

Travelling the distance

Bold 2015 relocation pays off for Raffs

ADVERTISER CONTENT

BY LINDA MANTOVA

Raff Angus

SEEN as one of the boldest moves in the beef industry of the time, in 2015 the Raff family relocated their established Angus operation thousands of miles south, however that is not the start of their story, nor the end.

With origins on the Southern Downs in Queensland, Raff Angus is today thriving on the fertile pastures of King Island, Tasmania, and in 2025 will be calving down 750 Herd Book-registered cows.

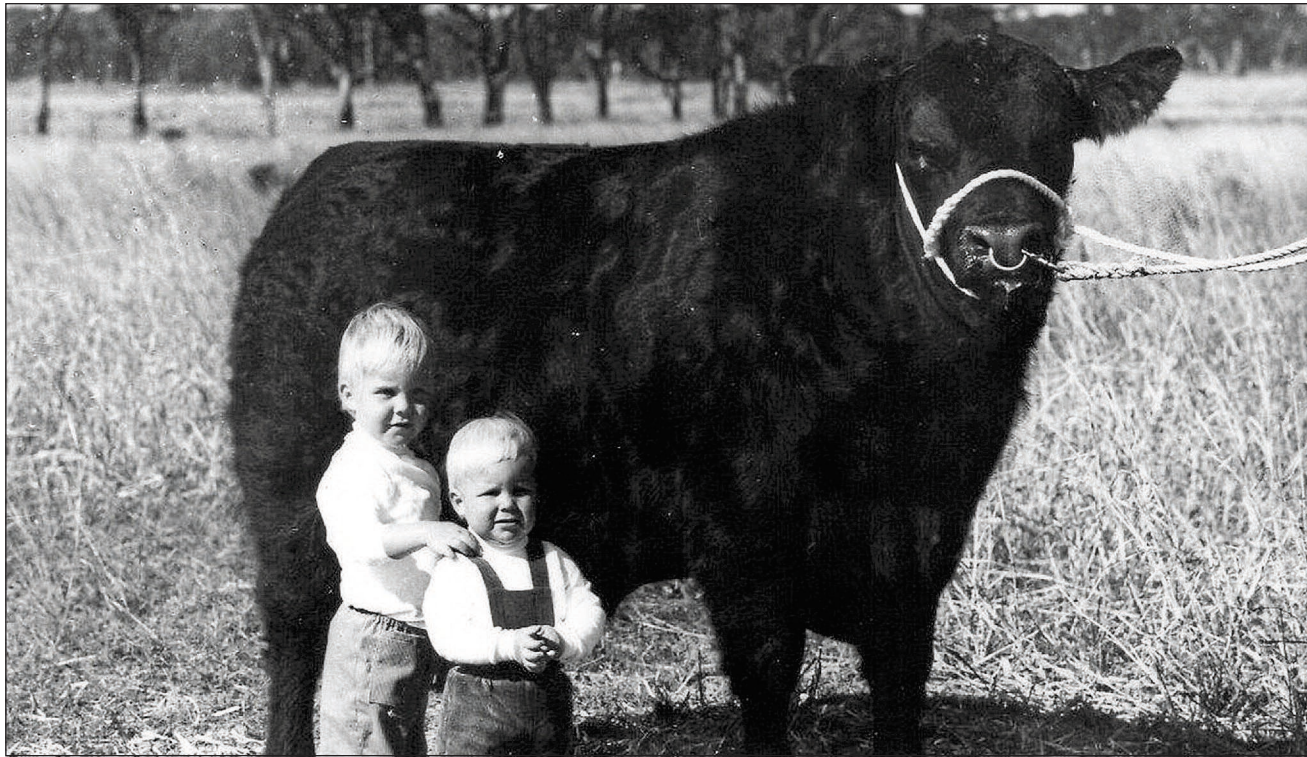
The third generation of the Raff family, Harry, Charlie, Georgina, and Olivia, are set to continue the legacy of their grandfather, David, and parents Andrew and Anna.

From humble beginnings, stud founder David Raff, then 21, purchased his first farm in 1967 - a 400-hectare former dairy farm between Leyburn and Karara, west of Warwick. The asking price was \$25,000, of which all was borrowed with his father acting as guarantor. The debt was to be paid off over 25 years with an interest rate of 12 per cent.

Andrew Raff said in the mid-1980s the family moved to Pittsworth, prior to relocating to Drillham, 120 kilometres east of Roma.

"During the near two decades there we gradually expanded both our land holdings and stud cattle numbers," he said.

It was on the family's 50th



Three-year-old Andrew Raff (right) and brother, Robert, 4, in 1977, with the 20-month-old bull, Forres Totem, weighing 725kg (breed average 595kg), which sold for \$750. Picture supplied



The Grand Champion Angus bull at the Brisbane Royal Show in 1978, Forres Warrior W3, led by David and Jill Raff (at right). Picture supplied

anniversary of breeding Angus seedstock within the south east corner of Queensland that Raff Angus, relocated in its entirety to King Island, chasing a secure and reliable rainfall environment of high grass production.

The Raff Angus herd is now run on a 1057ha aggregation within the south eastern end of King Island - just 8km off the east coast. At just 64km in length and 26km wide, King Island is responsible for more than 20pc of Tasma-

nia's beef production.

"Starting back in 1965 from just four cows, with the passion, support and vision within our family, Raff Angus now currently runs over 2000 pedigree-recorded animals of which 75pc would have pedigree linkage back to our initial foundation cows," Mr Raff said.

When asked how the Raff family got into Angus, he said he had found an extract in his father's journals which read:

"In 1965 I had at last saved

enough money to realise my lifelong dream of having my own Angus stud. I chose Angus partly because of the influence of my dear friend Eaton Webster but mainly because I believed Angus produced the best quality beef. During my visits to the Royal Easter Shows in Sydney with my parents we would go and see the Beef Carcase competition cattle hanging up after judging. I was always impressed with the fine texture of the Angus beef, the size of the eye muscle, the fine flecks of white through the meat and the very even white fat covering the carcass on the Angus compared to other breeds. Herefords were the dominant beef cattle breed at that time so it would have cost me a lot more to start with Herefords."

Andrew Raff listed the traits that had further attracted them to the Angus breed as maternal and fertility excellence and the breed's consistency to produce high

quality beef, as well as market flexibility and accessibility, and of course, nowadays, demand.

"Angus has a diverse global gene pool, and breeders have varied beliefs and selection preferences - this is important as different types suit different environments," he said.

Mr Raff said their foundation stud cows came from Eaton Webster's Sarum stud.

"All were big framed, good milking females rich in Mulben Embassy blood - a Scottish bred bull exported to New Zealand where progeny dominated the breed for many years before the bull himself was imported into Australia by Mr Webster as an aged sire," he said.

"Since then, almost six decades ago, we have never lost sight of the key fundamentals as to what makes a good Angus cow - doability, fertility, and survivability.

"The number of calves on the ground is well proven as

a key profit driver however, weight still pays. We aim to provide seedstock genetics that produce animals that grow fast and weigh heavy at a young age. We aim for them to reach target weights early and for them to produce a heavy and high yielding carcass as efficiently as possible with traditional carcass quality. Extreme marbling does not interest us. It compromises too many other traits of importance. For most of our clients, the heavier the animal the more money they make. Our cattle are profitable for all sectors of the industry."

Mr Raff said in 1968, the first bulls resulting from those initial foundation cows were sold topping at \$500 to average \$400 for four bulls.

"In 1974, at the height of the beef slump, 12 bulls were sold for the year to average \$198. In 1988 our bull sale featured the first progeny of US-imported sire, Premier Commodore. This sale created an Australian Angus breed record average for an on-property bull sale when 41 bulls sold to average \$4493," he said.

"In 2022, at the height of record Australian cattle prices, we broke our on-property sale average record selling 104 bulls to average \$17,825."

The biggest historical challenge that the Raffs have encountered was the industry perception of Angus cattle in a Hereford-dominant environment in the late 1960s and 1970s.

"Angus were criticised for being too small and had a poor reputation for temperament. They were commonly known as the little black pigs. Today, the Angus breed is recognised as one of the leading beef breeds of cattle throughout the world, giving breeders access to unique markets and opportunities."



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