

Why Miniature Longhorns?



By Eric J. Redeker

Why Not!

Eric Redeker of the Vertically Challenged Cattle Company (Alice, TX) with his 1 1/2 year old herd sire, Smokehaus and yearling heifers

When we look out across a pasture in the early morning and see the silhouettes of grazing Texas Longhorns through the low hanging fog, we know that there is no greater cattle breed on Earth. Calving dates are anticipated with the childish excitement of opening a gift on Christmas morning because we just can't wait to see what colors the calves will be. It doesn't matter how old or young we are, just thinking about this majestic cattle breed invokes a plethora of different emotions. Though every member of the TLBAA has a different opinion about what the perfect Texas Longhorn is or should be, the one thing that we can all agree upon is that this breed is extremely variable and can be molded through selective breeding to reflect our own individual ideals. Whether we are selecting for color, size, conformation, or horn, this breed offers something for every breeder and is the perfect medium for ranchers to express their individuality.

Texas Longhorn breeders are as variable



Eric Redeker of the Vertically Challenged Cattle Company (Alice, TX) with his 5 year old cow, Mini Socks.

as the breed itself, which is one of the things that makes life so interesting at the TLBAA. What fun would it be if all of our animals looked identical and could only be differentiated by their private herd num-

bers? Over time, this breed has changed dramatically through selective breeding. The general trend has been to create larger bodied animals that have horns that stretch out to the stratosphere. A small handful of breeders have taken their breeding programs in a completely different direction from what is considered mainstream. They have down-sized the Texas Longhorn to create true miniatures. These miniatures are approximately 1/3 the size of standard Texas Longhorns and have all the unique qualities that we love about the breed.

Many people may ask the question WHY? Over time, the average sizes of ranches around the world have decreased, making it virtually impossible for many landowners to run profitable cow/calf operations. Miniature livestock have made it

possible for these small landowners to run a respectable number of animals on their land. Additionally, miniature livestock are viewed by government agencies as agricul-

tural commodities, enabling smaller landowners to take advantage of various tax benefits. Miniaturizing the Texas Longhorn has enabled these smaller land owners to get away from monochromatic herds of traditional miniature cattle and enjoy the breed that we are all so passionate about.

The Miniature Texas Longhorn is the product of a vision shared by two TLBAA members: Bill Buck (Krum, TX) and



Anna Redeker of the Vertically Challenged Cattle Company (Alice, TX) with her 1 ½ year old herd sire, Smokehaus

John Fore (Denham Springs, LA). Both set out to create true Miniature Texas Longhorns twenty years ago, independent of one another. Each man had a different motivation for miniaturizing the breed and did not find out about the other until they had each successfully created their own version of Miniature Texas Longhorns.

Bill Buck, a retired US Air Force Chief Master Sergeant and the son of a cattle broker, first started raising Texas Longhorns shortly after he retired and purchased a recreational ranch in 1986. After spend-



Dave Sullivan of the Silver Star Ranch (Celina, TX) hand-feeding his 2 year old herd sire, Boots

ing the first several years barely breaking even with his cattle operation, he started looking for a way to generate higher profits. One day he saw some miniature horses and asked the owner, "What are they good for?" To which the owner replied, "They are fantastic pasture ornaments, people pay top dollar for them, and they don't cost a whole lot to raise!" Shortly thereafter, Bill started searching all over the country for Miniature Texas Longhorns but could not find any. So, he visited with his veterinarian and asked how he could miniaturize the breed. The answer was to selectively breed the smallest cows to the smallest bulls, retain the smallest offspring, and cull the largest offspring. Starting with fewer than fifty WR cows and a shoe-string budget, he began selectively breeding for size. After about the third generation, the size of his animals was markedly reduced. Currently, Bill is on his eighth generation and is still working to perfect the Miniature Texas Longhorn. Bill admits that he spent so much time and effort trying to reduce the physical size of his animals that he forgot about the horns. Now, with the help of some nicely horned bulls, he is trying to "put the horns back on them." His goal is to consistently produce animals that are 36 inches tall at the hip with 36 inches TTT horns and will not rest until he sees this goal come to fruition.

Around the same time and over 500 miles away, John Fore, an engineer, inventor, and technological innovator that holds over 17 patents to various inventions, had a simple motivation to miniaturize the breed: "I wanted to see if it could be done." Starting with a herd of over 240 Butler cows that were hand selected for their small size and had pedigrees that were relatively free of "large genetics," John bred these cows to the smallest Butler bulls that he could find. Out of the original 240 cows, John only kept a half dozen calves that had the size and conformation that he was looking for. The animals that

he retained from the initial herd formed the foundation of his breeding program. Using embryo transfer and artificial insemination, he was able to accelerate his breeding program and further refine the Miniature Texas Longhorn into what it is today. According to John, it took almost twelve generations to achieve his dream of producing consistently small animals that had desirable horns.

With fewer than a dozen active Miniature Texas Longhorn breeders across the country, the minis are very much still a novelty. The genetic base comes from both Butler and WR stock, so they are just as much Texas Longhorns as their larger cousins. Until recently, these minis were being registered within the standard TLBAA registry. One downside to having these ani-



Bill Buck of the Indian Mountain Ranch (Krum, TX) with his favorite cow, Miss Dollie (8 year old cow)

imals in the standard registry is that they cannot effectively compete with standardized cattle in shows. On May 26 of this year, the TLBAA Board of Directors approved the creation of a new Miniature Texas Longhorn registry. This new registry will enable Miniature Texas Longhorn breeders to reclassify their cattle as miniatures and compete in TLBAA sanctioned shows within a new miniature class.

The TLBAA is currently testing the new registration system to insure compatibility with the new Miniature Texas Longhorn Registry. As soon as the registrations department is able to accept Miniature Texas Longhorn registration and reclassification applications, the website will be updated. For more information, please email miniature@tlbaa.org

Eric J. Redeker was born and raised in Gladwyne, Pennsylvania. He earned his B.S. in Forest Science in 1995 and his M.S. in Rangeland Ecology and Management in 1998 from Texas A&M University. In 1998 he took a Research Scientist position with the Caesar Kleberg Wildlife Research Institute of Texas A&M University – Kingsville, where he oversees the use of mapping technologies within the graduate wildlife research program. In 2002, Eric founded Landitude Incorporated, a ranching and wildlife consulting company that specializes in using mapping technologies to increase ranching efficiencies. In 2008, Eric and his wife Anna purchased a small ranch in Jim Wells County (near Alice) where they are currently raising Miniature Texas Longhorns. Eric has been an active member of TLBAA since 2009 and currently serves on the TLBAA Miniature Texas Longhorn review committee.