Texas Show Steer Breed Classification

Jason Cleere, Extension Beef Cattle Specialist

Jim Mazurkiewicz, Professor and Extension Specialist – Leadership Programs, TALL Director

Stephen Hammack, Extension Beef Cattle Specialist Emeritus

Classifying the breed of a show steer in Texas used to be easy. Only three British breeds were shown. Crossbreeding among them was rare and easily recognized, and only Brahman crosses were shown in Texas.

Today, there are as many as 16 breeds and breed-cross classes in Texas shows, among about 75 breeds of cattle in the United States that could contribute to the genetic makeup of a steer.

To an outsider or novice, placing a steer in a breed class might appear to be relatively simple. Just read the specifications for a class and then find an animal that meets the criteria—right? But it's a little more complicated than that. Consider, for example, the characteristics for a Hereford steer:

- Must physically exhibit breed characteristics of a purebred Hereford
- Red body with white face, white underline, and white-marked legs
- Feather neck
- Horned Herefords must be dehorned

Factors that alone are not disqualifying but may in combination indicate non-Hereford genetics:

- Dark red color
- Red neck
- Solid red or solid white ear; ear size and shape are questionable

- Excess white on legs
- Excess white above the underline
- Eye pigment
- Black hair in tail, ear, or on rear end of animal
- Black spotting/smut, or freckling on the nose
- Line back
- White above switch in tail
- White across rump above the twist

Absolute disqualifying factors:

- Diluter color pattern
- Brindles
- Double muscling
- Any color pattern other than red or white (birthmarks excluded)

These are all visual factors. So, eligibility for the class is determined *only* by visual appraisal, as evaluated by classifiers appointed by show management. Registration papers, breeder affidavits, or other paperwork are not considered.

Keep this in mind when selecting prospects. The word or opinion of a breeder, seller, adviser, or friend may be useful as a guideline. Even knowing the exact breeding of an animal is no guarantee, because genetics and visual appearance do not always match. The example shows that the class is not simply for Hereford steers but rather for steers that *appear* to be Hereford, in the classifiers' judgment. With this background, let's look at the descriptions for the various types and breeds.

British Type

This group includes cattle that appear to be purebred Angus, Hereford, Polled Hereford, Red Angus, and Shorthorn.

Angus

Acceptable Breed Characteristics

- Must physically exhibit breed characteristics of a purebred Angus
- Solid black
- Polled

Discriminatory Breed Characteristics

- Continental breed type structure and head
- Bumps where horns would be on a horned animal
- Birthmarks or white hair in the switch should be reviewed for the skin color (black skin color is acceptable; white or pink skin is a disqualification)
- *Bos taurus*–type ear set (ear size is not to be discriminated against)

Absolute Disqualifications

- White skin resulting in white hair above the underline or in the front of the navel (white on the navel is acceptable)
- White skin resulting in white hair on the leg, foot, or tail
- Horns or scurs
- Brindle
- Diluter color pattern
- Dehorning scars
- Double muscling

Hereford

Ideal Breed Characteristics

- Must physically exhibit breed characteristics of a purebred Hereford
- Red body with white face, white underline, and white-marked legs
- Feather neck
- Horned Herefords must be dehorned

Acceptable Breed Characteristics (but not necessarily desirable; in combination may be discriminating)

- Dark red color
- Red neck
- Solid red or solid white ear; ear size and shape are questionable
- Excess white on legs
- Excess white above the underline
- Eye pigment
- Black hair in tail, ear, or on rear end of animal
- Black spotting/smut or freckling on the nose
- Line back
- White above switch in tail
- White across rump above the twist

Discriminatory Breed Characteristics

- Coarse joints, head, or ribs
- Straight-line white markings on legs
- White above the hocks, on the outside and back side of rear legs
- Excess pigment or color around the eyes
- Red neck in combination with excess white on legs

Absolute Disqualifications

- Diluter color pattern
- Brindles
- Double muscling
- Any color pattern other than red or white (birthmarks excluded)

Polled Hereford

Ideal Breed Characteristics

- Must physically exhibit breed characteristics of a purebred Polled Hereford
- Red body with white face, white underline, and white-marked legs
- Feather neck
- Must be polled or have loose scurs

Acceptable Breed Characteristics (but not necessarily desirable; in combination may be discriminating)

- Dark red color
- Red neck
- Solid red or solid white ear; ear size and shape are questionable
- Excess white on legs
- Excess white above the underline
- Eye pigment
- Black hair in tail, ears, or on rear end of animal
- Black spotting/smut or freckling on the nose
- Line back
- White above switch in tail
- White across rump above the twist

Discriminatory Breed Characteristics

- Coarse joints, head, or ribs
- Straight-line white markings on legs
- White above the hocks, on the outside and back side of rear legs

- Excess pigment or color around the eyes
- Red neck in combination with excess white on legs

Absolute Disqualifications

- Diluter color pattern
- Brindles
- Double muscling
- Any color pattern other than red or white (birthmarks excluded)

Red Angus

Acceptable Breed Characteristics

- Must physically exhibit breed characteristics of a purebred Red Angus
- English/British characteristics
- Solid red
- Polled
- Black pigmentation (animals may have two of three areas of black pigmentation on the nose, around the eyes, and on the anus, but not all three)
- A blond, light red, or mixed switch
- Black hair on the tail, muzzle, face, neck, and shoulder

Discriminatory Breed Characteristics

- Coarse joints or head (big feet, big dewclaws)
- Bumps where horns would be on a horned animal
- Solid white switch

Absolute Disqualifications

- Horns or scurs
- White above the underline or in front of the navel
- White on the leg
- Black pigmentation (having all

three areas of black pigmentation: on the nose, around the eyes, and on the anus)

- Diluter color pattern
- Dehorning scars or evidence of dehorning
- Solid white tail
- Double muscling

Shorthorn

Acceptable Breed Characteristics

- Must physically exhibit breed characteristics of a purebred Shorthorn
- Solid red; solid white with red hair or red pigment on ear, muzzle, or tail; or any combination of red and white, with the red and white color pattern bleeding together

Discriminatory Breed Characteristics

- Motley face or brockle face
- Orange or light red color
- Black nose pigment
- Straight-line white markings across leg
- Coarse head
- Double muscling

Absolute Disqualifications

- Diluter color pattern, such as yellow or yellow roan
- Blacks, blue roans, or grays
- Brindle

Brahman Type

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

American Breeds Cross

Acceptable Breed Characteristics

- Any color or color pattern
- Progression of importance to include *Bos indicus* head; eye; and ear of moderate length, slightly drooping and opening down and forward
- Crest or slick neck
- Sheath score of 2 or more

Discriminatory Breed Characteristics

- *Bos taurus* head
- *Bos taurus* short ear
- *Bos taurus* eye
- Sheath score of 1

Absolute Disqualifications

- A combination of a *Bos taurus* head, eye, and ear
- Without adequate *Bos indicus* head, eye, and ear characteristics, sheath score is irrelevant

Brahman

Acceptable Breed Characteristics

- Must physically exhibit breed characteristics of a 50% purebred Brahman
- A prominent hump beginning in the middle of the shoulder and going forward
- Any color or color pattern
- *Bos indicus* ear, head, eye, and sheath

Discriminatory Breed Characteristics

- None

Absolute Disqualification

- A crest with the absence of a hump

Brangus

Acceptable Breed Characteristics

- Must physically exhibit breed characteristics of a purebred black Brangus
- Solid black
- Sheath hangs at a 45-degree angle and is well controlled
- Influence of a *Bos indicus* eye, ear, and head
- Slick neck or evidence of a crest

Discriminatory Breed Characteristics

- Scurs or slick spots (scurs must be loose)
- Straight, pendulous sheath
- Absence of *Bos indicus*–influenced eye, ear, and head

Absolute Disqualifications

- Hard horns (attached)
- Dehorning scars
- White above the underline or in front of the navel
- White on the legs, feet, or tail
- Any brindle (red or light-colored)

Santa Gertrudis

Acceptable Breed Characteristics

- Must physically exhibit breed characteristics of a 50% purebred Santa Gertrudis
- Any color or color pattern
- Moderate crest, no definite hump
- Moderate dewlap development
- Moderate length of ear, slightly drooping and opening forward
- Sheath score 2–5
- Not necessary to show predominant *Bos indicus* characteristics

Discriminatory Breed Characteristic

- Straight, pendulous sheath

Absolute Disqualification

- Absence of any visible Santa Gertrudis characteristics

Simbrah

Acceptable Breed Characteristics

- Must physically exhibit breed characteristics of a Simbrah
- Must appear to have a minimum of ¼ both Simmental and Brahman and a maximum of ¾ both Simmental and Brahman
- A sheath score of 2 or greater
- A *Bos indicus* eye, ear, and head
- Stocking legs
- Bald, blaze, or streak face
- Diluter color pattern
- Solid black, red, light red, gray, smut, or yellow, or a combination of white with any of the previously listed colors
- Brindles

Discriminatory Breed Characteristics

- A sheath score of 1
- A *Bos taurus* head
- A *Bos taurus* ear
- A *Bos taurus* eye
- Mottled face

Absolute Disqualifications

- A combination of a *Bos taurus* head, ear, eye, and sheath
- Roans

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 the San Antonio Stock Show and Rodeo and the Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo there are separate classes for these five Continentals, as well as a class for Other Breeds and Crosses, which includes all breeds 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, because most may contain at least one-half of any other breed or combination breed.

Charolais

Acceptable Breed Characteristics
- Must physically exhibit breed characteristics of a 50% purebred Charolais
- White, yellow gray, or silver (moderate dappling allowed)
- Expression of diluter gene
- Painting or spotting less than 20%
- Skunk tail, line back, baldy

Discriminatory Breed Characteristics
- Excessive painting or spotting (over 20%)
- Double muscling
- Brindles
- Frail bone work and frail general appearance

- Light red color
- Short, stubby head
- Overly refined, narrow head
- Excessive dark pigmentation (eyes, nose, ears, and anus)
- Excessive dappling

Absolute Disqualifications
- Black, red, dark smuts
- Showing no diluter gene, unless solid white

Chianina

Acceptable Breed Characteristics
- Must exhibit Chianina influence in head (ear, eye, and nose) and skeleton
- Any shade of black, red, gray, or yellow
- Brindles, baldies, blaze faces, and motleys

Discriminatory Breed Characteristics
- Coarse joints or skeleton
- Excessive spotting above the underline

Absolute Disqualification
- Appears to be a purebred of any other breed

Limousin

General Breed Characteristics
- Head
  — Should be wide between the eyes, with a prominent brow (eye socket)
  — Should have a wide poll
  — Tendency to be smaller-eared; should have a moderate location (neither too high nor too low)
  — Tendency to be shorter-muzzled

- Muscle conformation
  — Tend to be expressive in muscle pattern
- Sheath
  — Tend to not exceed a score of 2
  — Tend to have a forward angle, with navel in front
- Legs/foot
  — Tend to be not heavy-boned
  — Tend to be flat boned
  — Tend to be not big-footed
- Tail set
  — Can have a forward tail set
  — Can drop from hooks to pins

Acceptable Breed Characteristics
- Must physically exhibit breed characteristics of a 50% purebred Limousin
- Solid black, red, light red, charcoal black, yellow, blond
- Bald face
- Smooth joints and skeleton

Discriminatory Breed Characteristics
- Coarse joints, skeleton, and head
- Stocking legs
- Brindle
- Spotting above the underline
- Roans

Maine Anjou
Acceptable Breed Characteristics
- Must physically exhibit breed characteristics of a 50% purebred Maine Anjou
- Spotted, solid black, or red
- White stocking legs, white underline, and spotting above the underline and on the face
- Heavy skeletal structure

Discriminatory Breed Characteristics
- Brindle
- Roan
- Diluter color pattern

Absolute Disqualification
- Appears to be more than 50% any other breed

Simmental
Acceptable Breed Characteristics
- Must physically exhibit breed characteristics of a purebred Simmental
- Larger, longer head
- Larger ear, lower set
- Solid black, red, light red, gray, smut, red and white, yellow and white, black and white
- Painting or spotting above the underline
- Stocking legs
- Bald, blaze, or streak face
- Diluter color pattern

Discriminatory Breed Characteristics
- Roans
- Skunk tail
- Double muscling
- 40% or more white above the underline
- Diluter color pattern around the eyes and muzzle
- Monkey mouth

Absolute Disqualification
- Brindle

Classification Glossary

American breeds. Breeds created in the United States by interbreeding existing breeds, including at least one tropically adapted breed (most often American Brahman).

Bald face. Appearance when white covers most of the face.

Blaze or streak face. A wide strip of white down the face to the muzzle.

***Bos indicus* (zebu).** Subspecies of cattle originating in south Asia; has a prominent hump on top or in front of shoulder.

Bos taurus. Subspecies of cattle; originated in west Asia but is usually called European.

Brindle. A streaking of black, brown, or white on the body of the steer (tiger stripe).

British/English. Cattle originating in the British Isles; Angus, Hereford, and Shorthorn are most numerous in the United States.

Brockle or motley face. Red or black spotting on a white or bald face.

Continental. Breeds originating in Continental Europe; sometimes called European or Exotic.

Diluter gene. A gene that determines color. Cattle that carry both copies of the gene will appear white. Non-diluter cattle will appear black or dark red, whereas those carrying a single diluter gene will appear gray or yellow.

Discriminatory Breed Characteristics. Characteristics that are not reason for absolute disqualification but in combination with other discriminatory visual characteristics could lead to disqualification.

Horned. Horns are solidly attached to the skull, or there is evidence of dehorning.

Painting. Large white markings covering a major portion of the steer.

Pigmentation. Dark skin coloring on the points of the steer (eyes, nose, ears, anus, tail).

Polled. Naturally hornless.

Purebred. Showing visual characteristics of a particular breed and none of any other breed.

Scurs. Horny tissue or rudimentary horn attached to skin but not the skull.

Sheath score. Scoring system from 1 to 5 based on the length of the sheath (1 = little sheath; 5 = excess sheath).

Smut. Dark gray color pattern.

Spotting. White spots on the steer.

Summary

In the commercial beef industry, most cattle are sorted by visual characteristics into numerous groups for marketing purposes. Similarly, during livestock shows, participating steers are sorted into breed classes based on visual characteristics. As you can see, in most classes there are generally few factors that will absolutely disqualify an animal, and those are usually easily identified. Instead, most disqualified animals have more than one subjectively evaluated discriminatory characteristic.

Steers should be selected and shown based only on their visual appearance because that is how they will be evaluated for classification. Remember that classifiers are asked to exercise their judgment. If your steer is classified out, it doesn't mean that the classifier or anyone else is accusing you of lying, cheating, or being unethical. Nor does it mean that the steer cannot be the breed you say it is. Look at breed classification as the first stage of judging. Don't be too upset if the classifier makes (or you think he or she has made) a mistake. It's all a matter of judgment.