

farmer's weekly

SERVING AGRICULTURE SINCE 1911

14 & 21 AUGUST 2026

FARMERSWEEKLY.CO.ZA

FOCUS ON BRAHMAN

POWER, PRIDE, AND PURE POTENTIAL!

**FOCUS ON
SOIL HEALTH**

**HEALTHY SOILS
MEAN HAPPY
RETURNS**

**WOMEN IN AGRICULTURE
CULTIVATING CHANGE,
WHILE FEEDING THE NATION**

TRAVEL

**VISIT OUDTSHOORN'S
HISTORIC FEATHER PALACE**





Auction Calendar

Date	Event	Location	Contact	Contact number	Email
JUNE					
27	BULLSEYE SALE	Grootpan Farm, Bothaville	Louise Botma / SHM Adel Viljoen Herco van den Heever	018 294 5922 083 551 2826 071 044 0002	shmafslaers@gmail.com, adel@bullseyeb.co.za, hercovandenheever@gmail.com
JULY					
2	DAMVIEW BULL SALE	Lynwood Farm, Bergville, KZN	Ting Braithwaite	082 809 6338	damviewoffice@gmail.com
7	REEBA BRAHMAN AUCTION	Netherwood Bull Ring, Nottingham Road, KZN	Don Mchardy	082 338 5800	DHM808@gmail.com
14	JAMICA BRAHMANE PRODUCTION AUCTION	Bull Ring Auction House, Davel	Janco Prinsloo James Prinsloo	072 364 3047 082 781 4135	jamica1@vodamail.co.za
15	RENZO COMBINED AUCTION	Vryheid Auction Yard	Lood van Rensburg	083 459 3291	renzo@lantic.net
18	BETTER BEEF SALE	The Bull Ring, Netherwood Farm, KZN	Priscilla Dent	082 804 6408	tambottrading@gmail.com
22	OOS-TVL ALL-BREED AUCTION	Ermelo Showgrounds	Vicky Burger	017 819 1106	vickyb@vleissentraal.co.za
30	MILES2G0 14TH ANNUAL PRODUCTION SALE	Idlewild Farm, Kei Mouth	Miles Dicke	084 589 3174	mwdicke@mweb.co.za
AUGUST					
6	ADVANTAGE STUD BULL SALE	Netherwood Bull Ring, Nottingham Road, KZN	Leon van der Merwe	084 440 7407	lv@live.co.za
6	LOVEDALE AUCTION	Lovedale, Lindley	Thys Meyer, Pieter Meyer	082 334 8906	thys.meyer@zimeyer.co.za, pieter.meyer@simeyer.co.za
7	OSTERLOH BULL SALE	Lincoln Farm, Komga	Eugene Osterloh	082 927 7886	osterlohobs@gmail.com
13	TRI-BULL AUCTION	Dundee	Danie du Plessis Stoffel Mouton	079 929 0218 082 329 0225	danieup92@gmail.com, stoffel.mouton@bkblouwid.co.za
20	LOUMA BOERDERY, NEDIBEST BRAHMANE & GUEST SELLERS' BULL AUCTION <i>Auction under the auspices</i>	Fairfield B Farm, Thabazimbi, Limpopo	Juan-Mari van Jaarsveld	079 068 7549	beeste@louma.co.za
21	BRAHMAN BONANZA SALE		Roelf van Rooyen	082 822 5742	roelf@filtec.co.za
21	MARLAN GROUP PTY LTD	Mooilaagte Farm – Lykso – between Kuruman and Vryburg	Martin and Elana Swart	082 689 9000	martin@worldonline.co.za, kantoor@marlangroep.co.za
SEPTEMBER					
5	NATIONAL AUCTION	Lekwena Wildlife Estate, Potchefstroom	Sietze Smit Jan Louw	083 712 9965 076 221 9715	sytsesm@gmail.com, teg@gmail.com
9	HJW BULL AUCTION	Swartrand Farm, Wolmaransstad	Marelize Jacobs	082 787 0870	marelizejacobs.mj@gmail.com
10	IDAHO ENTERPRISES 1ST PRODUCTION AUCTION <i>Auction under the auspices</i>	Vryburg	Schalk Fourie	082 838 5254	admin@idaho.co.za
12	ROOI WARM	Fire & Wine Arena, Pretoria East	Hendrik Nel Dr Paul Pienaar	082 491 8289 082 924 6078	cga@lantic.net
12	WAYSIDE BRAHMAN STUD	Botswana	Rowland Munger	077 130 3050 +267 713 1323	rkm@waysidebotswana.com
16	NOORD-KAAP CLUB AUCTION	Vryburg Showgrounds	Ramona de Bruin	053 927 3871	stoet@nklh.co.za
18	BRANDWATER BULL SALE	Bloemhoek Farm, Fouriesburg	Linde du Plessis	083 700 8592	admin@brandwater.co.za
19	BOS BLANCO BULL SALE	Kroon Boma, Kroonstad	Burnie Staal	082 463 0358	info@bosblanco.co.zal
OCTOBER					
2	SHL PRODUCTION AUCTION	Rietpan Farm, Lichtenburg	Hannes Liebenberg	082 347 3822	shlbrahmane@nwisp.co.za
10	WESTERN BRAHMAN GENETICS SALE	Lichtenburg Showgrounds	Do Mare	081 716 2491	do@domeldo.co.za
24	AU ALBIDUS BRAHMAN PRODUCTION AUCTION <i>Auction under the auspices</i>	Warmbad Veemark, Bela-Bela	Carel Chalmers	082 896 9586	pcjtrading@limpopo.co.za
NOVEMBER					
6	OSTERLOH BRAHMAN & BEEFMASTER BULL & PRODUCTION AUCTION	Lincoln Farm, Komga	Eugene Osterloh	082 927 7886	osterlohbs@gmail.com
7	KROONVEE SUMMER SALE	Vryburg	Jan van Zyl	082 944 0500	jan@kroonvee.com
21	GRANDIN STUD'S 9TH PRODUCTION AUCTION	Stockman's Choice in Tlokeng, Gaborone, Botswana	Dirk Jerling	+267 775 21314 +267 722 03811	dirkjerling@gmail.com
DECEMBER					
Office closes 15 December 2026 – Bernadine Erasmus – Info@Brahman.co.za – 051 446 4619 – Opens 7 January 2027					



NATIONAL SALE NASIONALE VEILING

The Complete Breed



SAT | **05** | SEP '26



11:00



LEKWENA WILDLIFE ESTATE, POTCHEFSTROOM



OP AANBOD / ON OFFER:

15 Geregistreerde Bulle / 15 Registered Bulls

45 Vroulike Diere / 45 Female Animals

Enquiries / Navrae: Piet Wessels(BKB): 082 857 7827
Sietze Smit: 083 712 9965 | Jan Louw: 076 221 9715





Members List

Stud	Member name	Province	Phone number	Email address
2 TLZ BOERDERY	Thean van den Heever	North West	082 924 2565	tieksenlefenja@gmail.com; tvdheever@nwkc.co.za
A CUT ABOVE CONTRACTING	Bailey and Veronika Kassier, Kerry Gilson	KwaZulu-Natal	083 475 4008	acutaboveagri@gmail.com
ADVANTAGE BRAHMANE	Leon van der Merwe	KwaZulu-Natal	084 440 7407	lv@live.co.za
AFRICAN DREAM BRAHMANE (SEEKOEI WATER)	Marius Nieuwoudt, Dirk Cornelius and Montsay van Papendorp	Mpumalanga	079 984 6255 (Montsay)	montsay@icloud.com
AJ MYBURGH	André, Johan and Hendrik Myburgh	Free State	066 064 5069	spitfirebhm@outlook.com
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AL-DI COMMODITIES	Dirk Lampbrecht, Erasmus Albertus	KwaZulu-Natal	074 119 4698 (Louis)	link@kznatal.co.za
AMAOO BRAHMAN	Boingotlo Toteng, Tshiamo Elvis Toteng	Botswana	267747 14999 (Tshiamo)	amaooranch@gmail.com; tshiamototeng@gmail.com
ANMACA FAMILIE TRUST	Kallie D'alebout	Free State	082 490 1954	kalliedalebout@anmaca.co.za
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BW STAAL	Burnie Staal	Free State	082 771 3394	info@bosblanco.co.za
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DH MCHARDY	Don Mchardy	KwaZulu-Natal	082 338 5800	dhm808@gmail.com; davidson@wylie.co.za
DIAMOND BRAHMAN	Pierre Alexander and Este Elizabeth Gloudina Nel, Marius Anton Pretorius	Limpopo	079 553 2422 (Pierre)	nelpierre34@gmail.com; esten@lantic.net
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DISCOVERY STUD	Wouter Louis van Deventer, Johannes Abraham Haasbroek	Gauteng	082 490 2000 (Wouter)	wouter@shefa.co.za; elisma@shefa.co.za
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JP MLANGENI	JP (Josiah) Mlangeni	Limpopo	082 456 3601	happymlangeni@gmail.com
JP SAKEBELANGE	Carel and Annamie Chalmers	Limpopo	082 896 9586	amcchalmers@gmail.com; chalmerscarel@gmail.com
JSA BRAHMAN STUD	Bertus Joubert	North West	064 752 0699	jsajoubert@outlook.com
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A Brahman stud built for breeders and commercial concerns

The Brahman is the 'king of crossbreeding' and demonstrates a range of economically important traits. Coupled with its legendary hybrid vigour, the Brahman is the top option for sustainable red meat production under South Africa's rigorous farming conditions, says **Dr Badu Mothusi**, owner of the Badu Brahman Stud in Mahikeng. **Annelie Coleman** reports.



ABOVE: Structural soundness is one of the most important selection criteria in the Badu Brahman stud as it underpins productivity and longevity. It also contributes significantly to adaptability.

OPPOSITE PAGE: The Badu Brahman focus is on economically important and hereditary traits such as reproductive efficiency, maternal ability, calving ease and mobility. These attributes add notably to the Brahman's ability to excel under challenging conditions. PHOTOS: BADU BRAHMAN STUD

Dr Badu Mothusi, owner of the Badu Brahman stud, says the breed's hardiness, heat tolerance and resistance to parasite-borne diseases is above par and makes it the ideal choice for the extensive farming conditions of Mahikeng, North West.

"The Brahman is exceptionally hardy and has all the attributes needed not to only survive but to excel under our tough farming conditions. The Brahman is adaptable and resilient. The breed's adaptability is underscored by the fact that our cattle are equipped to handle diverse climatic and environmental conditions. We experience recurring droughts in Mahikeng, and even under such taxing conditions, the animals remain resilient and productive," he says.

CROSSBREEDING EXCELLENCE

Mothusi is particularly impressed by the Brahman's performance when it comes to crossbreeding. According to him,

there is no breed that can match the Brahman as far as a crossbreeding is concerned. He says Brahman add growth, vitality and robustness to any cattle herd they are introduced to.

Brahman crosses fare exceptionally well in the feedlot industry because of their rapid growth. An added bonus is that the crossbred animals have smooth coats and adapt quickly to changes in their environment. Crossbred heifers and cows are highly functional mothers with excellent milk production and are popular with commercial farmers as breeding animals.

'I REMAIN CONVINCED OF THE GENETIC MERIT OF THE BRAHMAN AND FORESEE A BRIGHT FUTURE FOR THE BREED'

"The Badu Brahman selection criteria are focused on economically important and hereditary traits, including reproductive efficiency, growth, maternal ability, calving ease and adaptability.

"Mobility is another very important factor in our herd. The breed's heat resistance is another valuable asset in our part of the world where temperatures in summer can soar to the very high 30s. While other breeds are prone to seek shelter during the hottest part of the day, the Brahman will continue to graze actively in the blazing sun," says Mothusi.

ROBUSTNESS AND MILD DISPOSITION

"Animals must be able to move comfortably between watering points and grazing areas. The mothering ability of a Brahman cow is incomparable.

"Our Brahman mothers will fight to protect their calves against predators. However, we select very strictly for animals with a mild



disposition. Bad-tempered animals are culled from the herd without exception,” says Mothusi, who also practices as a dental practitioner at his own medical centre in Mahikeng.

Structural soundness is of the essence in the Badu herd, as form follows function. “Our breeding programme is aimed at the production of hardy, well-adapted and uniform animals that thrive under all climatic conditions,” explains Mothusi.

Before the Badu stud was registered in 2015, the Mothusi family was running a commercial beef production concern, using a number of different beef cattle breeds. In the quest to find the most effective breed to take the enterprise forward, Mothusi, following intensive research on the Brahman, in the late 1990s acquired two white stud bulls from Loriza Brahman.

SOUND GENETIC FOUNDATION

Genetics from the Serfbred, Bos Blanco and Kroon Vee studs were also introduced to the Badu herd. According to Mothusi, the genetics from these studs form the foundation of the Badu stud.

“The ideal Badu cow is ‘lady-like’ and feminine, with a sound udder and well-developed teats. Heifers are put to the bulls at between 18 and 20 months. Our bulls are structurally correct with strong legs and a pronounced hump. A bull should look like a bull, masculine and robust, with an acceptable scrotal size and functional testes to ensure efficient reproductive performance,” he continues.

According to Mothusi, the stud was since its inception built on principles of excellence and quality aimed at both the stud sector and the commercial beef production sector.

“Badu Brahman personify the strength and resilience required to take red meat production into the future. It would be remiss of me not to acknowledge the vital role of the Brahman Breeders’ Society of South Africa in the development of my herd since 2015. Credit should go to breed director Sytze Smit and Jan Louw, the society’s technical adviser, for their support in the growth and development of the Badu herds.

“We run a commercial Brahman herd as well, and their guidance on selection, among others, has played an invaluable part in our success so far.”

DUAL PRODUCTION SYSTEM

The stud and commercial herds are run in a dual production system. The commercial herd caters specifically to Badu clients who cannot afford stud prices. The commercial animals that are put up for sale remain of outstanding quality and are more often than not sired by stud bulls.

Animals that do not meet the Badu stud selection criteria are not culled but moved to the commercial herd. This makes it possible

FAST FACTS

Badu Brahman is built on a sound genetic foundation aimed at optimum production per hectare with animals that are well adapted to the extensive farming conditions of South Africa.

The stud is run in a dual production system with a commercial herd to cater specifically for producers who cannot afford stud prices.

According to Dr Badu Mothusi, very few, if any, other cattle breeds in South Africa can hold a candle to the Brahman in terms of crossbreeding. According to him, the breed’s hybrid vigour is unparalleled.



RIGHT:

The Badu stud was registered in 2015. Before that, the Mothusi family experimented with a number of other beef cattle breeds as well, but the Brahman outperformed all of them. The first two Brahman bulls were introduced in the late 1990s.

BELOW:

Mothusi credits the Brahman Breeders' Society of South Africa for the role it has played in the establishment and development of both his stud and commercial herds. According to him, the selection advice offered by the society played a vital role in the growth of the herds.



for more buyers to gain access to affordable but superior genetics. This affords buyers the opportunity to realise the best possible return on their investment and generally improve the production potential of their herds.

Over and above the Brahman's hybrid vigour, some breeders elect to use Brahman cross cows as breeding material, adding further value to their herds.

The Badu animals are kept on sweetveld, augmented with, among others, bottle brush grass (*borseltjiegras*). Mothusi says this highly palatable perennial adds to the carrying capacity on his land and is highly valuable in carrying the animals over during times of drought.

The farm is divided into 12 camps, with a single bull allocated to each camp, with between

28 and 30 females per bull. The Badu breeding season stretches from September to February.

SUPPORT FROM FELLOW PRODUCERS

The second Badu production sale was held in April 2026, with logistical support provided by the North West Department of Agriculture and Rural Development.

"I am ever thankful to the support I gained from fellow producers and industry specialists from the day I decided to register the Badu stud. I remain as convinced of the genetic merit of the Brahman as I was on the day of registration, and I foresee a bright future for the breed in Southern Africa," says Mothusi.

Email Dr Badu Mothusi at

badumothusi@gmail.com. **FW**





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OKABRA Brahman: four decades of measured breeding

Four decades of stud breeding have established OKABRA Brahman, near Grootfontein in Namibia, as one of Africa's largest white Brahman studs. Built on cattle selected for heat tolerance, fertility and adaptability, the stud reflects a long-term focus on performance under extensive conditions. **Mecki Schneider** spoke to **Henning Naudé** about breeding decisions, performance, and family succession behind the operation.

The Schneider family has farmed at Okamutombe, near Grootfontein in Namibia's Otjozondjupa Region, for 113 years.

Today, the fourth generation manages the livestock operation while the fifth is growing up on the farm. Mecki and Brigitte Schneider began preparing to take over during the early 1980s while still working elsewhere, developing camps and cattle posts and expanding the commercial herd to 120 cows before moving onto the farm permanently in 1986.

Now, the day-to-day management of the business rests largely with their son Reimo and daughter-in-law Sonja, who entered the partnership six years ago, while Mecki and Brigitte remain available whenever needed.

"Over the last six years they have taken over the daily running of the business. Brigitte and I are available if needed, and it is a pleasure to see this unfold in practice," says Schneider.

Their aim was to farm with low-maintenance cattle while increasing beef production through hybrid vigour. That led them to introduce Brahman genetics into the commercial herd.

The results convinced them to register a stud within months. They started with four pregnant heifers from the late Reg Hunt's Hunt Brahman stud, bred on Sugarland bloodlines, followed by another four cows the following year.

Because the commercial herd was already being performance-tested, the same recording system was introduced in the stud from the outset and remains central to the breeding programme today.

The operation has changed little in principle over the past four decades. Alongside a commercial herd of several hundred females producing slaughter cattle for the European beef export market, the family runs a Simmentaler stud of more than 120 females that traces back to the original dairy herd, once the farm's main source of income. The Schneiders apply the same breeding

philosophy across both studs, maintaining low-maintenance female herds while using hybrid vigour in the commercial enterprise.

"We see it as of utmost importance to run a commercial herd in parallel with our stud herds, not only to test our genetics, but to stay in touch with market tendencies in commercial beef production," says Schneider.

EXTENSIVE CATTLE MANAGEMENT

As the operation expanded, the Brahman, Simmentaler and commercial herds were moved onto separate properties. In the early years, all the cattle ran together, but today much of the herd grazes rented land spread across several hundred kilometres. Schneider says this demands careful management of personnel, time and resources.

Conditions also differ between Grootfontein and other areas. Differences in soil type and vegetation require close monitoring of body condition, with

RIGHT:

A group of OKABRA sale bulls grazing under Namibian conditions before being offered to buyers.
PHOTOS: OKABRA BRAHMANS



lick supplementation adjusted to suit the available grazing.

Grazing remains the foundation of the operation. Schneider says successful livestock farming starts with productive soils and good rangeland management, with the aim of maintaining healthy perennial grazing across a range of species.

The rainfall records kept at Okamutombe span more than a century. According to Schneider, they show no major long-term shift in rainfall patterns, but rather cycles of above-average and below-average years around a long-term average of about 415mm annually. During most droughts, the family has reduced stocking rates by only 10% to 20%. In the worst years, they even ground bushes into fodder to keep the breeding herd intact rather than sell productive females.

That philosophy also guides stocking decisions. The Schneiders avoid pushing stocking rates beyond what the veld can sustainably support under Namibia's unpredictable rainfall conditions.

ADAPTABILITY AND FERTILITY

Adaptability is the trait Schneider values most under Namibian conditions. He says the Brahman copes with wide climatic variation, converts low-quality forage into muscle and tolerates high temperatures. Its resistance to ticks and biting insects also reduces disease pressure.

The cattle walk long distances, survive prolonged dry periods and cross well with almost every other breed. Schneider adds that Brahman genetics have contributed to the



LEFT:

Three generations of the Schneider family on their farm at Okamutombe. From left: Mecki, Brigitte, Sonja and Reimo, with Paul and Lisa (front).

development of at least eight synthetic breeds. OKABRA breeds white Brahman exclusively, a breeding objective that has remained unchanged for four decades. The methods used to achieve it, however, have evolved. Estimated breeding values (EBVs) and, more recently, genotyping, provide the Schneiders with objective selection tools, while structural soundness and longevity remain non-negotiable. Every animal has also passed society inspection for the past 35 years. Selection focuses primarily on fertility, measured through the days-to-calving and scrotal circumference EBVs.

The Schneiders also place considerable emphasis on rib and rump fat, as well as feed efficiency measured through net feed intake, which Schneider regards as the only efficiency trait that does not simply produce a larger-framed animal.

Because calving ease has never been a concern in the herd and growth is already satisfactory, they select for so-called curve benders, cattle that combine low birthweights with above-average growth, or ideally above-average growth with below-average mature cow weight.

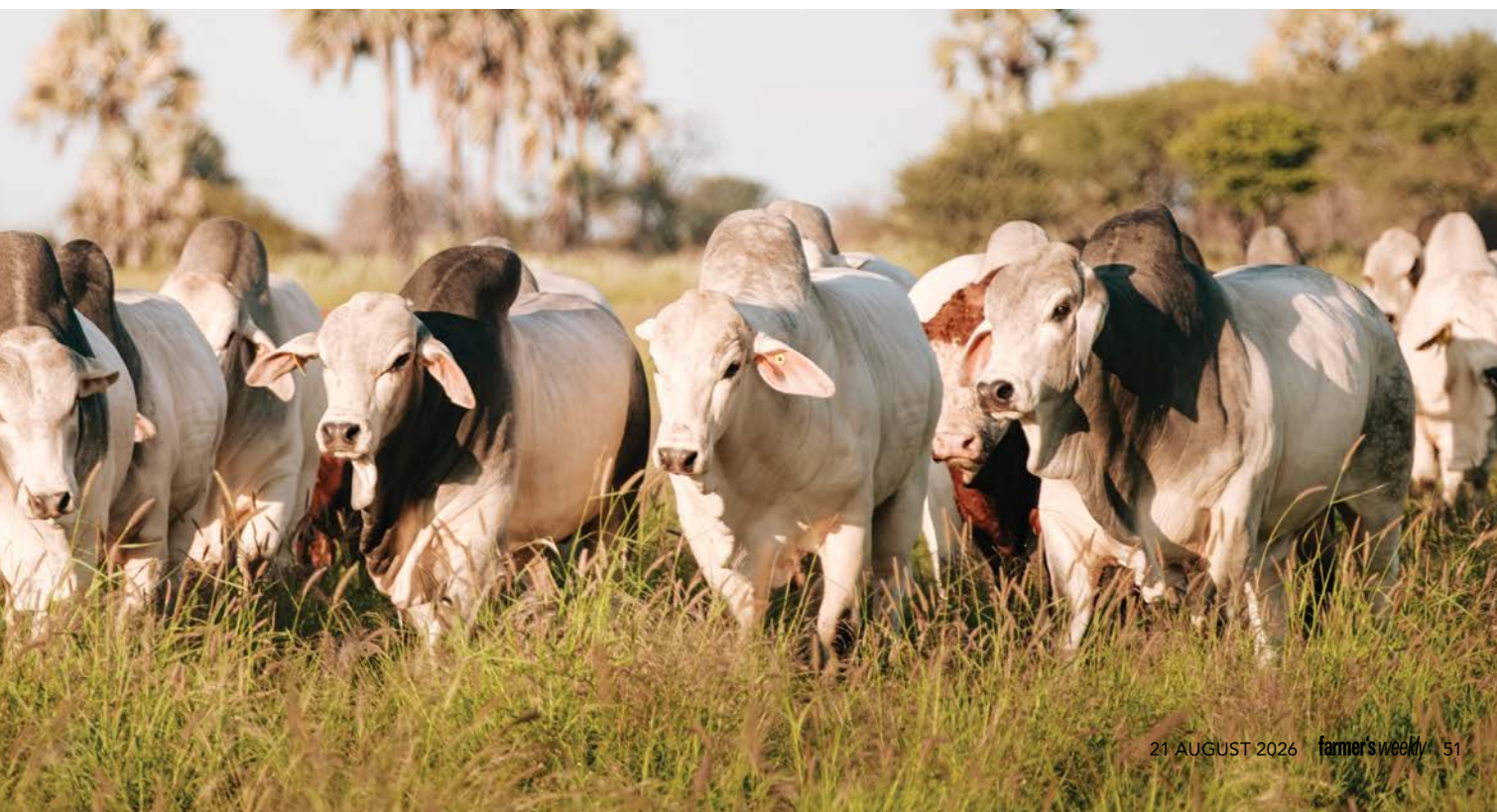
The same principles influence culling decisions. Cows are removed because of age or failure to conceive during the breeding season, while

FAST FACTS

The Brahman was developed in the US from several *Bos indicus* cattle types imported primarily from India and Brazil. The American Brahman Breeders' Association was established in 1924.

Brahmans arrived in Southern Africa in 1954, when eight bulls and 10 females were imported from Texas and landed in Cape Town, before being transported to Namibia.

The breed is highly adaptable to hot, extensive environments. Brahman tolerate high temperatures, and can maintain production on relatively low-quality forage.





ABOVE: Reimo Schneider inspects the next generation of OKABRA calves at a cattle post, assessing the structural soundness, growth, and adaptability that underpin the Schneiders' breeding programme.

structural soundness is the main reason for culling heifers and bulls. The Schneiders first evaluate animals visually, assessing sex characteristics, muscling, and structural soundness before considering their breeding values. Schneider views visual appraisal and EBVs as complementary tools, with neither replacing the other.

BREEDING AND PRODUCTION CYCLE

Every female herd, including the Brahman, Simmentaler, and commercial cattle, follows two breeding seasons. The summer season runs from mid-January to mid-April and the winter season from July to September. Schneider says this creates strong contemporary groups for evaluating EBVs and allows cattle to be marketed in matching half-year cycles.

Under the extensive production system, heifers are first mated at two years of age, ideally at around 360kg, although Schneider says earlier mating is possible under more intensive feeding systems. Nearly all heifers are joined, but only the best are retained as replacements. Early conception is the first requirement. Over recent years, more

than 90% of retained replacement heifers conceived during the first month of the breeding season. Structural soundness, EBVs and pedigree are then considered, with daughters of proven cows and top-performing sires receiving preference. The remaining heifers are sold, mostly in calf. The Schneiders retain about half the annual heifer crop, allowing faster genetic progress while creating room to cull underperforming cows.

Average conception in the cow herd is about 80%, although Schneider says this varies with grazing conditions and rainfall. Heifers achieve conception rates of above 90%,

but the second pregnancy of first-calving cows remains challenging under extensive, arid conditions. He regards this as part of the selection process because difficult conditions expose the most fertile females.

"The best selection for fertility is when females are placed under unfavourable grazing conditions," he explains.

Losses between birth and weaning average only about 1% across all herds. The stud publishes the inter-calving period (ICP) because it remains the accepted measure of fertility, but Schneider places greater value on the days-to-calving EBV. In his view, the ICP is influenced too heavily by bull fertility, cow condition and management decisions, such as when bulls are introduced.

Decades of herd records have convinced him that days-to-calving provides a more reliable measure when animals are compared within contemporary groups.

"Genetic progress is far more effective through the bull you select, with at least 30 calves, than through one calf from a cow in a season," he says.

The Schneiders first identify the structural improvements needed within the herd before selecting bulls on their EBVs. They use a colour-coded EBV ranking system ranging from dark green for desirable values to dark red for undesirable ones, and also consider the performance of each bull's dam where that information is available. Every bull is fertility- and semen-tested before sale.

Artificial insemination has long formed part of the breeding programme to introduce new genetics. During the past decade, the Schneiders have sourced semen from high-performing local bulls as well as from the US and Australia. The stud follows a biannual artificial insemination programme and has previously used embryo transfer from its best cows. They avoid inbreeding by using the BREEDPLAN

BELOW: OKABRA CLAWA, one of the stud's foundation sires, played an important role in establishing the genetics that continue to shape the Schneiders' white Brahman herd.





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PERFORMANCE RECORDING AND TESTING

Estimated breeding values form the basis of OKABRA's breeding programme. The Schneiders use BLUP breeding values throughout the herd and currently place the greatest emphasis on fertility, rib and rump fat, and net feed intake. Selection for high rib and rump fat contributes to females being in better body condition to conceive and ensures that slaughter animals have sufficient fat if marketed off the veld.

Schneider says birthweight is less important in Brahman than in many other breeds because Brahman cows naturally regulate foetal growth and the breed's pelvic structure contributes to easy calving. The Schneiders aim for average weaning weights and slightly above-average maternal ability, while deliberately selecting against large mature-cow weights to avoid breeding cattle that require more feed under extensive conditions.



ABOVE: Sorting and inspecting cattle at one of the farm's cattle posts helps the management team monitor herd quality across the widely distributed operation.

Feed efficiency is one area where Schneider differs from many breeders. He does not support Phase C or Phase D testing because he believes both favour larger-framed cattle. Instead, he regards net feed intake as the only true measure of feed efficiency.

The farm's GenTecSol net-feed-intake station, purchased from GrowSafe in Canada about 12 years ago, was the first of its kind in Africa. More than 1 000 young Brahman bulls have since been tested there, together with bulls from six other breeds, including Angus, Simmentaler, Simbra, Charolais and Santa Gertrudis.

The testing programme has also brought international recognition. Schneider says the OKABRA bull WB 17/4 ranks about 70th overall in the annual Vytelle catalogue of the world's top 150 proven bulls and is among the highest-ranked Brahman. He adds that one question he has pursued for many years is how accurately feed-efficiency testing under controlled conditions

reflects performance on the veld. Based on the available research and industry experience, he believes the correlation is about 70%.

HERD HEALTH AND BIOSECURITY

Schneider says animal disease is relatively uncommon under Namibia's dry conditions. Combined with the Brahman's natural resistance to ticks, biting insects and parasites, herd health receives far less attention than grazing management and nutrition.

Most veterinary treatments are carried out as part of Namibia's compulsory animal health programme. The winter vaccination programme includes anthrax, botulism, blackquarter and lumpy skin disease, while all heifers are vaccinated against brucellosis at weaning. Biosecurity is largely managed through the Farm Assured Namibia scheme and the NAMLITS traceability system. RFID ear tags and movement permits are required whenever cattle move between properties.

SALE PREPARATION AND MARKETING

Sale animals are identified several months before auction day. Bulls are selected three to four months in advance, primarily on structural soundness, while females are chosen about six weeks before the sale after pregnancy testing at around 30 months of age.

The Schneiders retain about 20 heifers annually for artificial insemination and generally prefer selling mature animals rather than younger stock.

Bulls are placed on a low-energy ration roughly three and a half months before the sale, starting at less than 1% of bodyweight and increasing gradually to between 1% and 2%.

They continue grazing throughout the preparation period and are not kept permanently in pens.

Marketing has become an increasingly important part of the operation. OKABRA invests heavily in social media promotion, produces its own sale catalogues, and markets cattle through production auctions, private sales and online platforms. Schneider says the stud was the first in Namibia to market cattle through online auctions, a channel that has since grown substantially.

He reports that regional demand has strengthened over the past five years, both within Namibia and elsewhere in the SADC region. Demand remains driven by the breed's adaptability, fertility, hardiness and ability to add hybrid vigour in commercial herds.

OKABRA plans to continue supplying white Brahman genetics to both Namibian and regional cattle producers while expanding its footprint elsewhere in Africa.

Email Farmer's Weekly at farmersweekly@caxton.co.za. Subject line: OKABRA Brahman. **FW**

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Fifty-five years of building a maternal cow family

Over more than five decades of disciplined selection in Namibia's harsh environment, St Blaize Brahman has built a closed maternal cow family known for predictability, exceptional fertility, longevity, and commercial profitability. Stud owner **Cobus van der Merwe** spoke to **Hanlie du Plessis**.

Ask Cobus van der Merwe to name the most valuable animal at St Blaize Brahman near Gobabis in eastern Namibia and he doesn't hesitate.

"The cow." Not the herd sire. Not the sale-topper. Not the show champion.

"The profitability of a beef enterprise starts with the cow," he says.

It is a philosophy that has shaped every breeding decision at St Blaize since the stud was established by his father, Louis, in 1971 with just three pregnant Brahman cows. Fifty-five years later, the herd has become one of Namibia's leading white Brahman studs, but Van der Merwe measures success differently from many breeders. He is not trying to breed exceptional individual animals. He is breeding exceptional cow families.

Every mating, every culling decision and every replacement heifer retained is judged against a single question: will she strengthen a maternal line that can produce fertile, productive cows for generations?

That unwavering focus has produced something commercial beef producers value above almost anything else: predictability. Buyers know what to expect because the cows behind the bulls have been selected for the same economically important traits for more than half a century.

THE ENVIRONMENT EXPLAINS WHY

Few production environments forgive breeding mistakes. Eastern Namibia certainly does not. Around Gobabis, rainfall averages about 360mm a year. Drought is part of the

BELOW:

Three-year-old bulls ready for St Blaize Brahman's annual production sale.
PHOTOS: ST BLAIZE BRAHMANS



production cycle, grazing quality fluctuates dramatically, and cattle often walk long distances between grazing and water. Every breeding female has to maintain herself on natural veld, rear a healthy calf, and conceive again under conditions that frequently test the limits of her adaptability.

In such an environment, nature becomes the toughest selection programme of all. A cow that fails to breed consistently, calves with difficulty, or cannot raise her calf, simply cannot justify her place in the herd.

For Van der Merwe, those realities have become the foundation of the breeding programme.

“Our breeding goal is to produce functional, efficient, adaptable, fertile, and tame cattle with outstanding beef quality, backed by accurate performance testing,” he says.

The objective is not to produce cattle that perform only under ideal conditions, but animals that remain profitable when conditions become difficult. Commercial beef producers do not farm in perfect seasons, and Van der Merwe believes stud cattle should be selected under the same realities their offspring will face.

THAT VISION LIVES ON IN A MATERNAL COW FAMILY THAT HAS BEEN SHAPED BY DISCIPLINED SELECTION OVER GENERATIONS

FIFTY-FIVE YEARS OF BUILDING A MATERNAL FAMILY

Many successful studs can point to influential herd sires. St Blaize points to its cows.

For the past three decades, no replacement females have been purchased. Every breeding female has been born, raised and selected within the herd, while new genetics are introduced only through carefully selected bulls from leading Namibian and South African bloodlines.

The result is a closed female herd built around proven maternal lines, one management system, and one breeding philosophy.

Only daughters from cows that repeatedly conceive, calve easily, rear quality calves, and remain structurally sound are retained. Others are culled, regardless of pedigree or appearance.

That level of selection pressure has steadily increased the herd’s uniformity.

Rather than relying on outstanding individuals, St Blaize has built families of cows that consistently express the same economically important traits. For commercial buyers, that consistency reduces risk because fertility, adaptability and maternal ability become consistent rather than occasional.



Van der Merwe believes meaningful genetic improvement cannot be rushed. “It takes generations to build a cow family,” he says.

Each generation provides another opportunity to strengthen the maternal base, while introducing carefully selected sires prevents the herd from standing still genetically. The balance between preserving proven cow families and introducing new blood has allowed the stud to make steady progress without sacrificing the consistency on which its reputation has been built.

EVERY COW HAS TO PROVE HERSELF

Building a strong maternal line begins with disciplined selection, but maintaining it requires equally disciplined management.

At St Blaize, stud cows are expected to perform under conditions that closely resemble those on commercial cattle farms. They calve in large veld camps with minimal assistance, receive only strategic supplementation, and rear their calves on natural grazing. If they cannot remain productive under those conditions, they do not remain in the breeding herd.

“I cannot afford to treat them like pampered stud animals,” says Van der Merwe. The Namibian veld becomes the ultimate test.



ABOVE:

The St Blaize Brahman cow herds are well adapted to the farming environment in eastern Namibia.

Performance records and breeding values provide valuable information, but they cannot replace what years under extensive conditions reveal. Fertility, structural soundness, adaptability, and temperament are evaluated simultaneously, every day, in the environment for which the cattle are bred.

That philosophy extends to maternal instinct. Cows calve unassisted, often far from handling facilities, and must protect and rear their calves with little human intervention.

Van der Merwe says Brahman cows frequently remain behind after calving until their newborn calves are strong enough

calves during her lifetime is worth far more than one that only produces five or six," he says.

Longevity is one of the biggest drivers of profitability in a cow-calf enterprise. Every replacement heifer represents years of investment before she contributes her first marketable calf. The longer productive cows remain in the herd, the fewer replacements are needed each year, allowing the breeder to be more selective and increasing the intensity of genetic progress.

At St Blaize, cows are not culled because they reach a certain age. They leave the herd only when they no longer justify their place through performance. A cow that conceives consistently,

calves without assistance, and rears a quality calf continues to earn her keep, whether she is eight or 18 years old. Some St Blaize cows have remained productive well into their twenties.

Fertility remains the cornerstone of that longevity. The three-month summer breeding season runs from February to April, while the two-month winter breeding season runs from August to September.

Every female is pregnancy tested after each breeding season. Over the past 15 years, first-calving heifers have consistently achieved conception rates of more than 95% during the summer breeding season, while mature cows have maintained conception rates of 90% to 95% across the combined summer and winter breeding seasons under extensive veld conditions, despite two severe droughts since 2019.

Van der Merwe attributes much of this consistency to the Brahman's adaptation to its environment. During drought, cows often delay cycling until conditions improve rather than conceiving when they cannot adequately support another calf.

Although this may appear less productive in the short term, it protects the cow's longevity and lifetime productivity.

Easy calving forms part of the same equation. Selection for moderate birthweights has resulted in average birthweights of 30,5kg for heifer calves and 31,8kg for bull calves, while maintaining excellent postnatal growth. Throughout his 24 years of farming Brahman, Van der Merwe says he has only had to assist a handful of cows during calving, and in each case the calf was incorrectly positioned in the birth canal.

For him, there are not separate breeding objectives. Fertility, calving ease, maternal instinct, and longevity are interconnected traits. Together they determine how many healthy calves a cow will produce over her lifetime and, ultimately, how profitable she will be.

BELOW:

Stud owner Cobus van der Merwe (left) and his daughter Karlien (a third-year veterinary student at Onderstepoort) with yearling bulls.



FAST FACTS

St Blaize has not purchased a single replacement female in over three decades, relying entirely on internally bred maternal lines.

First-calving heifers consistently achieve over 95% summer conception rates, while mature cows maintain 90% to 95% overall, even through severe droughts.

Select cows in the herd remain productive well into their twenties, with average calf weaning weights holding steady at 227kg.

to travel, even delaying their return to water to ensure the calf can keep up. This behaviour becomes particularly valuable where predators remain a constant threat.

"A cow that looks after her calf saves the farmer money," he says.

Maternal instinct may be difficult to measure, but its value becomes obvious at weaning. It improves calf survival, reduces labour requirements, and strengthens the efficiency of the entire breeding herd.

For Van der Merwe, those are the traits that distinguish truly profitable cows from merely attractive ones. Those traits only realise their full value when they are expressed year after year throughout a cow's productive life.

PROFIT COMES FROM LONGEVITY, FERTILITY AND PREDICTABILITY

Van der Merwe believes the true value of a cow cannot be measured in a single season.

"A cow that is adapted to her environment, naturally resistant to the parasites prevalent on the farm, and capable of producing 10 to 12



The same practical approach shapes how he evaluates growth. Over the past decade, St Blaize calves have averaged a weaning weight of 227kg. Yet Van der Merwe places greater emphasis on the cost of producing those kilograms than on the kilograms themselves.

ONLY DAUGHTERS FROM COWS THAT REPEATEDLY CONCEIVE, CALVE EASILY, AND REAR QUALITY CALVES ARE RETAINED

“If one compares the weaning weight with the total cost of raising the calf, including lick and veterinary costs, the Brahman produces one of the most profitable weaners in terms of kilograms weaned per rand invested,” he says.

Commercial beef production is ultimately about efficiency rather than extremes.

THE LEGACY OF ST BLAIZE

The St Blaize herd reflects more than five decades of disciplined breeding. Its consistency is not the result of one exceptional sire or a fortunate run of seasons. It is the product of thousands of selection decisions, each measured against the same objective: strengthening the maternal cow family.

Modern tools such as performance recording, estimated breeding values, and genomics support those decisions, but Van der Merwe believes they can never replace practical observation.

Figures identify genetic potential. The cow proves it. Every female must still answer the

same questions. Can she conceive every year? Can she calve without assistance? Can she rear a quality calf under extensive conditions? Will her daughters do the same?

Those questions have guided the St Blaize breeding programme for more than half a century.

They explain why the herd has developed such remarkable uniformity, why buyers return generation after generation, and why the stud’s reputation extends well beyond Namibia’s borders.

Van der Merwe believes too much emphasis is sometimes placed on breeding outstanding individual animals. He rather wants each generation of cows to outperform the previous one.

That philosophy has produced a herd in which fertility, adaptability, longevity, and maternal ability are no longer exceptional traits found in a handful of animals; they have become the defining characteristics of the entire female herd.

In an industry where breeding trends come and go, St Blaize demonstrates the value of consistency.

Fifty-five years ago, Louis van der Merwe laid the foundation with three Brahman cows and a clear vision of the type of cattle that could thrive in Namibia’s harsh conditions.

Today, that vision lives on in a maternal cow family that has been shaped by disciplined selection over generations.

The stud’s greatest achievement is not a record-priced bull or a string of show champions. It is a maternal cow family that has been proving its worth, generation after generation, for 55 years.

In the end, that is the true measure of successful livestock breeding.

Email Farmer’s Weekly at farmersweekly@caxton.co.za. Subject line: St Blaize Brahman. **FW**

ABOVE:

Every culling decision and every replacement heifer retained at St Blaize Brahman is judged against a single question: will she strengthen a maternal line that can produce fertile, productive cows for generations?

Remarkable evolution of the modern Brahman

From its ancient roots in India to a global beef powerhouse, the modern Brahman was selectively bred for extreme heat tolerance, parasite resistance, and unmatched hybrid vigour in tough environments.

FAST FACTS

Brahman cattle secrete an oily substance from their skin glands that naturally repels ticks, flies, and mosquitoes.

Beneath their light hair coat sits dark skin pigmentation, which deflects UV rays and protects them from skin and eye cancers.

Brahman cows stay fertile and structurally sound for 15 to 20 years, easily outliving most European beef breeds.

BELOW:

Strong maternal instincts, fertility, and longevity are hallmarks of the red Brahman, with cows renowned for raising vigorous calves under demanding conditions.

PHOTOS: SUPPLIED

The development of the Brahman cattle breed evolved over time from ancient Indian *Bos indicus* stock into a standardised American beef breed, and later expanded globally through selective breeding for meat production, heat tolerance and hardiness.

This process is important because it explains how centuries of natural selection in India and targeted crossbreeding in the US and Southern Africa created an animal with exceptional heat tolerance, parasite resistance, and hybrid vigour for modern beef production.

The core survival adaptations are:

- **Heat tolerance:** Loose skin, extra sweat glands, and short coats let them thrive in high temperatures;
- **Pest resistance:** Oily skin secretions help repel ticks, flies, and mosquitoes;
- **Hardiness:** Low maintenance needs allow survival on sparse forage and in dry conditions.

ORIGIN AND EARLY DEVELOPMENT

The modern Brahman breed was derived from four principal strains imported from India, initially to Brazil, in the late 19th century: Gyr, Guzerat, Nellore and Krishna Valley cattle.

The Indu-Brazil (Induberaba) was developed in the early 1900s in Brazil by intentionally crossbreeding Gir and Guzerat (Kankrej)

cattle. Breeders sought to combine the milking ability and convex head of the Gir with the heavy muscling and size of the Guzerat.

The Indu-Brazil was predominantly crossed with earlier American Brahman lines (which featured heavy Nellore and Guzerat influences) to add size, rapid weight gain, and maternal qualities.

Brahman-type (*B. indicus*) cattle were also imported independently and at various times into the US from multiple sources, including direct imports from India and gifts via the UK.

FINAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE BRAHMAN

Modern Brahman cattle comprise two distinct, recognised colour varieties: grey and red. There are still pure herds of some of the original types, such as Gir and Indu-Brazil, while the bulk of Southern African herds comprise red and/or grey animals.

Grey Brahman: Ranges from solid white and silvery grey to dark steel grey. Mature bulls are typically darker, often showing blackish pigmentation on the front shoulders, neck and hindquarters.

Red Brahman: Varies from light gold or bronze to deep cherry red. They possess black pigmentation around the eyes, nose, muzzle and hooves, providing essential sun protection.

Morphology: Both share the characteristic hump and dewlap, but the red Brahman often features more pendulous ears that curl inward at the tips, and a broader, slightly convex face.

Grey Brahman resemble their Guzerat ancestors more closely, with ears that droop at a 45° angle and a wider, flatter face.

BRAHMAN'S INHERENT QUALITIES

Brahman cattle are essential to the global beef industry because of their heat tolerance, disease resistance and hybrid vigour.

These qualities make them invaluable for sustainable beef production in challenging environments.

1. Environmental adaptability and hardiness.



- **Heat regulation:** Possess loose skin, a large dewlap and an elevated number of sweat glands that allow them to dissipate heat efficiently in high temperatures;
- **Solar protection:** Feature dark skin pigmentation beneath a smooth coat that deflects intense sunlight and protects against eye and skin cancers;
- **Foraging efficiency:** Efficiently utilise low-quality fibrous roughages and travel long distances across sparse pastures where other breeds struggle.

2. Health and longevity

- **Parasite defence:** Secrete an oily substance from sebaceous glands that acts as a natural repellent against flies and ticks;
- **Disease resistance:** Exhibit a high natural immunity to many tropical and subtropical diseases;
- **Lifespan:** Retain productive fertility and structural soundness for 15 to 20 years, outliving many conventional European breeds.

3. Reproductive and maternal excellence

- **Mothering instincts:** Cows display strong, protective behaviour over their calves against predators and harsh environmental elements;
- **Calving ease:** A sloping rump and lower birth weights help minimise birth complications;
- **Hybrid vigour:**

(heterosis): Impart exceptional hardiness, growth rate, and environmental resilience when crossed with *B. taurus* (British and European) breeds.

BRAHMAN'S SUPERPOWER

Brahman heterosis, or hybrid vigour, is the superior performance shown by crossbred offspring when Brahman cattle (*B. indicus*) are crossed with other distantly related breeds (*B. taurus*). This creates high genetic diversity, leading to significant improvements in growth, fertility and hardiness. However, the increase in heterosis is not unlimited.

Relationship between genetic distance and heterosis

- **Initial increase:** Moderate genetic divergence between parents increases heterozygosity

and complements missing or recessive alleles, driving a rise in hybrid vigour;

- **The optimal peak:** Maximum heterosis occurs at an ideal or optimal mating distance that balances gene complementation with co-adapted gene complexes;
- **The decline (outcross depression):** Crosses between extremely distant lines or different species suffer from genetic incompatibility. This can disrupt epistatic interactions, and also reduce fertility, which offset the benefits of heterosis.



Key factors impacting the cross

- **Trait heritability:** The effects of genetic distance vary among traits, with stronger positive correlations generally seen in low-heritability traits such as fitness and reproduction.
- **Reproductive barriers:** Wide crosses remain constrained by the biological compatibility and fertility limits of the respective genomes.

IN CONCLUSION

The modern type of Brahman emphasises economically important traits such as early maturity, high fertility and superior carcass quality.

Visit the Brahman Cattle Breeders' Society of South Africa at Brahman.co.za. **FW**

ABOVE:

The grey Brahman combines exceptional heat tolerance, hardiness and structural soundness, making it one of the world's most adaptable beef breeds.



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The value of a bull pack: utilising EBVs smartly to take the herd forward

Using a team of bulls rather than relying on a single sire significantly boosts estimated breeding value accuracy. Spreading risk across a bull pack accelerates genetic gain and optimises herd improvement.

Any breeder aims to improve herd genetics over time. Achieving this requires understanding how genetic progress is made, how the accuracy of estimated breeding values (EBVs) influences selection decisions, and how a team of bulls can collectively drive herd improvement.

Genetic gain is the improvement in a herd's average genetic performance over time through selective breeding. It measures how much better the offspring are compared to their parents.

$$\text{Annual genetic gain} = \frac{(\text{Selection intensity} \times \text{Selection accuracy} \times \text{Genetic variance})}{\text{Generation interval}}$$

- Annual genetic gain is the improvement in a herd's genetic potential per year, expressed in units relevant to the trait, such as kilograms per year for weight.
- Selection intensity measures how

BELOW:

A team of bulls can collectively drive herd improvement.

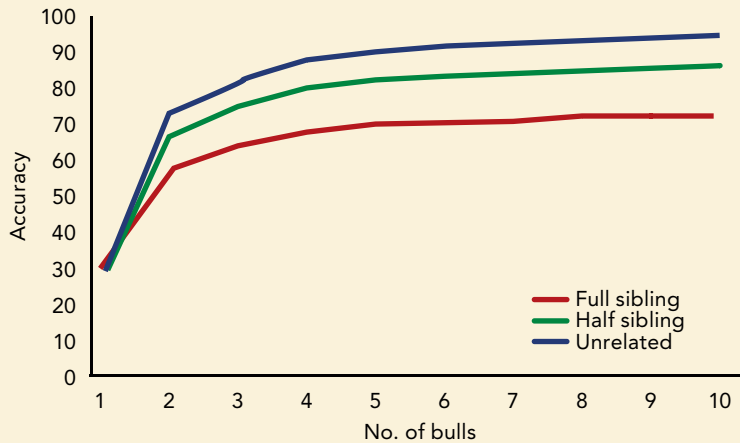
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RIGHT:
EBV accuracy of a bull team when EBV accuracy of individuals is 30%.

ACCURACY OF BULL TEAM WHEN EBV ACC = 30%

Source: Lohuis and Smith 1994, WCGALP 18:298-301



Although breeders often focus on the accuracy of individual animals, it is significant to consider the combined accuracy of a bull team. When multiple sires are evaluated as a group rather than individually, the accuracy of the team's combined breeding value is substantially higher than that of an individual bull. Within a bull pack, some bulls will perform above expectation, some below expectation, and others close to

genetically superior the selected parents are relative to the population average.

- Selection accuracy is the correlation between the selection criteria and the animal's true breeding value.
- Genetic variance represents the amount of genetic variation available for selection within the population.
- Generation interval is the average age of parents when their offspring are born. Shorter generation intervals increase the rate of genetic progress.

their predicted performance. Considering the team as a whole reduces the impact of individual variation. This principle applies whether evaluating bulls used in a single breeding season or across multiple joining seasons.

As illustrated in the figure, an individual bull with an EBV accuracy of 30% carries some uncertainty because the EBV may change significantly as more information becomes available. However, when two bulls, each with 30% EBV accuracy, are used as a team, the combined accuracy increases substantially to approximately 58% for full siblings, 68% for half siblings, and 74% for unrelated bulls. Unrelated bulls provide the highest combined accuracy as there is shared bias between full or half siblings.

This demonstrates that the risk associated with using younger bulls with relatively low individual EBV accuracy can be reduced by evaluating and using them as a bull pack. By spreading risk across multiple sires, breeders achieve greater confidence in the genetic outcome than when relying on a single bull. Consequently, a well-selected team of younger bulls can provide a level of confidence comparable to that of an individual proven sire.

EBVs remain one of the most valuable tools available for comparing the genetic merit of breeding animals. Confidence in selection decisions can be further improved by increasing the amount and quality of performance recording, genotyping animals, maximising contemporary group sizes, and adopting a bull pack approach.

Together, these strategies accelerate genetic gain while reducing risk, ultimately supporting more profitable and sustainable breeding programmes.

This article was compiled by the Brahman Office from a Stockman School lecture by Dr Christian Duff, chief of operation at ABRI.

Visit the Brahman Cattle Breeders' Society of South Africa at Brahman.co.za. **FW**

FAST FACTS

Evaluating bulls as a collective team drastically reduces individual prediction error. Using two unrelated bulls with individual EBV accuracies of 30% jumpstarts their combined accuracy to 74%.

A well-selected pack of younger, lower-accuracy bulls offers genetic confidence comparable to a single proven sire, allowing breeders to shorten generation intervals safely.

Faster herd improvement relies on balancing selection intensity, accuracy, genetic variance, and generation intervals, a balance made far more achievable through smart bull pack management.

BY SPREADING RISK ACROSS MULTIPLE SIRES, BREEDERS ACHIEVE GREATER CONFIDENCE IN THE GENETIC OUTCOME

EBVs are generated using performance records, pedigree information, genetic parameters (including heritability, genetic correlations and variances), and genomic information. They estimate an animal's breeding potential on a genetic level and enable breeders to make informed selection decisions that improve genetic progress and profitability and to achieve sustainability. When using EBVs it is important to consider the accuracy. Accuracy is expressed as a percentage between 0 and 99 and indicates the confidence in the EBV prediction.

Higher accuracy means the EBV is less likely to change as additional information from the animal, its progeny or relatives are analysed.

Factors influencing EBV accuracy:

- Heritability of the trait;
- Accuracy of the parents;
- Quantity of performance information;
- Quality of performance recording;
- Genetic correlations between traits.



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2
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22
AUG

SENEPOL
Airborne (Emoya), Bloemfontein

10
JUL

BORAN
Silverlakes Hotel, Pretoria

ONLINE
AUCTION

22
AUG

SIMBRA
Afridome, Parys

5
AUG

SA MUTTON MERINO
Bloem Showgrounds, Bloemfontein

5
SEP

INDIGENOUS VELD GOATS
Bloem Showgrounds, Bloemfontein

6
AUG

BRAUNVIEH
Afridome, Parys

18
SEP

BEEF SHORTHORN
Bloem Showgrounds, Bloemfontein

11
AUG

SA MUTTON MERINO
Frankfort Golf Club, Frankfort

15
OKT

BOERBOK
Bloem Showgrounds, Bloemfontein

12
AUG

BRANGUS
Afridome, Parys

22
OKT

DRAKENSBERGER
Afridome, Parys

13
AUG

SUSSEX
Bloem Showgrounds, Bloemfontein

4-5
NOV

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13
AUG

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Achieving genetic gain in the Southern African Brahman population

Driven by advanced BREEDPLAN evaluations and single-step genomics, Southern African Brahman breeders are accelerating genetic progress and improving crucial, hard-to-measure traits like feed efficiency, meat tenderness, and cow fertility without sacrificing hardiness.

Via the Brahman Breed Improvement Forum (BBIF), genetic analysis of key traits has been implemented systematically (Meat Quality is still in process) in order to allow publication of breeding values for Brahman members.

The Southern African Brahman societies use the BREEDPLAN genetic evaluation system (based on best linear unbiased prediction (BLUP) technology) to produce estimated breeding values (EBVs) of recorded cattle for a range of important production traits (like weight, carcass, fertility). This service provides EBVs for the following traits:

The BBIF is a collaborative network founded in 2013, uniting stud breeders, society officials, and scientists to advance the genetic quality, performance, and market value of Brahman cattle across the region.

Note: Since November 2023, the Southern African Brahman societies have been publishing genomically enhanced breeding values. This is done via the BREEDPLAN single-step genetic evaluation in which genomic information is incorporated.

FIGURE 1: BREEDPLAN EBVS ANALYSED FOR SOUTHERN AFRICAN BRAHMAN

July 2026 South African Brahman Single Step BREEDPLAN EBVs																		
Trait	Gestation length (days)	Birthweight (kg)	200 day wt (kg)	400 day wt (kg)	600 day wt (kg)	Mat cow wt (kg)	Milk (kg)	Scrotal size (cm)	Days to calving	Carcass wt (kg)	Eye muscle area (sq cm)	Rib fat (mm)	Rump fat (mm)	Retail Beef Yield (%)	IMF (%)	Docility	NFI-P	NFI-F
EBV	-0,2	+2,5	+20	+32	+41	+27	+6	+1,5	-8,8	+22	+0,4	+0,5	+0,6	+0,1	+0,4	-1,0	-0,20	-0,20
Accuracy	82%	97%	97%	94%	94%	91%	91%	84%	54%	86%	61%	76%	76%	65%	68%	94%	57%	56%
Breed average EBVs for calves born in 2024																		
EBV	-0,8	+1,8	+17	+26	+33	+35	+2	+0,8	-0,7	+18	+0,3	+0,0	+0,0	+0,0	+0,0	+0,7	-0,02	+0,00

FIGURE 2: TRAIT STATISTICS ARE LISTED FOR ANALYSED ANIMALS

Traits analysed:
BWT, 200WT, genomics
Number of herds: 8
Progeny analysed: 168
Scan progeny: 27
Carcass progeny: 1
Number of daughters: 37

FIGURE 3: SELECTION INDEXES AGAINST BREED AVERAGE

Selection index values		
Market target	Index value	Breed average
Rangeland grazing index	+R314	+R91
Wean index	+R303	+R136
Feedlot index	+R256	+R86

Successful selection within a herd requires accurate knowledge of the genetic merit of each animal. Once animals have been evaluated and ranked according to their genetic merit, those that are unlikely to meet the desired breeding and production objectives can be identified and culled.

Selection pressure is the degree of intensity with which animals are selected or culled within a breeding herd to improve the genetic merit of future generations. It reflects the proportion of animals retained for breeding relative to those that are rejected.

To measure traits like live weight, scrotal circumference, shoulder height, and so on, basic equipment and techniques are required.

Some traits are hard to measure, due to cost and factors like accessibility, but

have been promoted by Southern African Brahman because of economical impact.

NET FEED INTAKE

Net feed intake (NFI), a key measure of feed efficiency, significantly impacts beef production economics by influencing input costs. Selecting for low (negative) NFI in Brahman cattle reduces daily feed consumption without affecting growth rate or mature body size, leading to lower feeding expenses and possibly higher stocking rates on pasture.

This is the difference between an animal's actual feed intake and its expected feed requirements for maintenance and growth. Efficient Brahman cattle eat less than expected and have a negative NFI, while inefficient ones eat more and have a positive NFI.

Important to note:

- NFI is phenotypically independent of growth rate and body size, meaning an efficient animal grows well without needing extra food.
- It is measured via standardised feeding trials.
- Lower or more negative NFI values are ideal because they indicate lower feed costs for the same amount of weight gain.
- Heritability is estimated at around 40%, allowing breeders to make rapid genetic progress through targeted selection.

For Southern African Brahman, both NFI-P and NFI-F are calculated. NFI-P measures feed efficiency during the active growing phase post-weaning. NFI-F evaluates differences in feed intake during the finishing phase in a feedlot set-up.

MEAT QUALITY – WARNER-BRATZLER SHEAR FORCE (WBSF)

Shear force, measured objectively via Warner-Bratzler testing, is a direct indicator of meat tenderness.

The study of Southern African Brahman meat quality has become crucial as rising consumer demands for healthy, tender, and flavourful beef push the industry away from traditional production metrics toward carcass excellence. Historically valued for their hardiness, heat tolerance, and crossbreeding capability, Brahman in Southern Africa are actively overcoming a historical stigma regarding meat toughness through scientific selection.

A series of small groups has been tested over the last decade with indications that selection for positive meat quality traits is possible with-in the Brahman population.

In the most recent test group, WBSF values as low as 2,74kg had been recorded. Values including and below 4,6kg are regarded as acceptable for the retail industry, and values



including and below 3,9kg are regarded as acceptable for the restaurant industry.

It is worth noting that while excellent WBSF values have been recorded through-out the test groups, a healthy variation still exists. This implies that genetic gain in meat quality traits for Brahman cattle is an absolute reality.

IMPORTANCE OF DAYS TO CALVING

Days to calving (DC) is a critical genetic fertility trait in Brahman cattle, measured as the number of days from the start of the mating season until a cow calves.

Days to Calving = Calving Date – Commencement of Joining Date

Shorter DC values indicate earlier conception and superior genetic fertility, driving lifetime reproductive efficiency and herd profitability in tropical beef systems.

Interpreting the output:

The system processes these calculations across the entire pedigree (including records from relatives) to generate the DC EBV. Lower, negative DC EBV figures are highly preferred. A negative value indicates that a bull's daughters will have shorter calving intervals and conceive much earlier in the breeding season.

IN CONCLUSION

The genetic gain of the Southern African Brahman centres on enhancing the breed's economic performance while preserving its renowned hardiness, drought tolerance, and maternal adaptability. Managed closely by Southern African Brahman societies, genetic progress has accelerated significantly through data-driven breeding technologies and advanced selection mechanics.

Visit the Brahman Cattle Breeders' Society of South Africa at Brahman.co.za. **FW**

ABOVE:

Brahmans in Southern Africa are actively overcoming a historical stigma regarding meat toughness through scientific selection.

SUPPLIED

FAST FACTS

Selecting for lower net feed intake reduces daily feeding expenses without compromising growth rates, with a high heritability rate of about 40% allowing breeders to make rapid progress.

Recent testing shows Brahman meat tenderness achieving Warner-Bratzler Shear Force values as low as 2,74kg, well below the 3,9kg threshold required by the high-end restaurant industry.

By utilising genomically enhanced breeding values to target negative 'days to calving', breeders can select bulls whose daughters conceive earlier in the season, directly boosting herd lifetime profitability.

How Reeba Brahman built an award-winning herd

Located in the challenging KwaZulu-Natal Midlands, award-winning Reeba Brahman breeds elite, easy-fleshing cattle. Through strict culling and pasture testing, **Don McHardy** delivers exceptional fertility, hardiness, and commercial profitability.

Nestled in the lush, rolling hills of Dargle in the KwaZulu-Natal Midlands, Reeba Brahman operates under conditions that would test the resilience of any beef operation. High rainfall, steep terrain, biting winter cold, and low-protein sourveld define the landscape. Yet, it is precisely this demanding environment that has shaped one of South Africa's most formidable Brahman herds.

For breeder Don McHardy, choosing the Brahman was never in doubt.

"The Brahman is the backbone of the beef industry," he explains. "It is widely used in crossbreeding programmes and in most of the synthetic breeds. I specifically chose Brahman for their longevity; it's one of the most underrated value traits and profit traits."

That longevity and natural hardiness form the foundation of McHardy's operation, where survival on grass alone isn't just an advantage; it is a prerequisite for staying in the herd.

UNCOMPROMISING SELECTION AND AWARD-WINNING FERTILITY

At Reeba Brahman, the overarching vision has always been straightforward: to produce 'red booster beef'.

REEBA SUBJECTS ITS CATTLE TO A STRINGENT THREE-MONTH PASTURE TRIAL

This commitment to performance yielded national acclaim when Reeba Brahman won the prestigious Most Fertile Brahman Herd award. The stud also took home the Superior Cow award, alongside two additional cows tying for second place in the same category.

These accolades stem from a rigorous, zero-tolerance approach to herd management. "It's a very simple process," says McHardy.

"Reeba's breeding season lasts three months. The cows must produce a good calf every year to stay in the herd. The cows are pregnancy tested two months after the breeding season. If they are not in calf, they are culled. Out of the cows with weak calves, the bottom 30% are culled."

This aggressive selection ensures that only the most fertile, functionally efficient animals remain. To balance the 'meat and milk' equation, McHardy strategically leverages specific bloodlines.

"It's a balancing breeding act getting the balance right between milk and beef," he notes.

"I've got a Gyr influence in my herd that produces buckets of milk with high butterfat, and I infuse it with easy-fleshing, beefy animals."

When evaluating replacement heifers or potential herd sires, McHardy focuses on non-negotiable physical traits:

- Masculinity in bulls and distinct femininity in females;
- Structural correctness and soundness;
- Easy-fleshing ability packed with abundant muscle.

BRIDGING SCIENCE, PASTURE, AND PERFORMANCE

While estimated breeding values (EBVs) remain a standard across the livestock industry, McHardy advocates for a practical balance between data points and physical performance on the veld.

"I want the exact figures," McHardy notes regarding data collection.

"Unfortunately, the divide between productive, profitable animals and EBVs is drifting further apart. Objective measurement could be, and should be, a very valuable driver that we need. Hopefully, the role players combine their efforts – from the ones making a living from cattle to the ones behind computers. We need to work together for everyone to benefit."

To test functional productivity, Reeba subjects its cattle to a stringent

three-month pasture trial, running them exclusively on kikuyu grass with a P6 lick. This grazing test serves as a vital selection tool, ensuring bulls are built to perform under real-world commercial conditions.

Commercial cattlemen introducing Reeba genetics can expect "small, strong calves that thrive, with strong survival instincts and good growth", driving immediate hybrid vigour.

BIOSECURITY, TEMPERAMENT, AND THE ROAD AHEAD

Managing livestock in modern South Africa brings widespread challenges, particularly surrounding foot-and-mouth disease. While Reeba has remained free of infection through proactive vaccination, McHardy acknowledges the broader impact: "Foot-and-mouth has, unfortunately, had a massive, widespread negative effect, from the cattle to the consumer."

Despite these industry hurdles, day-to-day management at Reeba is enhanced by the breed's docile nature.

"It's the most amazing feeling being with your Brahman and they all affectionately come for a cuddle," McHardy smiles. Beyond the personal reward, quiet cattle yield tangible economic benefits.

"Labour is expensive, and working within time constraints is a must for efficient management, so temperament plays a vital role in managing the herd."

Looking toward the future, Reeba Brahman continues to refine its core genetics while actively developing new, unrelated bloodlines and a polled line.

As food security becomes an increasingly urgent regional focus, McHardy's mission remains clear: "As Reeba improves every year in every direction, we strive to breed efficient, functional, and productive Brahman that will produce more on less."

Phone Don McHardy on 082 338 5800.

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