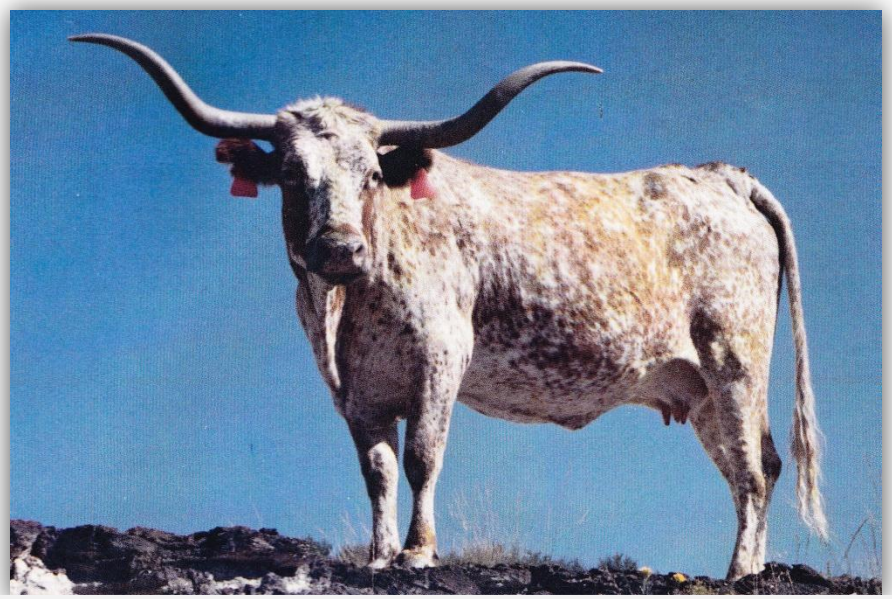
How to Measure the Quality of a Texas Longhorn Female



Measles – One of the greatest producing cows of all time. Valued at $600,000 in the 1980's

In today's Longhorn market it is not always easy to judge the true value or quality of the cattle. There are cattle selling for prices ranging from $600 dollars all the way up to $50,000. What is the difference between the bottom and top prices? The answer is HORNS… not necessarily overall quality. We have come a long way when it comes to horn growth in this industry. When I got involved with Texas Longhorn cattle in the 1980's we were celebrating 40" inches of tip-to-tip horn, which would be laughed at today. But back then it was not all about horn, it was about saving the breed, fertility, longevity, mothering ability…just to mention a few of the other traits that were valued by those breeders so many years ago. Today some breeders seem to believe that there is only one sure fire way to determine the value of top Texas Longhorn cattle…the tape measure…the bigger the horn the higher the price. However, like in the 1980's I believe this is only one of many things that must be considered when determining the value of our cattle. Breeders who use the tape measure as their only way of placing value on Longhorn cattle are overlooking many very important attributes of the Longhorn.

Judging the quality of a Texas Longhorn is simply not made by measuring the horns. There are numerous cattle in this industry that measure 75-80" tip-to-tip, but are these actually the best of the breed? Without a doubt some of these are good animals. However, many of them have sold for record prices, been flushed in ET (embryo transfer) and cloned only because of their record setting horn length. In some cases these cattle have poor conformation, genetic defects such as wry noses, jaw and mouth defects and bad udders with large teats and they can't even raise a calf. In my opinion some of these cattle with huge horns with an extremely large base do not show enough Longhorn traits but rather traits that are more commonly found in another long horned breed of cattle called the Watusi. However this is a whole other subject for another article and we'll save that for a later date.

If you were to check the production records (which I have) of several of these cattle you would find that in most instances they have produced mostly roper calves. At prices of $50,000 to

$100,000 it takes more ropers at $350 each than she can produce in a lifetime to pay for this "great" cow. That is without figuring in her annual upkeep and care. Several of the cows in the 75-80" club cannot even nurse their own calves; some are raised by a nurse cow or produced by ET because the cow cannot carry and raise her own calf. I always check the production records of any animal that I am considering purchasing unless it is a heifer - in that case I check her mother's production history.

Many of the 75-80" horned animals in today's industry are truly one of a kind; some have full siblings that do not come close to having the same horn measurements as they do. There is a cow in our industry that measures over 80 inches, yet her full sister only measures in the mid-50's tip-to-tip. Their dam was an average cow with good horn and their sire never produced another animal that has reached 75-80" (most are in the 60's). Therefore in my opinion these are not proven, predictable genetics. I was at a recent Longhorn sale where a four year old cow with almost 70 inches sold for $10,000. She was unexposed and by the looks of her udder, teats, shoulders and vulva she had never calved. She looked "steery". In my opinion someone bought themselves a costly lesson. You can have the longest horned cow in the breed but if she is not producing then all you have is a "glorified steer". No offense to trophy steers.

Production is one of the keys to selecting a top quality Longhorn female. Here is a picture (to left) of a nice solid cow that had good horn (48-50") for her day yet she produced many daughters that had 55-60" horns. One of them

was one of the industry's first 60" horned cows Delta Diamond (see photo right), who did eventually reach 70". Today some breeders would not even glance at this cow (shown above) in a sale or in the pasture because she is not loaded with horn, yet she produced great horns. The term is 'she out produced herself'. There has been numerous cows in the Longhorn Breed that have produced several offspring with 65-80" when the cow herself only measured in the 50-60" range. Most of

This cow measured almost 80". Her dam only 50" & her sire

the 65-80" horn cattle in our industry are sired by bulls with 50-60" horns and most of these bulls have done this more than once or twice. Phenomenon measured a little over 60" and is one of the leading sires and grandsires of 65-80" horn animals. His sire Superior measured 50" and shows up as sire or grandsire of numerous animals that are in that 70-80" Club. Proven Genetics are one of the keys to long term success in this industry.

In summary if you are going to breed for horns remember to keep all the Longhorn traits in mind when making your cattle selections. Also, if you are just getting started in the Longhorn business or you do not have a budget that will allow you to purchase the longest horn animals, do not get discouraged. There are animals out there that may not have the longest horns, but they have the genetics for producing horn. If you study the pedigrees you can make a wise and affordable purchase that someday just might produce you a 70-80" horn animal that you can sell for a top price.

This cow at maturity measured almost 80". Her dam had 48" & her sire had 60"