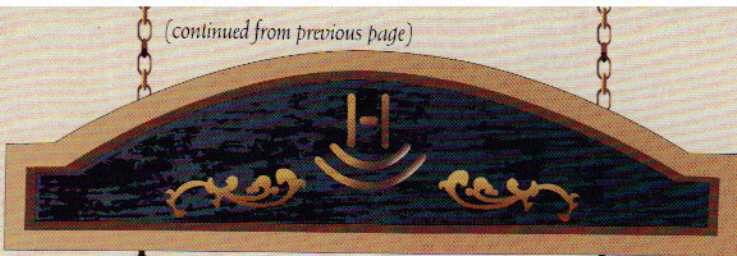


Above: Sherrill and Dale holding Chico. It's no surprise that Hunt values horn length and is the founder of the Horn Showcase Banquet Auction.
(Photo by Dorthie Kelley)

Below: Dale Hunt's grandfather, Glen Evans, who taught 9-year old Dale about cattle.

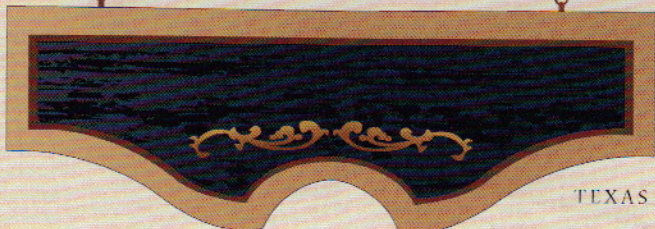


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Above: Dale and Colonel Eddie Wood worked together at various Texas Longhorn sales.
Photo courtesy of Dale Hunt

Below: Buckles, buckles, and more Buckles, all won during Hunt's 16-year bull riding career.



"THAT'S WHERE MY PASSION IS - RAISING GOOD COWS..."

Hunt recalls advice from well-known rodeo cowboy, Warren Granger "Freckles" Brown. In a group meeting, he told the competing bull riders to stay positive, stay in shape and if the bulls scare you, roll up your rope, put it up and never get on another one. That's when you get hurt.

"I rode them for 16 years," admits Hunt. "I was successful. Then I got off one day and decided 'that's enough' and never got on another one."

After college, Hunt went to work and tried to adapt to city life.

"I didn't feel complete. I got to thinking about raising some registered Longhorns. I had some land and bought a few. I got around those Longhorns and learned about them. I fell in love with them. They are such smart animals. They're different - you don't get bored with them like you would 25 black cows that all look the same."

Hunt visited ranches and learned the fine art of culling a herd and how to select breeding stock that produced animals with characteristics he liked. Along the way, he met auctioneer Colonel Eddie Wood. Soon Hunt was working at sales, opening the gate for cattle to enter the sales arena. Later he learned to read pedigrees for Col. Wood's auctions. By reading pedigrees, Hunt learned what worked when breeding animals and what didn't. He currently reads pedigrees at Texas Longhorn sales in Texas, Oklahoma, and Kansas.

Sooner or later everyone has problems. Hunt hit a rough patch in 2006 and sold his herd.

"I was divorced at the time. Then I met Sherrill Caddel."

"Dale's sister-in-law brought him to church one Sunday," explains Sherrill Caddel, who is engaged to Hunt. "A lot of people don't believe we met in

church, but we did. Later, we went to a Longhorn sale, and we both had a great time. You could tell he had a passion for these cattle. I talked him into getting into [the Longhorn business] again. He jumped in with both feet."


"We're running an elite program," Hunt says. "We're taking these proven females and crossing them with the industry's top bulls. We don't want to have 100 head of cows, but we want 30-40 of the best cattle in the breed. And we're having a lot of fun."

Hunt takes photos and provides pedigree information while Caddel keeps the website current and updates the Facebook page they use as a marketing tool.

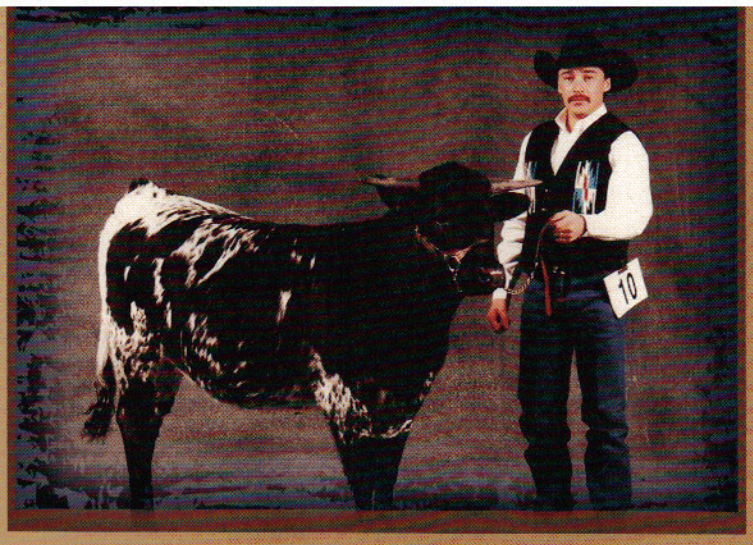
"We are putting every cow we own on the website," Hunt adds. "It helps us discipline ourselves. We're not going to hide some animals that might come around. If they aren't there, we're trading them in and upgrading. Our future plans are to have an elite set of cattle that can compete industry-wide. They've got to be producers."

"If I have a 70-inch horned cow, my challenge is to pick the right sire to put on top of that cow's pedigree to make that a 75-inch offspring and not give up good qualities, like milk, square frame, and color. They've got to have the pedigree and the whole package. We don't want just one trait."

Using the Rocking H brand, given to him by his grandfather, Hunt is proud to be a breeder.

"That's where my passion is - raising good cows," Hunt says. "We've raised a world champion bull, cow, and steer. I think we're on the right track." 

Gilda V. Bryant loves to write stories about ordinary folks who achieve amazing things, as well as articles about cattle. Her articles have appeared in The Texas Longhorn Journal, Working Ranch Magazine, The Cattleman and various regional magazines.



Above: Dale Hunt competing with a Texas Longhorn calf, "MyMy" (Photo courtesy of Dale Hunt); Sherril branding Dale with the Rocking H Brand (Photo by Dorthie Kelley); Dale competing in Kansas City in 1983 on Don Enkamp's #11, Bottle Cat bull, Bert Davis is the bull fighter and photo is by Bern Gregory (Photo courtesy of Dale Hunt).


DALE HUNT'S



Advice to Other Breeders

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Dale Hunt's advice for other Texas Longhorn owners includes:

- Keep impurities out of your herd. Don't mess up the blood line.
- Cull hard. It's easy to say and hard to do.
- Buy bulls when first starting. When the first bull calf comes along, you don't need to keep him. Go to the big ranch to buy a bull that can do some good.
- Have fun. The Texas Longhorn people are so much fun. You look forward to seeing them and getting away from the everyday grind. New people need to know that we'll welcome them even though we don't know them.
- A breeder and bull rider have something in common. If you're riding bulls and you buck off, it's nobody's fault but your own. If you're the one picking the sire and cows, and things aren't right, look in the mirror. It's your fault if it doesn't work. 



Dale Hunt reading pedigrees for Joel Lemley, auctioneer at the Working Y.O. Ranch sale, September 15, 2012. Photo courtesy of Joel & Shirley Lemley.

Below: Hunt feeds "Hubbell's Rio Kay" on the ranch, which has Bermuda grass pastures among rolling hills.

