



What's the Texas Longhorn "bloodline of choice" in the late 20th Century? The surprising answer is...none! To be more specific, the prototype animal for today's progressive Longhorn breeder is a blend featuring three of the Seven Families of Texas Longhorns. According to the Texas Longhorn Breeders' Survey published in the December '96/January '97 edition of the Texas Longhorn Journal, the favored "genetic blend" consists of a cross using the Phillips, Butler and Wichita Refuge (WR) bloodlines. This supercross, when it clicks, produces Longhorns with the complete package of size, horns and color without sacrificing the "internal" qualities which enabled the breed to thrive for centuries in the wilds of Mexico and Texas. In this exclusive TLJ feature, contributing writers Kaso Kety, J.O. Roane and Charlene Semkin discuss what each of these three families of Texas Longhorns "brings to the table" in the genetic blend which is producing today's top individuals.

The Butler/Phillips/WR Genetic Blend

Today's Bottom Line for Top-of-the-Line Texas Longhorns

The Butler Bloodline

By Kaso Kety, Folsom, Louisiana

The Butler bloodline has proven to be an essential ingredient in many modern "blend genetics" Longhorn programs. While many breeders see Butler cattle as a way to infuse the genetics for increased horn growth into their herds, they actually add much more. In addition to the well-known horn length benefits, Butler blood can add horn quality, which includes heads and horn patterns that are characteristic of the breed. They will add horn base to pencil-horned cattle, and can help correct the "rounded-poll disease" afflicting the heads of so many animals in the breed today. Butler cattle also serve to strengthen pedigrees and raise the value of the offspring by adding proven, well-respected, market-friendly genetics.

Butler cattle excel at those traits which Texas Longhorns are best-known for such as fertility, hardiness and efficiency and bring these attributes to the genetic pool of which they have become a part. Females are typically very "clean" and feminine and bulls are masculine and typey. In many cases Butler cattle have been used to refine coarser, sloppier cattle. Butler females typically show excellent udder quality and, similar to the buffalo, provide nourishment for their calves through less volume and "richer" milk. While every producer likes a "heavy milking" cow, extreme volume results in udder problems. It does a cow very little good to breed into her twenties if large teats or mastitis from injury have rendered her unable to raise a calf. Butler females retain excellent udder quality through small teats and udders that are up and out of the way. In fact, on a mature But-

ler female the udder of a dry cow is barely visible, but descends when wet to reveal an excellent functional udder. While there are exceptions to every rule, the typical Butler Longhorn is known for its gentle disposition and is generally very easy to work with. Like every animal, however, how it is handled will largely determine its temperament.

Butler cattle are quite unique and possess traits which can indicate if a cow contains Butler blood and (depending on the number of visible traits expressed) can give a good indication as to the amount of Butler breeding present. The Butler family is different because of the nature of Milby Butler's breeding program. In a time of open ranges and multi-sire herds, Mr. Butler was implementing a breeding program based on rigorous selection and linebreeding to produce a specific type of Longhorn he considered a true form of the "old blood." He had excellent working facilities and small pastures where he could (and did) plan each mating.

It is well known that Milby Butler had a passion for horns and, while much of his program centered around horn growth, he did in fact select heavily for other traits. Some of these are quite obvious, others are very subtle. Mr. Butler was a cowman first and foremost and demanded cattle that were fertile, productive and efficient. In addition to horn growth, he selected for a tight "Texas Twist" corkscrew horn growth pattern. Horn shape and base were as important as tip-to-tip measurement by Butler's standards. He wanted a cow to have a "mealy mouth," "crocodile eyes," a "fish-hook" tailhead and a "foxtail" switch. Butler cattle also possess several distinct conformational characteristics, including a topline identifiable uniquely to the Butler bloodline.

The Butler cattle were separated into sub-families and then linebred, resulting in cattle that are genetically very "tight" and very consistent. This consistency gives these sub-families a degree of predictability that is for the most part not seen in other families of Longhorns. While similar sub-families exist in other bloodlines, it is Milby Butler's planned mating scheme—started in the 1940s—which could account for the higher level of consistency among the Butler bloodline.

However, this also means that when a mating "works" it works very well and when it doesn't, it doesn't. In a blend genetics breeding program using Phillips and WR breeding, it has been shown that certain Butler lines cross far better than others with Phillips cattle. Similarly, particular Butler bulls will "click" with the breeding of WR 1814 while others will click with WR 2308 bloodlines. Breeders have for years extolled the "magic cross" of Butler, WR and Phillips blood, but realizing the potential of the blend requires looking beyond the surface and researching established programs for evidence as to which crosses work the best. Studying established programs is the best way to eliminate squandered time and wasted matings. While it is true that inferior individuals from unsuccessful matings are generally eliminated, studying the most successful crosses will provide valuable hints as to how certain gene pools interact. Programs that have historically incorporated Butler breeding have provided valuable information to modern-day breeders and have unknowingly become our most important sources of genetic knowledge that we can utilize in planned matings. Many of these breeders are still quite active today—a testament to the wisdom of using Butler genetics.

The greatest genetic impact can be made using a straight-Butler bull on other bloodline cattle, and several programs fortunate enough to obtain Butler females have used outcross bulls on them and then generally used sons out of these Butler cows. Among the breeders following these "paths to success" have been J.W. Isaacs, Johnnie Hoffman, King Ranch, Red McCombs, Bob Shultz, Terry Kelsey, Dickinson Cattle Co., Jack Montgomery, Holt's H-R Ranches, Owen McGill and Robert Harrell. I also happen to be very proud of the blend-genetics cattle produced at the Ace Cattle Company before we switched to a straight-Butler program.

Herds that are primarily straight-Butler which at times used other bloodlines and retained some of the offspring of these cattle include those of Michael McLeod, Blackie Graves, Luman Holman, DeWitt Meshell and Ruel Sanders. Cattle from these and the aforementioned programs reflect that what Butler blood provides is genetics for superior or increased horn growth and distinctive color patterns that are specifically identifiable as Butler. But this does not mean, contrary to semi-popular notion, white cattle. While it is true that virtually all Butler cattle carry the white color pattern and this pattern tends to be dominant, it is in fact other, more spectacular, color patterns which truly reflect the presence of Butler blood. The White Park color pattern can be found in every Longhorn gene pool so, contrary to popular myth, white color is not in itself an indicator of Butler breeding. Subtler traits can be passed on and can serve to confirm the presence of Butler genetics. While many blend cattle can express Butler traits to the extent that they appear "pure Butler," they generally will not breed as true as straight Butler cattle because of the addition of the out-

side gene pool. It is this consistency that separates pure Butler from part Butler.

A very interesting bit of information is that the idea of introducing Butler breeding as "outcross" blood is no modern trend at all. In fact, of the other six families of Longhorns (Phillips, Peeler, Wright, Marks, WR and Yates) only the Yates bloodline did not add Butler breeding to its herd at one point or another. There is documented evidence that Jack Phillips and Graves Peeler shared a Butler bull for many years and that this bull figured quite prominently in both their herds. The Marks family used the Blackie Graves-bred Butler bull "Pete" during the late 1960s and early '70s. The Wright family bought groups of Butler heifers at early TLBAA sales and used sons of these cows as herd sires, thus establishing heavy amounts of Butler breeding in their gene pool. In later years the Wrights incorporated Bold Ruler and his breeding into their program. The Wichita Refuge also used Bold Ruler in 1976 as an outcross on the WR herd.

While the Yates family did not use Butler breeding in their herd, there is some phenotypical evidence that would suggest a link between some Yates cattle and some Butler cattle. This could be attributed to a common gene pool based on geography. It is known that Milby Butler intensively linebred to his "Mexican" cow Miss John Wayne. Butler obtained her from a region that is essentially the same region from where the Yates cattle originated. This may be pure speculation, but it is a fact that all the early "Longhorn families" looked for "Mexican" blood to infuse into their herds. These cattle were viewed as purer, living in remote regions and free from "improved" European blood.

Given the usage of Butler cattle in these other families and the seemingly close relationship that some appear to have, I would like to suggest that what indeed may be working so well is simply the "re-combining" of like gene pools rather than crediting heterosis for the improvement that is seen. If heterosis were the acting mechanism, improvement should be seen with every calf (or at least very consistently) and we as breeders know that not every cross works. Another more accurate hypothesis, given the high heritability of horn growth, may simply be the re-blending of common gene pools that were separated long ago. *(continued on page 42)*



Photos—opposite page from left: FM Graves 102, a cow that has helped set the modern-day standard for Butler quality; Dawna Ranger, a contemporary example of the Phillips bloodline; WR 20, an outstanding 1980 Refuge-branded cow. **This page:** Gravy's Super Doll (top), a 64"-horned product of the Butler/Phillips/WR blend; FM Graves 54 (above left), a 1974 cow that typified straight-Butler breeding.

The Phillips/Texas Ranger Bloodline

By Charlene Semkin, Prescott, Arizona

When one thinks of Phillips breeding, it is impossible not to think of Texas Ranger JP, as the two are synonymous in the Texas Longhorn industry. When I think of Texas Ranger, I remember back to 1971 when I saw him for the first time roaming the Colorado countryside among Darol Dickinson's herd. He was a three-year-old youngster just out of swampy, marshy West Columbia, Texas on lease from Jack Phillips. At that time, Texas Ranger was so far ahead of any bull in the industry in overall makeup that he stood out like the proverbial sore thumb. He had such bone, height, and length that it was an awesome sight just to watch him move. His nice, flat, lateral horns were already impressive and he had not yet reached full maturity.

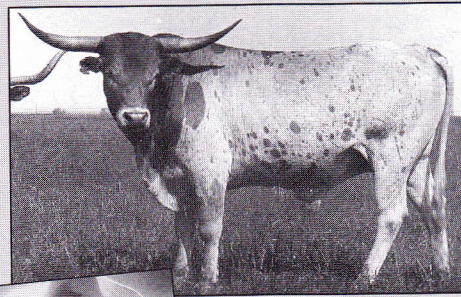
Looking back on this picture in light of the quality of today's top sires, we know that he would not necessarily be a standout by virtue of visual appeal. In fact, if he were alive today, he would likely be passed over by most breeders. However, when we look back through pedigrees and see his name somewhere in the pedigrees of most of the top animals in the industry, we realize the large impact that the Phillips line has had on the breed. Most, if not all of our World Champions go back to Texas Ranger. The Phillips line gave the industry a bull who consistently outproduced himself, which is the mark of a true herd sire.

He was the first bull to be A.I. certified with the TLBAA and his semen went on the market in 1971 at \$4.50 an ampule. Certainly a price that everyone could afford to use on a breed that was a the time bringing a little less than market value for beef cattle. The first Texas Ranger calf that I remember seeing was out of WR 1071, a beautiful cow that we referred to as "Grandma." This son was raised in non-parasitic country with strong grass, which gave him advantages that his sire did not have. Today, we know this son as Texas Toro, sire of the late, great Cowcatcher. The body on this bull impressed even the commercial cattlemen and the horn was quite impressive for the day. In fact, he would have qualified for an "Over 40" Horns" Certificate which was still being issued in those days. At today's standards, most would probably also pass this bull up for lack of horn.

As I said earlier, Tex outproduced himself many times and many of the great bulls in the Texas Longhorn industry go back to him: Tri-W Ladies' Man, Overwhelmer, Ranger's Gun Smoke, Mr. Measles, Measles' Super Ranger, Ranger's Dividend, Texas Lin, King, Zorro Ranger, 7HD Billy Bob, Bail Jumper, Pring, Right Hand Man, Senator, Fireman, Whelming King, Zhivago, Cowcatcher, Jet

Photos: *Texas Ranger JP* and *Jack Phillips* (top of page), the founder of the Phillips bloodline and the bull that put it on the map; *Superman* (above center), a 1991 product of Phillips, WR, Wright breeding.

Opposite page: *WR 101* (top), a 1980 daughter of WR 3232 and WR 2478; *WR 549* (center right), a big-horned, colorful 1984 daughter of WR 3465 and WR 2890.



Jockey and too many more to list. The Texas Ranger daughters are known for their high fertility, milking ability and longevity. They add body to Butler and WR cattle without sacrificing horn length or base. It is a revelation to move several generations away from Texas Ranger himself and still see his influence so strongly.

Our program has succeeded largely through the use of Texas Ranger breeding through A.I., and we will continue with this formula. Some of our animals go back to Tex four or five times with excellent results. Our herd sire Superman is an example of an animal that goes back to Texas Ranger multiple times on the top and bottom. His excellent horn, clean underline and beautiful color are a good example of what we consider the "complete genetic package." We have found that the use of 25-50% Texas Ranger consistently produces a beautiful animal.

In any blend-based Texas Longhorn program, we consider the Phillips/Texas Ranger JP family to be the outstanding line for successful blending with any of the other six families. It is not only an outstanding line in itself, but has proven over the past twenty-five years to accentuate the best of the other Texas Longhorn bloodlines.

The WR Bloodline

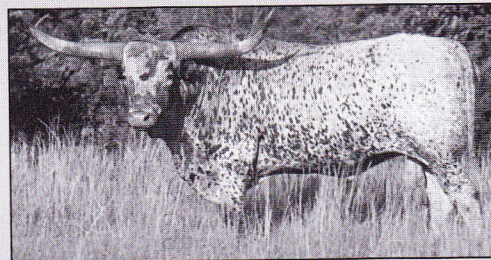
By J.O. Roane, Valley View, Texas

Ranger Earl Drummond probably didn't realize that the herd of cattle he assembled 70 years ago would play such a significant role in future generations of longhorn (the "l" is in lower case, as the Longhorn was not a recognized breed in those days) cattle. Mr. Drummond was simply a man who knew Longhorns and did what he could to preserve a breed on the brink of extinction. Over the years dedicated breeders have carried on the tradition (yes, I used the "t word") Drummond began by developing one of the top bloodlines of cattle known today, the Wichita Refuge or WR bloodline.

The WR cattle are recognizable by the WR or "US" brand. The US is the brand of the "other" federal government herd at Nebraska's Fort Niobrara, which was formed using foundation WR cows in 1936. WR cattle are most easily identified by number (such as WR 2935 or WR 1850) while other household names are known by the names given to them by their owners off the Refuge, such as "Measles" (originally WR 2849), "Magnum" (WR 169) or "Quanah Parker" (WR 3681). By whatever name, they are WR Texas Longhorns and constitute a crucial part of today's "genetic blend" of choice among breeders.

A look at the pedigrees of a majority of what are generally considered today's top individuals will likely reveal familiar Refuge numbers somewhere in their ancestries. The TLJ Breeders' Survey (December/January 1997, pages 22-24) illustrates the degree to which the WR bloodline is part of the mix desired by a majority of breeders. A genetic blend of cattle allows Longhorn producers to select from the best of different families without being restricted by the limitations of a particular bloodline. While this is the popular trend (and is producing exemplary results), there are those of us who selectively breed within a single bloodline. By raising our favorite cattle, the bloodline "purists" are providing straight-bloodline seedstock for both pure family herds and for blended programs.

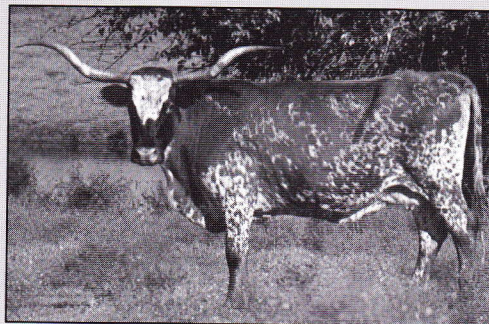
The easiest way for me to underscore the value of the WR influence in a genetic blend is to explain why I'm a WR breeder. The qualities that sold me on these great cattle are the same qualities that



WR Longhorns bring to the mix when crossed with any other Texas Longhorn bloodline. Those qualities include overall appearance, easily traceable ancestry, and traits such as longevity, survivability and purity of breed.

Much has been written about what Texas Longhorns ought to look like, with a variety of opinions on the subject among breeders. Ranger Drummond knew what he was looking for when he assembled the Wichita Mountains herd. He spent a number of years selecting those that resembled the animals he saw as a young cowboy in north Texas and southwestern Oklahoma. From this beginning the WR (and later the US) herds maintained a true-to-type appearance which is still found in WR cattle today. The individuals may be bigger, may have more horn, but the basic imprint is still there. Horns match bodies and the bodies haven't taken on some of the identifying loose skin and bulges typical of certain other breeds of cattle.

The characteristic WR horn is an attribute that deserves special attention. As I mentioned, horns should look like they "fit" the cow or bull they are attached to (WR 549, shown here, is an excellent example). Think about that the next time you see a 700-pound cow sporting 65" horns. It may be that too much emphasis is placed on length of horn and not on the overall quality of the animal. To be sure, there are plenty of heavy-horned, 50"-plus WR cattle in the breed today, and more with that potential being calved every day. A quote from J. Frank Dobie's "The Longhorns" says it better than I ever could. "The natural twist of horns, nature's curves, give them far more character, interest and beauty than mere length. Twists were characteristic of Texas



horns." I have several cows with over 50" of horn, but what makes the package is the twist. Sure, all WR cattle don't look like we want them to as careless breeding practices, mismanagement and poor breeding decisions have led to inferior WR cattle. But this occurs in any family or genetic blend of bloodlines. Because of this, every breeder should select the best stock available to have the best chance of producing superior cattle.

This brings me to another reason that I choose to raise WR cattle. Throughout the history of the Wichita Refuge herd, certain numbers are prominent in the pedigrees of the very best individuals. Among the best-known individuals to WR breeders are cows such as WR 1005, WR 1052, WR 1850, WR 2495, and WR 3007. Household names among WR-bloodline bulls include WR 1814, WR 2385, WR 2935, WR 2308, WR 2161 and WR 3465, sires of excellent calves year after year. You can bet that I built my program around those great sires and dams. The Refuge has made it very easy for me. From the beginning, extensive records have made it possible for me to seek and acquire descendants of those special individuals. Fortunately for me, simple numbers instead of lengthy names have been used by the Refuge throughout. Numbers



may not be fancy or have instant "market impact," but does that great herd sire or brood cow really care? You can take 'em off the Refuge, re-brand 'em, rename 'em, but they're still WR Texas Longhorns.

When you do take the cattle off the Refuge you can be sure they will adapt wherever you want them to call home. They are equally at home in lush pastures, in the colder climes up north or down in the rugged south Texas rocks, mesquite and cactus. Whether they originated in the harsh conditions of Fort Niobrara or in your own pasture, WR cattle have retained the ability to cope with their environment just like the cattle that came up the trail 110 years ago. Some say that this adaptability is the result of being bred in natural conditions and surroundings for so many generations. I'll leave such deep thinking to the "experts"—I just know it's true and don't question the reasons.

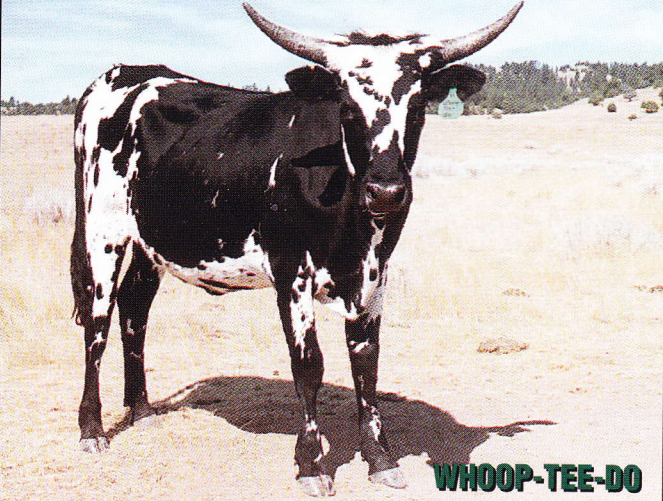
Finally, when I purchase a WR or US Longhorn I have complete confidence that I am purchasing a pure Texas Longhorn, especially if it wears that government brand. I'm not worried that the neighbor's bull jumped the fence a few generations back or, even worse, another breed was introduced to a program in order to enhance a certain quality of the herd. Even in straight-WR cattle bred off the Refuge, a long list of the government numbers behind the name tells me what I'm getting.

In conclusion, let me wish the very best of luck to all of you who cross bloodlines in search of just the right hybrid vigor. Just remember to keep a bit o' the WR in the mix and your program will have a decided genetic edge.



Photo credits: FM Graves 102 (page 24) and FM Graves 81 (page 25) by Ron Graham; WR 20 (page 24) by Larry Griggs; Dawna Ranger (page 24) by Charlie Searle; Gravy's Super Doll (page 25) by Stan & Priscilla Briney; Superman (page 42) by Charlene Semkin; Texas Ranger JP (page 42) by Darol Dickinson; Jack Phillips (page 42) courtesy of National Geographic; WR 101 (page 44), and WR 549 (page 44) by Jim Curry.

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