



LIVESTOCK BREEDERS' SHOW REPORT NAIROBI, AUGUST 2018

I had a tremendous time in Nairobi judging the 2018 National Boran Show. The hospitality was phenomenal, the fellowship fun and the event exceptional.

The Boran is a fascinating breed of cattle. They do so much right that a lot of numerically larger breeds around the world struggle with. After sorting through the 220 plus entries in the steer, heifer, bull and F1 Dairy crosses shows, I realized that I was learning more from the Kenyan breeders than they could ever learn from me.

Foot quality, udder development and teat size and placement, testicle size and shape, masculinity in bulls and femininity in females... almost every animal possessed these fundamental traits. And this was done without the manipulation or smoke and mirrors that some "leading" cattle industries use. These cattle are real! And they're really good.

I guess the way in which Boran cattle are run in large herds in Kenya, with predators sharing their space and the challenge of being at altitude and on the equator auger well for them needing to be functionally efficient. If an animal is wild and leaves the confounds of the herd, it becomes prey. If an animal can't move well or is lame it gets left behind and becomes prey. If a cow has large teats and the calf can't get up and suckle unassisted, the calf becomes prey. These cattle are good because they have to be good. If they're not good, they're dead.

Hundreds of animal scientists in offices across the world work tirelessly developing computer models to produce genetically improved cattle. Million of dollars are spent on technology and on acquiring semen and embryos from the outliers that the computer modeled EPDs/EBVs push out. But I'll argue, with confidence, that what nature has done over 1,000 years in east Africa with the Boran is far more effective and tangible and relevant than what all the computer models and their data entrants and analysts could ever do.

I began the steer show with these 3 philosophies in mind.

1. Dimension (Length, Depth, Width)
2. Muscle Shape and Fat Cover in the Appropriate Balance
3. Soundness (Steers need to be sound footed and correct in their structure. Lame steers don't feed or grow well. And for every unsound steer, there is an unsound sister to that steer out on pasture somewhere).

I found a steer that ticked these boxes perfectly to win the show. The Grand Champion Steer was a Boran steer with tremendous skeletal structure, balance and soundness. He was thick and deep with true muscle shape and ideal fat cover. It was exciting to see him sell so well in the auction later on that afternoon. The auspicious buyer was President Kenyatta, who purchased the Grand Champion Pen of Steers that the Champion Steer was part of.

The following day was kicked off with a really impressive female show.

I laid out 3 principles and philosophies that I would use in my selection process to keep me straight and to give the crowd and exhibitors and outline of what to expect.

1. Cattle need to be able to eat, walk and reproduce.
2. The four most important economic traits in a cattle operation are:
 - Fertility, Longevity, Adaptability and Efficiency.
 - You'll notice that I didn't mention milk, muscle or growth. As important as these traits are, they're irrelevant if the essentials are not in place.
3. Quality cattle come in all shapes and sizes. Its easy to make a big animal or a small one. The art of breeding is in making a good one.

My Champion Boran heifer was a great female. Feminine, sound and perfectly balanced. She was athletic and flexible with perfect feet and soft joints. As feminine as she was, she still possessed boldness of rib and depth of body. Her smooth shoulders blended back into a powerful fore-rib which set the tone for the way in which she gradually became more powerful as she transitioned through her center body into a stout and well muscled rump. She had an ideal balance of muscle and softness.

*Softness being the ability to put down a layer of fat at a young age. This enables early fertility, early maturity and good do-ability.

The bull show was just as impressive. The Grand Champion bull is a stud! He beat out scores of good footed, stout butted, big testicled bulls to win the title. Despite how much muscle and thickness he possessed, he floated around the ring effortlessly with impeccable structure. His punch and masculinity, combined with smoothness of shoulders and truth in chest floor and base width made him formidable. He's a big time herd sire and can make a big difference in the industry. Like the champion heifer, he was balanced in his structure and possessed the right balance between muscle shape and softness. Deep, long and wide with a functional sheath and good testicle size and shape, he was hard to fault. These attributes led to him being the Supreme Champion Bull of the show, beating out good quality Angus, Charolais and Santa Gertrudis.

This event was a true highlight for me. I absolutely loved being amongst the tightly knit fraternity of Kenyan Boran breeders and I cannot wait to be back again soon. And I will be, because the well kept secret of the Boran needs to be exposed to the world.