

# TEXAS LONGHORN HISTORY, BEFORE AND AFTER THE SHADOW

by Darol Dickinson - January 10, 2023

Over the years, Lavern Pfeiffer bought a number of cattle from Dickinson Cattle Co., both at the original Colorado location and later in Ohio. Always hunting the next new, drop-dead-fancy show calf, he hauled calves all over the show circuit for his daughters from his ranch in Scribner, Nebraska. Lavern was a big, fun kind of guy who really knew cattle and worked at serious evaluations with an eagle-eye.

One day as we bounced around the DCC pastures in Ohio, I was excited to show him my top bull, *The Shadow*. During the mid and late 1990's, this bull's tip-to-tip horns were in the 65" range. That T2T score put him near—if not at—the top of Texas Longhorns for horn length. Moreover, in a world full of whiter cows, he was as black as a crow's wing-pit. He tipped the scales at 2050 lbs. and was easily the breed leader for popularity. DCC was selling a lot of his semen and planned to breed him for a long, long time.



**The Shadow gave the industry many value traits. High hopes were placed on his genetics.**

*The Shadow* was sired by *Senator*. We had bought *Senator* near Washington, D.C., and moved him west to Colorado. We later bought *The Shadow* in Tollhouse, California, and relocated him east to Ohio. Great genetics are worth transcontinental travel to hunt and acquire. (For *Senator's* story, see *Fillet of Horn*, pp. 223-31).

Roaming the DCC range, Lavern and I had a hard

time finding *The Shadow*. After searching every corner of the pasture, we finally found him standing in a lake. Not a good sign. When we got him out of the water, we saw that his right front leg was swollen nearly to the size of a stove pipe. Lavern said, "You're going to lose that bull." His prediction was an easy call—but a long way from what we wanted to think about our top sire. We wanted to save him, whatever it took.

To deal with *The Shadow's* leg, we quickly called Dr. Harold Kemp, a highly respected large-animal veterinarian. He told us that our prize bull had stepped on something sharp that penetrated his hoof from the sole up past the ankle. An infection had started at the bottom of his foot and was rapidly moving up his leg. Our ranch hands who check pastures had unfortunately missed him for several days.

The prognosis for *The Shadow* was not good: his leg's tissue had become necrotic, and the sole of his hoof had started to separate seriously. Amputation or hamburger were Dr. Kemp's first two unpleasant recommendations. A third choice—a very long shot—was to remove the sole and rebuild it with fiberglass. Then we'd have to keep our bull pumped with antibiotics and pray for the best.

We were confident that *The Shadow* was a positive jump forward. His genetics were irreplaceable in the breed. If healed properly, his hoof would redevelop in less than a year—but only if he sur-



**The Shadow on the table at Ohio State University enduring one of his many procedures.**

vived the infection already advancing inside his leg. So we asked Dr. Kemp to proceed immediately with the long shot. *The Shadow* was too special for anything less.

Fortunately, he was a compliant patient. Dr. Kemp surgically removed his sole with most of the wall and molded a new fiberglass hoof to fit. We medicated him daily, enforced minimal activity, and designed a comfortable, soft-bedded, spacious stall for his recovery. When he eventually began walking, he placed his weight on the left front leg and carried his right. But most of the time he just lay down.

He became so used to shots and medications that Joel could go into his stall, lift up his foot, and treat him without restraints. Little by little over many months, he began to place weight on his bad foot. We were concerned, however, that the massive injections might affect his fertility when and if he became able to breed again. (For *The Shadow's* story, see Horn Stew pp. 88-102.)

*The Shadow* is the important middle of this piece of Texas Longhorn history. But no great undertaking is ever quick, easy, or accidental, so let's drop back thirty years and begin anew with a broader study of genetics. In June of 1967, our family bought our first registered Texas Longhorns. After serious consideration, we selected a bull named *Sam Bass*, who had 32" of horn T2T—the widest-horned bull we could find. In other herds, many



**In starting the Dickinson family Texas Longhorn herd, Sam Bass was the widest horned bull that could be found. He is believed to be over 32" at most, but was tipped down to under 20" tip to tip. This was our start.**

bulls were 20"-28", which many breeders considered okay. But DCC wanted more. Our next bull came from YO Ranch blood— *Sam Houston II*, with 36" horns. At that time, his was the top measurement among many known herd sires.

In the early '70's, I toured Jack Phillips's Battle Island Ranch in West Columbia, Texas. (For details of

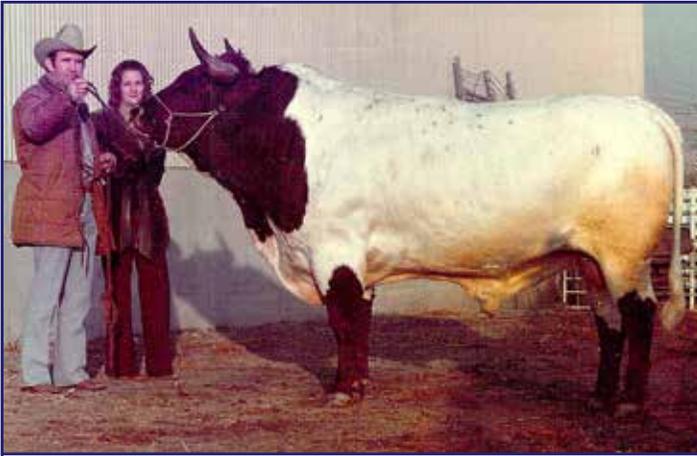


**Texas Ranger was the elite of the Phillips genetics. It is believed he is in over 90% of modern Texas Longhorn pedigrees. Some prominent sires trace back to him 70 to 110 times.**

that relationship and documentation of some historic cattle purchases, see *Fillet of Horn*, pp. 16-24.) My eyes opened wide when I saw the first four bulls over 40" T2T. The Phillips cattle were one of the seven foundational families, and their colors were not as pretty as many herds', but they were far taller, longer, and had more twist and T2T than any Texas Longhorns I had ever seen. The widest-horned Phillips bull was *Texas Ranger JP*, then about 46" and later to go a little over 48" T2T—the breed's horn record in the mid-1970's.

At that time, the main criticism of Texas Longhorns was "Not Enough Beef." In that department, *Texas Ranger* added a new genetic feature: he sired the first one-ton bulls. In fact, more of his sons and semen were available in those early years than from any other sire. (Semen is still available from some of his sons.) Even today, it is hard to get length and thickness unless *Texas Ranger* is in the pedigree multiple times. He was forward progress. Other foundation bulls were far less useful in the long run.

In 1977, I found *Classic*—an unregistered Butler family bull owned by one person and bred by an-



**Ranger's Big'un was a son of Texas Ranger and the first Texas Longhorn to weigh over a ton. He was purchased from DCC, for \$20,000 by Larry Smith Sr, standing with Linda Dickinson, at the Fort Worth Fat Stock Show 1978.**

other, who each hated the other. Even though *Classic* was the largest-horned bull in history at 60", the odds were good he would never sire a registered calf. All of his early calves were falsely registered to other bulls, which was wrong. The torture of dealing with personal conflicts, law courts, estates, and divorces made *Classic* a nearly impossible challenge to register him legally and make him usable in the industry. (For *Classic's* story, see *Horn Stew*, pp. 41-55.)

With *Classic* semen, his 60" horn genetics created a lot of excitement. One daughter named *Sweet N Low* sold for \$116,000. *Classic* was syndicated for \$1,000,000, and twenty investors bought semen shares for \$50,000 each. The syndicate sold out in a day. Horn enthusiasm was exploding.

*Classic* brought additional horn into the industry but also a consistent white color and small-frame. Cows ran about 700 lbs and bulls 1100 lbs. Horn was very popular, but fleas came with the dog.

In breeding programs, some individuals never seem to produce progeny as good as themselves. Occasionally—rarely—one contributes a genetic "bounce" and produces offspring better than themselves. To profit from that brilliance, ranchers must battle constantly to locate the forward-bouncers.

Identification usually happens, however, only when the animal is well up in years. Discovery takes a long time and patience—but once identified, this trait becomes a focus to breed rare-superior genetics. The results can be wonderful. Quick detection is most valuable.

DCC offers a free series of biographies of many prominent Texas Longhorns, including some descriptions of their contributions to the breed. Collectively, these portraits are a 50-year history of animals informing all the prominent pedigrees. (Click on [https://www.texaslonghorn.com/longhorn\\_info/biographies/index.cfm](https://www.texaslonghorn.com/longhorn_info/biographies/index.cfm).)

As numbers grew for the rest of the century after 1977, certain individuals emerged as leaders in forward genetic progress. Here are just a few special ones: *King*, *Bail Jumper*, *Cowcatcher*, *Don Quixote*, *Emperor*, *Gun Man*, *Measles*, *Senator*, *Overwhelmer*, *Ranger's Measles*, *Unlimited*, *Zhivago*, *G-Man*, *Doherty 698*, and *Phenomenon*.

Although many breeders were measuring and fighting to develop more horn, advancement in breed T2T was only about 5" from 1977 to the late 1990's. Progress was erratic, fast or slow, depending on identifying and using forward-breeding cows and bulls.

Some feel this slow progress was a result of splintering desire for different types of cattle. One organization believed only Wichita Refuge (WR) cattle were worthy. Another believed the Butler and only the Butler family was of value. The Cattlemen's Texas Longhorn Registry (CTLR) promoted early types, mostly Yates, WR, and Marks genetics. Shows run by the Texas Longhorn Breeders Association (TLBAA) used college cattle judges and invented a new show-type of early-developing cattle with very small horns. The record-setting, high-dollar producers went totally for horn, with less interest in the other virtues.

Consider how the current dynamic scene could have been very different under a few changed circumstances. *Texas Ranger* might never have left Battle Island or been collected. *Classic* could never have been legally registered. *Don Quixote* might never have left Chain Ranch. *Zhivago* was

purchased as an unpaid board bill, fortunately not liquidated to a slaughter house. *Doherty 698* was purchased from a large coal company in Ohio. *The Shadow* could have died from infection.

After that 30-year side-bar, now back to *The Shadow*. His hoof injury cost half a breeding season, but he was 90% good the next year. Although he moved a little slow, he faithfully serviced his large cow herd. After recovering from hoof surgery and siring hundreds of calves, he was bred to *Kentucky Blue* and sired *Shadow Jubilee*. She sold twice for \$120,000, was a major clone cow, and was one of the first cows to reach 90" T2T. *The Shadow* was also bred to *Zither* (by *Zhivago*) and sired *Shadowizm*, who reached the mid-70" T2T—some progress.

Tom Smith of Michigan bought *Shadowizm* semen from DCC and bred his cow *Jamoka*, who gave birth to *Jamakizm* ("Jah-māke-is-um," born 5-22-2003). Smith's neighbor Dick Lowe then purchased the young bull. I first saw him at Dick's, breeding cows at age 2. He was beautiful, perfect horn shape, one of the tallest bulls ever. I wanted

*Jamster, Jamaju, Jack Pot, Toss The Jam, Hooray*, etc. I never could buy *Jamakizm* semen for \$50 ever again.

*Jamakizm* clearly contributed a forward bounce as a sire. His best horn of record was 83". He not only bred his own qualities but produced superior traits in his offspring. His son *Drag Iron*, for example, measured 90" and weighed 2260 lbs. The new generation also had a forward-bounce factor. In our own day, *Drag Iron's* prepotency is already a matter of history. Among others, he sired the many-times Horn Showcase Champion cow *Silent Iron*, now 111.25" tip-to-tip.

The two decades of 1977-1997 recorded 5" of horn increase. During 1997- 2022, horn growth increased 37" in round numbers—about 1.5" per year over twenty-five years. The forward-bounce families have been identified and are readily available.

Each person can pick and choose— to preserve, or to improve the Texas Longhorn. Even though some amazing cattle are selling for hundreds of thousands of dollars, a few good people enjoy raising cattle exactly like the ones we started with in 1967. They swear up and down that traditional is the best.

Others like to study genetics, catch the bounce, and strive to improve the breed.

As the lady said who kissed the cow, "It's just a matter of taste."

For more Texas Longhorn history, begin with these books:

Before 1939, *The Longhorns*, by J. Frank Dobie

After 1960, *Fillet of Horn*, by Darol Dickinson

After 1970, *Horn Stew*, by Darol Dickinson

Purchase books on line at <https://head2tail.com/product-category/publications/>



**Silent Iron, by Drag Iron currently measures 111.25" tip to tip. What an exciting history and still going.**

him. I tried to buy him, unsuccessfully. In time, Dick collected *Jamakizm* and offered semen at \$100 per straw—a very high price in 2006. I told Dick I would send him a check for \$5000 for 100 straws. He weakened, and we had a deal. That was probably the best investment of my life.

In 2007, *Jamakizm* calves started to be born: *Drag Iron, Juma, Rose Jam, Jama Dandy, Jam Packed,*

**Dickinson Cattle Co**  
**35000 Muskrat Rd.**  
**Barnesville, OH 43713**  
**740-758-5050**

[www.texaslonghorn.com](http://www.texaslonghorn.com)