

# **Antelope Creek**

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## ***SELECTING BOER HERD SIRES OR BUYING A BULL LIKE A RACE HORSE***

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I hope this title caught your attention as I want to share several interesting observations from recent reading that I have done about bull selection. That's right I said bull selection but what does this have to do with Boer buck selection. You will have to read further to find out.

If you have a question on goat raising please send me a note via the following address: (if I don't know the answer I will find it for you)

Ranch and Rural Living  
P.O. Box 2678  
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If you have access to a computer and the internet, you may send your questions to me at: [ancreek@yahoo.com](mailto:ancreek@yahoo.com). My website is: [www.antelopecreek.com](http://www.antelopecreek.com)

If you would like to contact me directly you may do so by calling my number at the ranch which is: 325-453-2863. I normally get to the house after the evening chores about 9 p.m. Please leave a message on the answering machine if I am not there when you call. I will be happy to return your call as soon as possible.

I have been doing a considerable amount of reading recently about breeds of livestock other than goats. I think we can learn a great deal from breeders of various breeds of livestock and try to relate this information to Boer goats.

Given below are two separate opinions that I have found in recent searches on the internet. I would like to include these here and then comment on what I think these opinions lend to a discussion of Boer bucks. The first treatise

compares buying a bull to selecting race horses and I think you will find it interesting.

#### I Buying a bull like a race horse

“With some of the green-up people are getting antsy, almost like a disease, to get to buying some females or looking at new hay equipment or anything else spring fever can bring. For me it’s the anticipation of the Kentucky Derby and watching these young hopefuls try to pass the test to make it to the first Saturday in May. Although their performance is judged a little differently, handicapping that racehorse is not a whole lot different than picking those herd bulls. Everybody knows what the paper says, but there’s always the x-factor or those intangibles that bring you back to the favorite. For the horse races it may be a grueling stretch run or something that marks them as “battle hardened” ready for the task. With bulls it’s probably something like he’s freer moving or he has that “look” that you like or his momma is an awesome cow that will help the bulls sort themselves to the top compared to their counterparts. It’s the same with the Derby contenders class is class and once they rise to the top, just like your herd bull selections, will have passed one test, progeny will define their legacy.” (taken from a market report site on the internet.)

The next article is a little more extensive and alludes to many of the considerations involved in selecting a breeding bull. It appears below:

#### Bull Selection Can Help Beef Producers Capitalize on Markets

“Beef producers who want to purchase bulls or semen for their spring breeding herds should be doing their homework now, says a Purdue Extension beef specialist. Cow-calf producers can take advantage of high market prices by selecting healthy bulls that will produce calves with more growth potential.

“If we can buy bulls that will produce offspring that will be born with a minimum of dystocia, grow a little bit faster, will produce a little bit higher-quality carcass, and produce replacement females that perform above average, I think our cow-calf producers have the opportunity to capitalize,” said Ron Lemenager.

Producers can do this by looking at what will affect offspring and doing plenty of research before investing.

“Good bulls come from good cows,” Lemenager said, “So if producers can take a look at mom before they purchase that bull, I think it helps minimize some of the risk.

But even if the dam looks good and is healthy, a bull’s own merit still needs to be evaluated, starting with reproductive soundness. They should have a breeding soundness evaluation that includes both a physical exam and semen quality evaluation. Many seedstock operations offer a breeding guarantee to the buyer.

Lemenager also said it’s important to know the health status of the animal. “Know the background of the bull and the vaccination history,” he said. “If you’re buying an older bull, be sure the animal doesn’t have any venereal diseases that are going to come back into the herd. I really like the idea of buying a virgin bull to minimize the risk.”

Structural soundness plays a large role in whether a bull will be able to get cows bred, so Lemenager suggested inspecting feet and leg structure, eyes and muscle shape, a factor that contributes to calving ease. Also important is genetic merit. Genetic defects have the potential to cause problems in the herd.

"Almost every breed has one or more genetic defects, and they can sneak up on you if you're not careful," Lemenager said. "Producers need to study the pedigrees and know which bulls are free of genetic defects, or buy bulls that have been DNA tested and declared free of known defects."

Producers also need to study up on a bull's expected progeny differences, or EPDs. Calving ease, maternal calving ease, growth traits, maternal milk and carcass traits can all affect a producer's bottom line.

"We really need to keep an eye on the EPDs for the economically important traits," Lemenager said. "We need to stay away from single trait selection and emphasize multi-trait selection to make herd improvement that complements marketing strategy. If you're saving back replacement heifers, things like maternal calving ease and maternal milk become very important. Growth traits such as weaning and yearling weight affect the pounds available for sale. Carcass traits, such as marbling, back fat and the ribeye area are the main drivers for how these cattle hang on the rail.

"I'd also do an independent cull on frame size, so the cattle don't get to be too big or too little."

It's not until all of these traits have been met that Lemenager recommends producers start looking at the animal's phenotype, or "look".

Much of this same advice applies to producers who manage an artificial insemination breeding program. And while commercial AI studs tend to do a good job of screening animal health, AI sires can still perform differently.

"Some bulls produce semen that's of higher quality or that gets cows bred better than other bulls," Lemenager said. "So, here again, producers need to do their homework before they start spending a lot of money on semen. They need to know that the bull has been working, that cows have been conceiving to that semen and that the offspring are performing as expected."

Notice in both of these small articles there is considerable mention of productivity traits and the importance of maternal traits of raising offspring and giving milk. These maternal traits should also come into play when selecting a herd sire for a Boer goat herd. The Boer goat industry is still in its infancy in this country and we have not come around to realizing many of the important considerations used by beef ranchers in selecting bulls and applying this to selection of bucks. Many people choose a Boer buck according to their winnings in the show ring which is often based more on form rather than function and "pretty" rather than production. I suspect that many of the bucks with tubular bodies and a feminine appearance that are winning in some shows today actually don't have enough testosterone to be effective herd sires. There is a reason they look like a girl and some of it has to do with glandular function particularly testosterone. In my opinion, boys should look like boys and girls should look like girls. Bucks should be heavier in the front end as they have to compete for the females and does should be

deeper or heavier in the rear end to have capacity to hold babies.

I recently wrote an article that discussed visions for the future of the Boer goat industry and one of the more important visions was collection of herd production data from many different Boer bucks so that EPDs could be calculated. As a continuation of this vision perhaps DNA markers can be identified for some of the positive EPD values. These DNA markers might help us to identify the bucks to use in meat goat production herds.

Notice in the beef discussion that consideration was given to production data in carcass evaluation. While back fat and ribeye measurements are very important in selecting beef cattle I think that we need to discover other important measures for carcass data with Boer goats and meat goats. Goats are browsers rather than grazers like cattle and sheep and as a result deposit fat differently. Goats deposit fat around the internal organs such as kidney, pelvic and heart areas and have little or no back fat measure regardless of the fact that they may be consuming high protein feed for extended periods of time.

Notice that the phenotype or "look" is one of the last considerations in selecting a bull while phenotype for selection of bucks in the show ring is one of the primary considerations. The importance of performance data in beef cattle selection for the mother of the bull is important. I think this should be an important consideration to be added to the equation in Boer buck selection. As the man says "good mothers produce good sons." Some think that the proper shape of the udder is what produces the proper shape of testicles on the bull calf produced.

Without getting too long winded in this article I think you see what I am trying to say. We can learn from the cattleman and what he uses in his selection process.

I look forward to seeing the Boer goat and meat goat industry mature over time and begin to include many of the traits, data and considerations that cattlemen use in selecting beef cattle, particularly their bulls for beef production. We can learn from everyone we meet. We just have to pay attention and be willing to have flexibility in our thoughts and philosophies. Until next time-----

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