

First-rate eating quality

Speckles score top MSA grades

BY MATT SHERRINGTON

THE advantages of including Speckle Park in a commercial breeding enterprise were boldly underlined through the Meat Standards Australia (MSA) results achieved by Minnamurra Pastoral Company earlier this year.

General manager for the Coolah, New South Wales-based business, Dennis Power said they fed 600 milk and two-tooth light weight Speckle/Angus-cross steers for 150 days when the season moved against Minnamurra early in 2024.

The post-kill data that the company received showed that 410 of these steers achieved across-the-board well above national average results for carcase weight, marbling and eating quality.

The kills, which took place on April 16, May 15, and May 28 saw these crossbred steers average 364kg carcase weight against the national and NSW averages of 330kg and 335kg respectively, while producing an average fat cover of 23mm.

They averaged 3.03 for marbling and scored 63.83 on the 2021 to 2023 financial year national MSA index. This index score placed these steers above the top 25pc range nationally (61.18) and in NSW (62.03).

The lowest graded Minnamurra steer scored 58 on the index, which still placed it within the top 50 per cent



Minnamurra Pastoral Company achieved excellent carcase results with Speckle Park/Angus-cross steers earlier this year. Picture supplied.



The Minnamurra steers averaged 3.03 for marbling and scored 63.83 on the MSA index, placing them above the top 25pc range nationally. Picture supplied

nationally, while 10 steers scored 70, which placed them in the top one per cent nationally and within NSW.

These Speckle Park/Angus-cross steers achieved an ossification score of 151 against the standard of 180 nationally and 170 in NSW. They also averaged an MSA marble score of 530 against the standards of 370 across the nation and 400 in NSW.

"Over the last 12 months we've also had to custom feed more than 1500 head

in feedlots due to dry conditions impacting our ability to finish on grass," Mr Power said.

"A recent kill in July of a load of Speckle Park-cross yearlings, which entered the feedlot at less than desirable weights in a large mixed pen during the cold winter months, illustrated the flexibility that Speckle Park crossbreeding affords us.

"They entered the feedlot at an average of 345kg, and after 103 days, exited



The hybrid vigour in the Speckle Park is providing a productive edge that translates into an extra 3 to 5 per cent meat yield over straight Angus. Picture supplied

on July 22 at 548kg for a respectable 1.96kg average daily gain. The carcasses were impressive, given that they were from very ordinary cattle with 95pc meeting MSA grading."

Tamworth-based livestock consultant Andrew Hosken said as Australia's cattle markets change, develop, and expand MSA grading is paramount for a producer's success.

"It has become common to see MSA-graded cows

commanding 100c/kg higher rates than non-grading bod-ies. It is a similar story across all types," Mr Hosken said.

He looked back over Minnamurra's kill data from more than 500 Speckle Park/crossbred cull cows in wet and dry seasons, off grass only, and from different abattoirs.

"The average across this large sample of slaughter cows was 12.7mm fat cover, with 73pc grading MSA, to an average index of 53.1pc.

Mr Hosken said 149 Minnamurra Speckle Park-cross long grass fed non-station mated cows, which had all reared a calf, were killed a fortnight ago.

"These crossbred cows averaged 314kg carcase weight with 19mm of a fat cover. In all 93pc graded MSA and returned great premiums.

"The Speckle cross's well-documented foraging ability in dry paddocks during tough conditions ensures that they hold their condition longer, which therefore contributes to their overall success."

Wingham Beef Exports livestock manager Stephen Moy said the company had killed Minnamurra cattle for many years.

"The quality of carcase has always proven of a high standard. Over the last few years, we've killed a higher number of Speckle Park-cross cattle than previously, both young and old grass fed and also longer grain fed.

"The Minnamurra cattle have proven to have higher than expected marbling, with grain fed cattle up to MSA 8 and many others at MSA 3 to 4-plus. Cows and young cattle have consistently met high MSA grading."

Company director David Reid said feedback trials have proved the effectiveness of Speckle Park/Angus-cross.

"The resulting hybrid vigour is providing a productive edge that translates into an extra 3 to 5pc meat yield over straight Angus," Mr Reid said.

"More importantly from the consumers' point of view, the Speckle Park has a breed-unique trait of high intramuscular fat without excess marbling, creating a highly flavoursome, tender and healthy meat to eat."

SIGNATURE SPECKLE PARK ADVERTISING FEATURE

Potter family's onto a winner

BY MATT SHERRINGTON

A DECADE-PLUS investment in the Speckle Park breed has proven its worth for the families involved in New South Wales-based Ron Potter Farms Pty Ltd.

The family-owned business is run by Chris and Julie Potter, David and Julie Storrer, Will and Elle Storrer, and Clint and Mel Austin, on properties in Hillston: Ballyrogan, Mountain Creek, Red Lagoon, and Coolabah, and to the north-east in Cassilis on Darkwood and Ginghi.

To increase the meat yield and eating quality of the article they produce, Mr Potter began crossing Speckle Park bulls over Angus females more than a decade ago.

"The crossbred heifers are easy to handle, have great maternal instincts, and produce plenty of milk. When we pull the calves off their mothers at weaning we're already on the front foot due to the terrific job they do with their young. The crossbred progeny have good carcass traits, structure, and valuable hybrid vigour. The Speckle Park/Angus-cross has worked out well. I've been in cattle my entire life and the Speckle Park breed is the best I've seen," he said.

The Potters join for 70 days from October, and as they have plentiful feed and a full moisture profile in their soil they have the luxury of fattening the crossbred store cattle before selling them.

"We won't have to do an-



Family-owned Ron Potter Farms introduced Speckle Park bulls over their Angus breeders more than a decade ago, with pleasing results having ensued. Picture supplied

anything drastic for a while. We'll continue to cull cows at weaning if they come in empty. At preg-testing we've achieved a 92 per cent fertility rate for some time, though we'll hopefully be able to lift that number even higher."

The country on the Hillston properties consists of red soils sown to pastures and cereal crops, and irrigated alluvial clay soils along the Lachlan River. The Cassilis properties consist mainly of undulating country.

The business includes a 1000-head feedlot, where the cattle are finished dependent on cost and availability.

"Lately we've been selling over the hooks at 600kg-plus, otherwise they're sold

to other feedlots or via the saleyards in the mid-450kg range. If the cost adds up, we aren't afraid of going into the feedlot and finishing the steers. The feedlot provides us with marketing flexibility."

The Potters have been purchasing Speckle Park bulls from Minnamurra Pastoral Company for as long as they've utilised the breed. They have close to 20 Minnamurra bulls in their paddocks at present.

"The Minnamurra bulls have terrific structure, meat, and muscling, they yield well and possess a quiet disposition. The Minnamurra Speckle Park article is a product that's gaining popularity so it's quite exciting to have



Chris Potter, who has worked in cattle his entire life, said the Speckle Park breed is the best he has seen. Picture supplied

those genetics in our herd."

Mr Potter said it had been "a pleasure" dealing with Minnamurra director David Reid and general manager Dennis Power.

"We like that Minnamurra's vision is on the Speckle

Park breed and their cattle operation. David and Dennis are always happy to share their knowledge with us. Letting us look at all aspects of the breed provides us with a lot of confidence in what they're doing."

Mr Potter said attending the Minnamurra sale is an annual highlight.

"The sale is conducted undercover so we get to have a really good look at the bulls, which are always well presented. Being able to network and socialise with the Minnamurra staff, sale agents, and our fellow buyers is another big plus."

He said at this year's sale they'll be looking to purchase bulls with excellent structure, length, and EBVs.

"We're looking to tighten the gestation period of our cows to condense our calving period so we'll be looking for bulls fit for this purpose."

Mr Potter said their goal is to improve the herd with the best genetics and management tools available.

"We see the Speckle Park as being a major part of this advancement. The future of the breed looks bright. It's a breed that everyone is starting to talk about and the results coming through support this interest. It's nice to be onto a winner."

Mr Potter said despite the Bureau of Meteorology forecasts, which predicted dry times for the region, it has turned out to be a good year.

"We received 130mm in May, alone, and the falls had been consistent from then until about a fortnight ago. Our crops and pastures are doing well, making our livestock look good. We have the weaners on oats and lick to maximise their growth."

Minnamurra Speckle Park

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