

## “Saddle Cattle” A Big Hit For This Oklahoma Ranch

Neal and DeeDee Strauss are not your typical Oklahoma cattle ranchers. Instead of producing beef for meat production, their family breeds, trains and sells Longhorn riding cattle. Some are used for work or parades while others are ridden at Western re-enactments. A few have even made it into movies and TV commercials.

“About 15 years ago we needed a change from typical cattle ranching, so we bought two Longhorn heifers to get started,” says DeeDee, whose husband Neal is an experienced roper. DeeDee learned how to raise and train the Longhorns from other owners and college classes. Her background in quarter horses was excellent experience for halter training the heifers and breaking them for riding. She also took classes in artificial insemination (AI) to learn how genetics could produce large, strong and even-tempered calves. Now they have 5 generations in their herd of 13 cattle.

“I just love working with the animals, socializing them for interaction with people,” says DeeDee. “They’re such a joy to be with and people love them.” The Strauss’ have purposely kept their herd small and easily manageable, now using 4 saddle-broke cows as breeding stock. Their real pride and joy is Astoria, who’s known as the longest horned saddle cow in the country, measuring 86 2/4 in. tip to tip.

DeeDee, Neal, and sometimes their daughter Ashley do most of the training. Calves begin their learning process at just a month or two old when they can be removed from their mother for a short time. “The mothers trust us as long as they can see the calves and they’re able to nurse when they’re hungry,” says DeeDee. “The calves are easy to work with because Longhorn disposition is highly inheritable, and our momma cows are all very gentle.”

Calves are first halter broken, then follow leads and commands from the trainer walking beside them. “We spend 4 to 5 hrs. a week with the youngsters and they’re able to pull a training cart when they’re a year old,” DeeDee says. “At this point the yearling saddle prospect could be sold for about \$2,500 to another owner who will continue the training, or we’ll continue to train them at our ranch.” At age two, the animals are ready for a saddle.

The Strauss’s breed their cows to large sires so the offspring are eventually able to carry a 50-lb. saddle and a 200-lb. rider. “We look for a sire that weighs about 2,000 lbs., one that will produce stout steers with excellent minds, beautiful horns, and a strong frame and legs,” DeeDee says.

Over 3 years, their fully-trained saddle steers have received several hundred hours of personal attention, a major labor investment



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on their part that can bring \$10,000 to \$12,000 when the animals are sold. “These steers are one of a kind,” says DeeDee. “They can’t be mass produced.”

Until a few years ago, the Strauss’s purchased semen for breeding, but now they have two bulls of their own with exceptional genetics. “It’s been really exciting to see our breeding program come to fruition,” says DeeDee.

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Some of their Longhorns have even made it into movies and TV commercials.



Oliver is a rare Watusi steer with horns that measure 26 1/2 in. in circumference at the base and span almost 6 ft. A Texas couple created a profitable sideline business exhibiting him at events.

## Watusi Steer Brings In Crowds

Vincent Browning and Michelle Lumpkin of Liberty, Texas have created a profitable sideline business by traveling around with their rare Watusi steer, Oliver, for the past 8 years.

Watusi (also known as Ankole-Watusi) cattle are prized for their huge horns. Approximately 1,500 Watusi cattle are found outside of Africa, with about 80 percent of those in the U.S.

Oliver is 12 years old and weighs a little over 1,600 lbs. His horns measure 26.5 in. in circumference (at the base). Each horn is over 3 ft. long and they span almost 6 ft. from tip to tip. Due to Oliver’s gentle nature, he’s fully trained to ride under saddle and responds to a bridle with a modified hackamore, according to Browning.

“I first started halter breaking him when he was 6 mos. old, and then saddle broke him at 2 years of age,” he explains. “I just put a regular roping saddle on him and ride him like a horse. He also lets me trim his

hooves just like a horse.”

Browning’s steer training skills go back a long way: “In high school, I showed cattle in FFA and 4-H. Then I worked as a professional bull rider,” he explains. “For a while, I also had a Brahman bull I could ride. Later, I worked with a guy who had Watusi cattle, and that’s where I got my first calf.”

With Oliver’s combination of impressive looks and cooperative nature, he’s an attraction that people pay to have at their parades, rodeos, barbecues, and parties, among other events.

In addition to the fee that Browning and Lumpkin charge to attend the various events, they also earn income from the photo sessions with individuals in attendance. They simply set up a small pen where people can sit on Oliver and have their photo taken. The couple charges \$10 for a 4 by 6-in. photo, or \$15 for an 8 by 10-in. print (which are printed on the spot). In all, “Oliver, the African Watusi” earns an average of about \$200 a day profit. They attend 25 to 30 events per year.

## Solar-Powered LED Farm Signs

“People really like my solar-powered LED signs. They’re backlit with waterproof LED strip lights that automatically come on at night,” says Gene Luoma, Duluth, Minn.

He recently sent FARM SHOW photos of a 28 by 32-in. sign next to his driveway that shows his street address in big numbers under a colorful painting of a digitally printed duck. He made another sign for his son’s driveway with an image of Bigfoot.

Both signs hang from 4 by 4 treated posts anchored in the ground. They’re made from 1/4-in. thick acrylic plastic with digitally printed, full-color UV ink and are backlit with 3/8-in. wide LED strips. A 2-in. wide frame supports each sign and has a reflective piece of material behind it.

“The LED strips have a double-backed adhesive so they stick both to the sign and the reflective material behind it,” explains Luoma. “A solar panel mounted above the frame charges a 12-volt sealed lead acid battery during daylight hours. An adjustable photo cell automatically turns the sign on at night.”

“People often drive by at night and pull in to ask where I got these signs. I tell them they’re looking at the only ones in existence,” says Luoma.

He says the lights can be adjusted to stay on for 2, 4, 6, or 8 hrs. or left on all the time. The solar panel can be tilted according to the season and sun angle.



Solar-powered signs are backlit with waterproof LED strip lights that automatically come on at night.

Luoma has also made signs out of plasma cut steel that are backlit with the same LED strips.

He has drawn up plans for his design, which are now available on the website, www.GizmoPlans.com. The plans include a complete parts list plus instructions on how to build the signs.

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The couple set up a Facebook page two years ago, where they share pictures, videos and information about Oliver. They already have 18,702 page likes and say that they get a lot of general questions about the breed.

The couple have 12 head of Watusi on their ranch and say that weaned calves sell for \$1,500 to \$2,000. Browning also has a Longhorn steer (bought as a calf at a sale

that he’s training to ride as well. It’s named “Tyson,” he’s 2 yrs. old, and is still in training.

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