

Show Steer Breed Classification

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At one time classification of the breed of a show steer was easy. There were only three British breeds shown and crossing among these breeds was rare and easily recognized. The only crossbred steers shown were Brahman-crosses, very easily identified. Contrast that with today. There are as many as 16 breed and breed-cross classes in Texas shows, and there are about 75 breeds of cattle in the U.S. today.

To an outsider or novice, placing a steer in a breed class might appear to be relatively simple. It would seem that all that is necessary is to read the specifications for a class and find an animal which meets these criteria. Consider the current requirements for a Hereford steer:

- State Fair** - purebred of high grade Hereford.
- Fort Worth** - sire and dam both pure blood Hereford and show all characteristics of the Hereford breed.
- San Antonio** - must be out of a purebred (registered or high grade) Hereford sire and purebred Hereford dam. Should exhibit typical Hereford color markings, breed character, and expression of frame size, muscle and structure.
- Houston** - purebred horned Hereford characteristics and features.

However, what if you don't know anything about a steer's parents and what are "typical" Hereford characteristics? That is, how is it determined if an animal meets these requirements? This is done **only** by visual appraisal. Consider this statement from the 2000 Houston Premium List. "Eligibility will be based solely on visible characteristics as determined by classifiers appointed by show management. The judgment of classifiers is final and not subject to protest."

So, the only factor which actually determines breed classification for show is visible physical characteristics, and how a particular person evaluates them in relation to what that person thinks should be the characteristics of that breed. Registration papers, breeder affidavits, or other paperwork are not considered. This should be kept in mind when selecting prospects. The word or opinion of the breeder, seller, advisor, friend, or enemy may be useful as a guideline. Even knowing the

exact breeding of an animal is no guarantee, as genetics and visual appearance do not always match. Again, going back to the example, the class is not simply for Hereford steers but, rather, for steers which **appear** to be Hereford, in the judgment of the classifiers. With this background, let us look at the various types and breeds.

BRITISH TYPE

This group includes Angus, Hereford, Polled Hereford, Red Angus, and Shorthorn. All of these are for cattle appearing to be purebreds.

- Angus:** Must be polled (no scurs or dehorning) and black in color. No white above underline, in front of navel, or on legs, feet, or tail.
- Hereford:** No specific requirements. Color shade and markings often important.
- Polled Hereford:** Must be polled or, if scurred, scurs must be in place. (Don't dehorn a scurred Polled Hereford.) Color and markings same as Hereford.
- Red Angus:** Must be polled (no scurs or dehorning). Must have Red Angus color with no white in front of navel, above underline, or on leg. No combination of black on nose, eyes, and anus together.
- Shorthorn:** Purebred (15/16) physical characteristics.

BRAHMAN-TYPE

This group is sometimes called American Breeds. Physical evidence of Brahman background is important (ear length and shape, hair type and amount, amount of hide, and, most importantly, hump placement).

- Brahman:** Must show appearance of being at least one-half Brahman. Need to have some hump, not just a cresty neck.)
- Brangus:** Must appear to be purebred. May be scurred but must be black in color with white allowed only on underline in back of sheath.

•**Santa Gertrudis:** Must appear to be at least one-half Santa Gertrudis. May be any color (there are black Santa Gertrudis-crosses). Need not have dominant *Bos indicus* characteristics.

•**Simbrah:** Appearing to be minimum of 1/4 and/or maximum of 3/4 Simmental and Brahman, with no other breed characteristics evident.

•**American Cross:** Consisting of *Bos indicus* or *Bos indicus*-containing breeds, either purebred or crosses among these breeds or with other breeds. Exhibiting visibly obvious predominant characteristics of *Bos indicus* genetics. May include, in addition to the four breeds above, such breeds as Beefmaster, Braford, Red Brangus, Brahmousin, etc. At Fort Worth, Dallas, and many smaller and county shows, all American breeds and crosses are shown together.

CONTINENTAL or EXOTIC TYPE

Included here are Charolais (half-blood and higher), Chianina (predominant), Limousin (half or higher) , Maine-Anjou (half or higher), and Simmental (purebred). At San Antonio and Houston there are separate classes for these five Continentals, and also a class for Other Breeds and Crosses, which includes everything not already discussed, as well as steers classified out of any of the above. At Fort Worth, Dallas, and many smaller shows, all Continentals, and any other steer that is not purebred British or American breed or cross, are shown together.

There are no specific physical requirements for any of these Continental classes except that they show evidence of the breed in which they are entered. Depending on the breed, it can be difficult to classify these classes as most may contain at least one-half of any other breed or combination. Charolais and Simmental classifiers generally are most rigid, Limousin perhaps intermediate, and Chianina and Maine most flexible.

Summary

As can be seen, there are very few specific physical characteristics in classification. Instead, general shape and body type are important, along with color or horns in some cases. Generally, unless something specific such as color or horns is involved, no one single factor will cause disqualification.

The more unusual or uncharacteristic physical features that an animal has, the more likely he is to be classified out. Steers should be selected and shown based only on their visual appearance, as that is how they will be evaluated for classification. Remember that classifiers are asked to exercise their judgement. Their decision may differ from your judgment. Just because your steer is classified out does not mean that the classifier or anyone else is accusing you of lying or cheating. Nor does this mean that the steer cannot be what you say he is. Look upon breed classification as the first stage of judging. Don't be too upset if the classifier makes, or you think he has made, a mistake. It's all a matter of judgement.

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