



VIOLET HILLS CHAROLAIS

AUTUMN 2014 NEWSLETTER

I always remember a cartoon that I saw during the 1982 drought. It depicted a man with a shovel, standing in a swamp, surrounded by alligators. The caption was **“It is hard to remember that you have been sent to drain the swamp when you are up to your ass in alligators”**. This is so true this last year with the cattle market so severely impacted, firstly by political interference both here and overseas followed by a horrific drought in Queensland and Northern NSW. This has placed huge pressure on the processing industry and has severely impacted the saleyard prices.

On the positive side there has been a significant devaluation of the Australian dollar, a decline in the cattle numbers in many countries and a strong global demand for Australian beef. **It can still be hard to reassure yourself that the beef industry has a rosy future when you are impacted by drought and very depressed prices. But I am sure that by the time the progeny, of bulls bought today, are ready to be sold we will be experiencing some very good prices.**

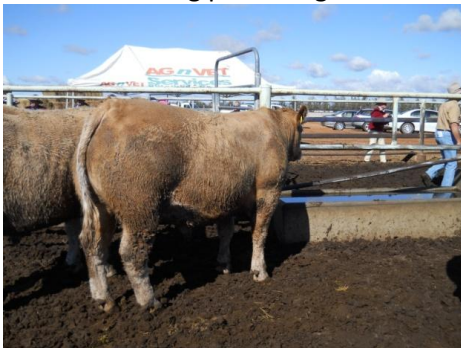
Some of our clients have organised their production and marketing to meet the requirements of specific markets. One example is to produce milk fed calves that dress over 200kg for the supermarket trade. This is something that requires not only good genetics but good nutrition for the life of the calf. The take home message to all beef producers appears to be, that, more than ever, they need a clear view as to the market that they are producing for. The breeding decisions we make today will influence our returns in 20-24 months time.

At Violet Hills we have had to contend with the Spring completely failing for the second year in a row. This has resulted in the early weaning of all calves, once again. We have been fortunate that it started to rain mid February and has continued into March.

Our bulls for our sale on the 1st of May (Thursday) are looking good and showing the exceptional thickness and growth, as well as the early maturity pattern, that is so necessary for the production of trade cattle. Most of the bulls are also polled.

Australian National Field Days Steer and Carcase Competition

We, once again, entered a team of steers in this competition as we have found the competition of great value is assessing the commercial value of the entrants. Our pen of 3 purebred Charolais steers that were sired by Violet Hills Dane performed very well with one of the team being judged as Champion steer on the hoof. Unfortunately, when they were slaughtered their carcase weights exceeded the maximum allowable weights of 400kg which cost the team a lot of points. However they did come 2nd for carcase quality, 3rd for yield of saleable meat and 4th for dressing percentage. It was interesting that they lost some points for being over fat.



Champion steer on the hoof



Pen of Violet Hills steers

The aim of our breeding programme has always been to produce a type of Charolais that excels under Australian conditions and meets requirements of our markets. This involves the ability to perform on grass and have the maturity pattern that enables them to finish at a young age, either on grass or in a feedlot, without resorting to cross breeding. From this point of view the results are very pleasing.

To Poll or not to Poll that is the question

With animal welfare becoming increasingly topical for the general public, procedures such as dehorning are attracting much more attention. The farming community has been aware, for a long time, of the problems that horns cause. Bruising and hide damage are problems for the processing industry. The feedlots don't want horned cattle, and for the farmer, the job of dehorning can be messy, time consuming and requires a degree of skill. As well, dehorning can cause the animal stress, reduce performance in the short term and in a small number of cases cause death. Picking maggots out of an infected horn wound or seeing a calf break its horn when loading it for market is not much fun.

Luckily nature has given us an option, and that is to "breed" the horns out of the horned breeds of cattle. Charolais are naturally a horned breed even though the French now claim they have found some pure bred polled Charolais. Most of the polled Charolais are the result of upgrading from a Charolais crossed with a naturally polled breed like Angus. By using back crossing, (Charolais over the original crossbred animal and then again putting a Charolais over the resultant progeny and so on until you have back crossed at least 4 times), you hope to retain the gene that causes the animal to be polled. The trick is to also retain all of the good Charolais characteristics. This is the area when the whole exercise can fall down. How often do we hear the statement "horned cattle are better beef cattle than the pollies". This can result from the stud breeders putting a disproportionate emphasis on retaining the poll gene at the expense of the other important traits. With balanced breeding there is absolutely no reason for polled cattle to be inferior to the horned cattle of the same breed. It is my opinion that the view that polled Charolais are inferior to horned Charolais could be due to the type of polled Charolais (referred to as white Angus) that have been imported from North America.

Terms used for polled animals

Homozygous poll All genes are paired, with one half of the pair coming from the dam and one half of the pair coming from the sire. If there is a poll gene from the dam and a poll gene from the sire then the animal is homozygous for the poll gene so the animal is polled and all of their progeny are polled.

Heterozygous poll These animals have one poll gene and one horn gene at the same site. These animals will be polled but because they are carrying a hidden horn gene some of their progeny may be horned. The poll gene is dominant over the recessive horn gene. These heterozygous poll animals sometimes develop scurs. That is another story altogether.

Double poll This simply refers to the fact that both parents are polled. If both parents are heterozygous polls then some of the progeny can be horned while there is a 50% chance that the progeny will be heterozygous polls carrying the hidden horn gene.

The number of generations of poll breeding may not be of any value unless a breeder can identify the homozygous poll animals. A genetic test, of high accuracy, has now been developed to identify those animals that are homozygous polls. This will speed up the availability of poll Charolais. The onus will be on the stud breeders not to do this at the expense of all of the other important traits.

At Violet Hills the majority of our cattle are polled, however, we still use outstanding horned bulls like Violet Hills Dane because of the tremendous attributes he has.

DARYL'S SOAP BOX

Like the old time politicians spruiking on their soap box I would like to talk about one of the most misused terms when describing cattle. That is **maturity pattern**.

I am a great believer that the only way to increase muscling (carcase yield), retain fast early growth and be able to fatten the animal at an early age is to select for a heavily muscled, fast growing bull with an early maturity pattern. While this may lead to a slightly smaller mature frame score, the progeny reach marketable size quickly, and then fatten. Let's face it, our premium markets require a carcase somewhere between 200kg DW and 400kgDW. The quicker we get to the target weight the more chance of making some money!! The days of big old bullocks have been relegated to the history books. The mature weight has very little to do with early growth rate. So what are the signs to look for that indicate such a pattern.

A shorter, broader head and shorter legs are a very good indication. If the EBV's are accurate enough, a 600 day weight that is similar to the 400 day weight EBV can indicate an earlier maturity pattern. As sexual maturity and physical maturity are linked, selecting heifers that cycle and get in calf early is one way of selecting for the early maturing strains.

At Violet Hills we join our 15 month old heifers for 2 months at the same time that we join the cows. Any not getting in calf are culled. The same applies to the 2yr old heifers with their first calves, and the rest of the cows.

Long narrow heads and long legs are probably good for race horses but will let you down badly if you want to produce market acceptable trade carcasses.

I suppose I will have to continue to grit my teeth and shudder every time I open a sale catalogue and see a long legged, slab sided bull with a head like a horse being described as being early maturing and suitable for vealer production.

NEW STUD SIRES



VIOLET HILLS GAELIC WARRIOR (P)

By Violet Hills Ellis



VIOLET HILLS DEMETRIUS (P)

By Violet Hills Barclay

STEERS for SYDNEY Royal Easter SHOW 2014

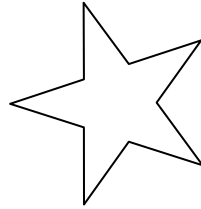
At this year's Sydney RAS show there will be 3 steers that we have bred, being exhibited.

One will be exhibited by Hurlstone Agricultural High School and the other two by The Scots School, Bathurst. I have not seen the one Hurlstone is preparing but I am very impressed with the two that the Scots School are preparing.



The preparation of the steers is a credit to Libby Dawes and the pupils of The Scots School.

The white steer is by Violet Hills Ellis and the coloured steer is by our Red factor bull Violet Hills Alexander. As you can see the use of red factor bulls can sometimes result in broken coloured purebred progeny. Crossbreeding red bulls over black cows can also result in some black progeny.



ANNUAL on PROPERTY SALE

MAY 1st at 1pm

We will offer approximately 43 excellent, super thick, early maturing bulls. Also presented will be two Charolais X Red Angus composite bulls. The majority will be polled. Because of the adverse spring and summer we will offer a smaller number (18) of Red Angus X Charolais composite heifers PTIC to a low birth weight Red Angus bull.



Some of the sale bulls for the 1st of MAY 2014

From all at Violet Hills we wish you a happy and healthy 2014 and hope the seasons and cattle prices are kind to you.

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