

Breeding exceptional Boran genetics

In 2007, **Keith Peinke** and his father, **Kenneth**, established a Boran cattle herd. Today, their 30 Boran stud cows produce sought-after genetics. **Mike Burgess** reports.

The Peinke Ranch Boran (PRB) herd, situated on the 800ha Peinke Ranch near East London in the Eastern Cape, is owned by father-and-son team, Kenneth and Keith Peinke. Over the past few years, the Peinkes have produced Borans with exceptional genetics; a number of females have fetched over R100 000, while five Boran bulls were recently auctioned for R350 000. At the National Sale in July 2016, the Boran Cattle Breeders' Society named the PRB herd the second-most productive Boran stud herd with under 50 cows in South Africa.

"For small-scale farmers like us, it's a great achievement," says Keith.

"But there's a lot of room for improvement."

In 2007, the Peinkes sold their herd of 150 commercial Bonsmara x Brahman cattle and set about establishing a Boran stud, and a Beefmaster x Boran commercial herd, after conducting detailed research on the best beef cattle breeds in the East London region.

In June 2007, Kenneth and Keith attended the prestigious Circle C and Keta Boran auction, where they acquired a bull and three open heifers at a cost of R500 000.

A few months later, Kenneth and Keith bought another Boran bull, this time for the commercial herd, and a cow from Simon Hodgson's Boran Genetics in KwaZulu-Natal.



BREEDING

Embryo flushing and transfer have been critical components in the development of the PRB herd. The process involves the artificial insemination of elite cows and heifers, called 'donors'. Donors receive hormonal treatment, which allows them to hyperovulate. Seven days after insemination, the embryos are 'flushed', from the donors' uteri and transferred into recipient cows that serve as surrogates.

"We only flush our original proven cows, most of which have direct genetic links to Kenya," Keith explains.

In 2009, they bought a cow, Shakira (BA 0530), from Adriaan Rall, former director of the Boran Breeders' Society. Shakira, born in 2005 to a Nairobi Show Champion heifer, has proven the most influential cow in the PRB herd.

"She's really the cow around which our entire herd has been built," says Keith. "She's the perfect example of a Boran cow."

Most of their 100 commercial Boran x Beefmaster cows are used as recipient animals in



ABOVE FROM TOP:

The influential Boran cow, Shakira (BA 0530), was bought from Adriaan Rall in 2009. Shakira still holds the SA record for the highest amount of embryos (51) produced in a single conventional flush in 2010. "The consistency and quality of her progeny makes her such a valuable cow," says Keith.

The Peinke Ranch Boran Stud bull, Sherlock (PRB 1106), was sold for R85 000 at the 2014 National Boran Sale to the Biewenga Boran Stud from Namibia. Keith believes the best age to market Boran bulls is between three and five years.

KEITH PEINKE

two breeding seasons from 1 November to 31 January, and from 1 May to 31 July. At the moment, the vast majority of the 70 stud calves born annually on Peinke Ranch are embryo calves (the result of flushing), and although Keith plans to phase out the embryo transfer programme in the next five years when his stud cows reach about 100, he says that he will always use Kenyan embryos where possible to broaden the stud's genetic foundation. "The genetic pool in the South African Boran herd is not very big," he says.

Commercial and stud cows and heifers in the natural breeding programme are put to the bull when they are between 18 and 22 months and at an average weight of 325kg. They calve down at 30 months at an average weight of 385kg to 400kg. The calving percentage of both herds is 90%, with average individual calf:cow weight ratios at weaning of 45% to 50% across both commercial and stud herds. Calves are weaned using nose rings, and weighed at 205 days, with commercial weaners achieving

average weights of 240kg for bull calves and 225kg for heifer calves. Boran weaners, including embryo calves, achieve average weights of 225kg for bull calves, and 210kg for heifer calves.

HEALTH AND NUTRITION

Peinke Ranch is characterised by virulent redwater, heartwater and gallsickness veld. Initially, Keith was concerned about bringing expensive Borans to Peinke Ranch and its heavy tick loads.

"By the grace of God, to date we've never lost a Boran on the farm to tick-borne diseases," he says. "This is also a testimony to the abilities of the breed."

Commercial and stud animals are inoculated twice every summer with Ivomec Gold, and dipped with Ectoban every three to four weeks in summer and every six weeks in winter. While Keith trusts that his purebred Borans can cope with less dipping, he adheres to this programme because of the damage that ticks can inflict on udders. However, calves are dipped only post-weaning to ensure the continued development of the herd's immunity.

The ranch is characterised by old pineapple lands, natural bush and toxic plants, including inkberry and lantana. The herd receives a lick of 150g to 250g per day, depending on the season; this comprises lime sulphur (which curbs the effects of plant poisoning) protein, energy, phosphate and salt. The amount



ABOVE: The Peinke family, from left: Kenneth, Marlene, Korban, Karen, Keith.

BELOW: The Peinke Ranch Boran cow, Faith (PRB 1208), with her bull calf (PRB1630), which weighed an astonishing 235kg at 150 days. These two animals will be available at the 2016 Vastrap Sale in Ladybrand.

of lick, which includes a fertility pack of vitamins and minerals, is adjusted in winter. The lick is also given to cows during flushing. Weaners, which are separated from their mothers at about eight months, are allowed to strip-graze 5ha brazseed for two to three months, with a maintenance lick, before being returned to the veld. All weaners are then marketed, while selected Borans undergo further selection at 12, 18 and 24 months. Bulls selected for auctions receive 1% of their body weight in feed per day for about 120 days before the auction. The goal is to ensure that a three-year-old bull weighs between 650kg and 700kg, and a bull between 42 and 48 months weighs around 800kg before being marketed. Keith says it is critical that bulls maintain their fitness during this period, and they are therefore walked 3km daily. "This ensures the bulls' fitness is where it needs to be, and it brings out the muscling as well."

EXCEPTIONAL GENETICS

Peinke Borans are marketed at the National Boran Sale in Parys (one bull and female), the Vastrap Sale of Quentin and Marisa de Bruyn near Ladybrand (one bull and four females), and the Pioneer Boran Sale in Grahamstown (two to three bulls and up to 10 commercial females). A number of Boran bulls and Boran stud/commercial

females are also sold off the farm during the year to farmers from the former Transkei.

The PRB herd's performance at auctions speaks for itself, having achieved the best average price at the 2016 National Sale, and the second-best average price at the 2014 and 2015 National Sales. Top prices include R120 000 for a cow and calf at the 2016 National Sale, R110 000 for an open heifer at the 2014 Vastrap Sale and R85 000 for a bull at the 2014 National Sale.

Keith believes the demand for PRB genetics is linked to the outstanding quality of foundation cows such as Shakira. "Having rare dam lines makes for high genetic value," he says.

He adds that he is always willing to share the PRB's exceptional genetics, as the best advertisement for his Borans is their proven ability to add value to other stud and commercial herds. "The animals we sell are the top 3% of our herd. We're willing to sell and share the best," he says. "The best way to judge the performance of your herd is to get positive feedback from breeders, and we've had only good feedback."

• Phone Keith Peinke on 084 941 1341 or email him at peinkeranch@vodamail.co.za.
• Phone the Boran Cattle Breeders' Society of SA on 051 410 0951, or email hester@studbook.co.za or christine@studbook.co.za. For more information, visit boran.org.za.