

# THE HORMONAL MAIL

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CLASSIC LIVESTOCK MANAGEMENT SERVICES.

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MANAGEMENT SERVICES

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## EDITORIAL

Welcome to 2017 and on behalf of our company, I would like to wish you all the best for the coming year. No doubt it will have its usual highs and lows and probably a few that we are not expecting. For many producers, especially in Australia, we are experiencing some of the better returns for cattle that we have had in our lifetimes. No doubt that will change with time, but I hope you can all take advantage of the market now while the opportunity exists. Having said that, I empathise with those producers who have been experiencing drought conditions and are looking at the daunting prospect of having to pay higher prices to restock when it does rain.

Mother Nature appears to have no favourites and if our lives are tied to the land then we will experience all the gifts and the vagaries that she has to offer. I'm a great believer in working as closely as possible with her rather than other ways. I think history shows us that often when we interrupt nature's pattern the consequences can be diabolical and usually take a considerable time to fully manifest the result. We have all seen the consequences of introducing a foreign species to control a so called local pest and soon the introduced predator has taken over and negatively influenced other native species further down the food chain. The introduction of the cane toad, rabbits, foxes etc. into Australia are typical examples.

There are so many other examples in other aspects of agriculture, in particular, where we have questioned and contradicted nature's wisdom and paid the price. I have written of some of these in our book and in earlier newsletters. I include things like the impact of dairy factories going from just processing cream to processing both milk and cream and changing their paying system from quality (butterfat) to quantity. In the beef industry it includes the impact of the demand by feedlots for big fast growing, masculine type animals that has followed on into our females. It saw the introduction of cattle bred for draught activities being used for meat. The impact of these changes took several generations to impact on the industry and we are now starting to pay the price for those decisions, though it is gratifying to see more producers realising what has happened and doing something about it.

The impact of chemicals into farm practices after the second world war has only just started to have an impact on human health in recent years.

## **WHAT'S (BEEN) HAPPENING**

\* We had a couple of interesting trips to NSW in Sep/Oct. and avoided most of the flooding that was occurring at the time. Several places we went to had recorded their highest rainfall on record by October. Whilst it was very wet and muddy at the time, it will guaranteed a very good start to the grass growing season and therefore plenty of contented cattle.

\*Our annual meeting at Tallangatta, Vic. in October was very successful and as usual provided plenty of positive discussion. Whilst no major changes to our current method of operation were introduced, the general consensus was that we keep working along a similar path to that which we have been going by promoting and explaining the system to as many producers as we can, given our limited resources. We are still confident that what we are offering will make a significant contribution to the future of the beef industry as more and more people become familiar with it and work out how they can apply it to their own enterprise.

\* The biggest disappointment expressed at the meeting was around the lack of acceptance of the ultra sound method of measuring bone shape. Despite a lot of initial interest, both on an individual basis by producers and at field days etc., we have not had anyone actually use it as yet and so we are considering selling it and focusing on other areas of interest that we believe will make important contributions to our business in the future.

\*After discussions at our recent annual meeting, we are also considering running a 2 day conference later this year for all who are interested in our system. The event would likely feature at least 2 key note speakers on closely related industry matters as well as time spent working with cattle and updating attendees on our latest developments. We are also considering asking commercial businesses who provide services compatible with our production system to advertise their products with stands at the venue and possibly demonstrate their products.

\*I will be travelling to Tasmania between Christmas and New Year mainly for family commitments, but am also catching up with a couple of producers who have expressed an interest in our system. On our return to Victoria

during the first week in January, we will be heading to the Western Districts to check out some bulls. We may also hold a field day while we are there. I will also be travelling to Northern NSW and to Central Qld. over the next three months.

\* We are still very keen to hold more field days in localised areas over the next few months so if you would like one in your area, please let myself, Albert Hancock (0267334666) or other company directors know and we will get it under way.

\*The Coodardie Brahman Stud is offering up to 100 of their females for sale over the next few weeks. The Coodardie stud is based on Cherokee bloodlines and has been a closed herd pretty much for all the 40 years the O'Brien's have been breeding.

\*We remain keen to get some marketing of graded cattle going and are happy to advertise for any of our clients here in the newsletter.

\*We also have breeders interested in purchasing well-muscled Red Poll, Angus and Red Brahman bulls.

### **\* 2017 COURSES**

We are planning at least two more 5 day courses in 2017 provided that the interest is there for people to attend. Ideally, we need around 10 people to attend to make the course viable. The challenge is to find dates that suit most people who would like to attend and venues that are available at the time. I guess it will be impossible to find a time that will suit everyone. The first one is planned for the Armidale area again from Feb 26 – March 2<sup>nd</sup>. Jason and Naomi Simmons have kindly agreed to allow us to use their on farm facilities for the Armidale course. We will also have some night sessions in Armidale.

\*The second course we are planning will be held in Clermont from the 3<sup>rd</sup>. to the 7<sup>th</sup>. April. Again the challenge was to find a time that would suit most people. It will be held at the Clermont Showground and sale yards where there are some excellent facilities.

\* There will be further information about the upcoming courses distributed early in the New Year. We will be distributing a questionnaire early next year asking for feedback in regard to what type of course would suit most people the best around factors such as time structuring i.e. no. of days etc., content, night sessions etc. We would

like to be as flexible as possible in our future planning and would welcome and appreciate any input that you can provide for us. The gift of your time to do this is most appreciated.

## **BREED OF THE QUARTER**

### **TARENDAISE**

The Tarentaise cattle of today are descendants from the domestic cattle of the Tarantaise Valley in the Savoie region of France, which for many thousands of years was very isolated and difficult to access. The Tarantaise Valley, apart from being isolated, is also situated at a high altitude with very steep slopes covered with rough forage. This breed has now been exported throughout the world and is more popular in environments similar to its original one.

Because of their isolation for many thousands of years, they developed a tight gene pool and this has come to the fore with their popularity as a cross breeder in familiar terrains.

They are a dual-purpose breed also bred for the beauty of their markings and their docile demeanor. Their coat is usually of a tan color with darkening around the eyes and sometimes on the neck of the bulls. The color of their nose, eye surrounds, udder and hooves is black. The dark pigmentation offers good protection from sun-related disorders. The bulls on average weight about 725 to 950 kg. and average body weight of the cows is about 400 to 590 kg. Both polled and horned versions of this breed are found.

The main characteristics of the breed include:

- \*Medium in size
- \*Early Puberty
- \* Good Pelvic Size – calving ease
- \* Strong Maternal Traits
- \* Production Efficiency – especially for milk
- \* Higher Fertility
- \* Female Efficiency
- \* High level of unassisted calving at two years and on schedule at three years
- \* Optimum milk production with udder and teat conformation for easy feeding.

They are used in France today to produce Beaufort, a Gruyere-type cheese with a distinct flavor that comes from the high alpine villages of the Tarentaise valley.

Tarentaise cattle were originally bred as a dairy breed for milk production. But now they are raised as a dual purpose animal and kept for both milk and meat production.



This breed is distinctive for its abundant muscling in the hip region, and they are exceptionally long from hooks to pins. Because of its habitat, it was naturally selected for muscling, hardiness and adaptability in order for them to live under range conditions in the French Alps. Their steep environment has led to them having the remarkable natural muscling and marbling that is one of their main characteristics and is also responsible for their very robust cardiovascular system.

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### **SALEABLE MEAT YIELD – IS THE PENNY (DOLLAR) FINALLY DROPPING FOR THE POWERS THAT BE.**

It was interesting to read recently that the industry is finally developing and trialling a scanner, called a Dual Energy X-ray Absorptiometry that can identify meat from fat and bone in a carcass. This will hopefully eventually enable producers to be paid for the actual amount of meat on each carcass and not have to rely on the estimate of buyers and assessors who have historically and understandably always assessed the meat to bone percentage very much on the conservative side in favour of processors and buyers. The MLA plan is for these machines to start to be trialled for beef in 2017.

The plan is then for them to be installed in all abattoirs eventually. Those processors that don't install these measuring devices will not be in the market if it is adopted generally throughout the industry. Producers are only going to supply processors who pay them for

the meat they really produce. We can only remain hopeful that when the new system is introduced, it will not be over complicated and difficult to implement, especially to the stage where it turns people off.

We have been long advocating for this change and for those breeders that have been focusing on producing meat rather than large quantities of bone, they will finally be rewarded for their foresight and persistence.

We have had many producers tell us they are not interested in what they produce in terms of meat or bone because you get paid for them both at the same rate. What those producers don't understand is that the buyers have already factored in a percentage for bone on each animal before payment and the price is adjusted accordingly overall.

We now have many years of experience in relating our grading system to saleable meat yield and are confident that those breeders that have been selecting breeders based on the Classic system will be a step ahead of everyone else when it comes to taking advantage of the new system of payment on saleable meat yield when it comes into commission.

Our experience shows that cattle that grade 4 or 5 in our system will usually yield only in the high 60%, what the buyers usually use for their benchmark when buying. An animal that grades 3.5 on our system will usually from yield from 70 – 74%, a grade 3 will yield in the 75 – 78%, a grade 2.5 will grade from 78 – 80%, a 2 from 80 – 82% and a 1 anything over that. This means that generally speaking at least, the more tender the meat, the higher will be the meat to bone ratio.

It is a simple task of doing the mathematics to see how much better off you will be if you are selling grade 3 cattle for example. The industry allow in the range of 67% as an average bone out percentage so if you have a line of grade 3 cattle, they will be worth around 8 – 10% more to you if you are paid on saleable meat yield. On a 200 kg. carcass worth \$6.00 that would mean  $200 \times 6$  divided by 67% equals \$804.00 as against a 200 kg. carcass worth \$6.00 -  $200 \times 6$  divided by 75% equals \$900.00. So that beast is worth an extra \$100.00 approx. at basically no cost to the producer apart from our \$5.00 evaluation fee to identify more animals in your herd to use as breeders to ensure that you keep producing high meat yielding cattle.

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## **MILK GRADING FEATHERS**

In the last newsletter, we considered the hair pattern on cattle called the escutcheon. In this newsletter, I would like to discuss some of the other indicators that occur in or around the escutcheon and also “fine tune” the message that the escutcheon gives us. I realise that this method of “reading” the milk and butterfat production of your cows can take a while to grasp, but I hope you will persevere because the information will provide a good indication of the milk production potential of your herd.

This method of identification will be of significant importance for both dairy and beef breeders because of the value of having cows that can produce a sustainable quantity of quality milk and bulls whose heifers are going to be consistent, high quality producers.

There is no doubt in our minds after the amount of research we have done with cattle that there is a direct correlation between meat and milk quality. We have already been able to substantiate that with the tests we did for A2 milk on cattle that we had CLMS graded for meat tenderness.

So the following is an idea of other indicators associated with the escutcheon and milk production.

### **Milk Veins.**

- These run along the flank to beyond the naval and end near the forelegs.
- In the higher grades of cows, the ends branch out into a network of veins.
- These vessels don't always run straight and can be bi-furcated.
- In higher grades of cows where the veins disappear into the animal, e.g. near the naval area and just in front of the udder, the pits are larger and deeper. You can feel for and find these positions of entry when evaluating to assist in determining the animal's milk production capacity.
- The size and arrangement of the veins is not necessarily an indication of a cow's milk producing ability like the vein entry positions are.

## The Escutcheon.

The following will revise our notes on the escutcheon in the last newsletter.

- The escutcheon indicators or classes that Guenon identified are ten in number.
- The escutcheon is formed by a reversal of the direction of the hair that extends from the centre or just in front of the teats to the level of the upper extremity of the vulva. It extends in width from at least the middle of one thigh to the middle of the other and then cuts down just above the hocks to the udder.
- Hair influenced by the escutcheon is shorter, finer, softer and silkier and has an appearance of being initially freshly shaven.
- The difference in the shade and lustre of the escutcheon and the hair surrounding it provides further indication of the level of activity and thus productivity.
- It must be added that these indicators need to be measured against the average of the breed being graded.
- Other areas where the escutcheon can be seen are on the under belly, towards the navel and on the udder between the haunches.
- The form or pattern of the escutcheon indicates the class or grade that the cow is in and the surface area covered denotes milk quantity.
- Fineness of the hair and the colour of the skin is an indicator of the quality of the milk.
- The escutcheon is the sole indicator of the internal capacity of the udder. A large escutcheon equals a large quantity of milk.
- Cows with a large escutcheon, fine hair and a yellowish skin colour with small scales of fatty substance on the inside and lower parts of the thigh, in the tail switch and in the ear will have milk that has a high butterfat yield.
- When the udder has an elastic feel and has short, furry hair the milk will be rich.
- When the escutcheon is sleek, white and covered with long, sparse hair, the cow will give thin, serous (watery) milk.
- The most accurate appraisal can be made on a cow in full milk from the rear as well as by brushing the hair downwards which brings out its form and dimension.

- There are three main terms to become familiar with in this method of evaluation. These are:
  - \***Escutcheon**
  - \***Ascending Feathers**
  - \***Descending Feathers**
- Another well used term is “Alternates”. This refers to cows that go dry quickly after they become pregnant.
- The opposite of these are called “Free cows”, which milk throughout the lactation.

## Variations and Precautions.

Our aim in modifying this system is to make it easier to learn, more user friendly and yet still effective in identifying milk yield and quality. To do this we have removed a lot of the repetitive features that appear in each order of Guenon’s different classes. However, there are some important factors that may not be emphasised in our interpretation and the following highlights these. We ask that you are always aware of these when grading.

1. Variations do occur and precautions need to be taken. Due consideration needs to be given to these as part of the evaluation process. They are shown by various “Feathers” or “epis” that are similar in characteristics to an ear of wheat. They are indicated by their:
  - Form
  - Character
  - Situation
  - Size.All feathers that encroach on the escutcheon will lessen to some degree or other, its favourable indications.  
**The exceptions to these are small “oval feathers”.**
2. Another special kind of feather is formed by upward growing hair which is similar to the escutcheon and is situated to the right and left of the vulva. Its importance varies with its size and figure. This feather distinguishes free cows from alternates.
3. Another consideration is the result of crossing different classes which also modifies the patterns of the escutcheon and feathers.

4. All variations in the hair of the escutcheon are feathers. This is an irregularity that will influence the secretion of milk. The size of the feather will indicate how much affect it will have.
5. Just prior to calving, the escutcheon and feathers will enlarge and expand so this is not the time to judge these animals.
6. In first and second class cows, the escutcheon is true and well defined and rarely invaded by feathers other than the oval feathers. When the escutcheon has feathers of upward or downward growing hair, like that in alternates, there will be some degeneration, although the quantity of milk will remain the same, the lactation period will be shorter. The nature of the feathers will indicate how significant the effect will be.
7. If the escutcheon is small, but has oval feathers and a fineness of hair similar to the first class cows, it means she will give less milk, but milk longer into her pregnancy.
8. When descending hair replaces ascending hair, it means deterioration proportionate to the size of the notches in the feathers. Similarly, breaks in the feathers also affect the quantity and persistence of milk.

## FEATHERS

- Ascending feathers are seen as mere traces in the form of furrows that cut through the descending hair. They form more or less elongated figures either side of the vulva and below it.
- Descending feathers form designs on the upward hair of the escutcheon in various forms. This occurs most predominately in the oval feather. They are mostly situated at the lower part of the udder just above the hind teats.
- There are five feathers situated on the escutcheon and two outside it. Their significance and importance is indicated by the extent, position and the direction of their hair.

### 1. OVAL FEATHER:

- This feather is found inside the escutcheon.
- It is situated on either or both sides of the back of the udder.

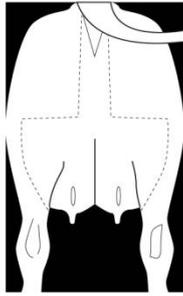
- It is just above the hind teats, oval in shape and with ascending hair as opposed to the descending hair of the escutcheon.
- It has a shinier tint and a whiter lustre than the escutcheon.
- If these feathers are small, regular in shape with very fine hair, it indicates high quality milk. Quality deteriorates as feathers get larger, misshapen and the hair coarser.
- As a general rule, all cows in the two higher grades will have this feather.
- These feathers can be found in any class and are not an important indicator of quantity.

### 2. BUTTOCK FEATHER:

- This feather is found outside the escutcheon on the buttock of the animal to the right and left of the vulva to which it adheres somewhat at the top.
- It has ascending hair and is usually 5 – 7 cm. long and a centimetre in width.
- When this feather is of these proportions and covered with fine silky hair, it indicates a continuance of milk throughout the pregnancy.
- If the feather is larger than this and covered with coarse, bristling hair, it indicates a cessation of milk flow during gestation and indicates inferiority.
- Found on all but the top grade of cows.

### 3. BABINE FEATHER:

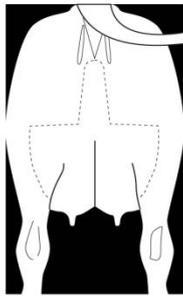
- Usually only found in the first two grades of cows and is in the escutcheon.
- This feather starts at the vulva and forms a vertical streak to the right or left, usually left and below the vulva and adhering to the vulva at its upper tip.
- It is formed of descending hair and often found on both sides at once.
- It has a shinier or whiter tint than the ascending hair of the escutcheon.
- It is elongated and size varies from 4 – 5 cm. in length to 5 – 6 mm. in width.
- The presence of this feather is a mark of degeneration and a falling off of milk. The larger it is and the coarser the hair the more pronounced the falling off of production will be.



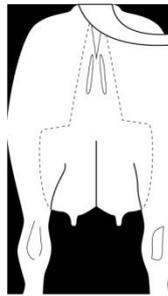
1 - OVAL FEATHER  
HIGH QUALITY MILK



1 - OVAL FEATHER  
LOW QUALITY MILK



2 - BUTTOCK FEATHER



3 - BABINE FEATHER

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#### 4. VULVOUS FEATHER:

- This is only found in the first grade animals.
- It is situated in the escutcheon and just below the vulva, the lower part of which it encloses.
- It is usually round at the lower part, but is sometimes forked.
- It is usually 2 cm. in length and 3 cm. wide.
- It has a whitish gloss and the hair is descending.
- It indicates a lower than average milk yield for the grade and especially when it is larger than the above dimensions with coarse, sparse hair.

#### 5. ALTERNATE FEATHER:

- Has an egg shape that is about 10 cm. in length and 5 – 8 cm. in width.
- Found in the escutcheon about 20 cm. below the vulva with descending hair.

- Has a whiter gloss than the escutcheon which in this area has a rosy tint.
- It is found only in the first grade cows and denotes a falling off of milk straight after the cow becomes pregnant.
- The falling off is less if the feather is smaller but it always increases as the pregnancy advances.

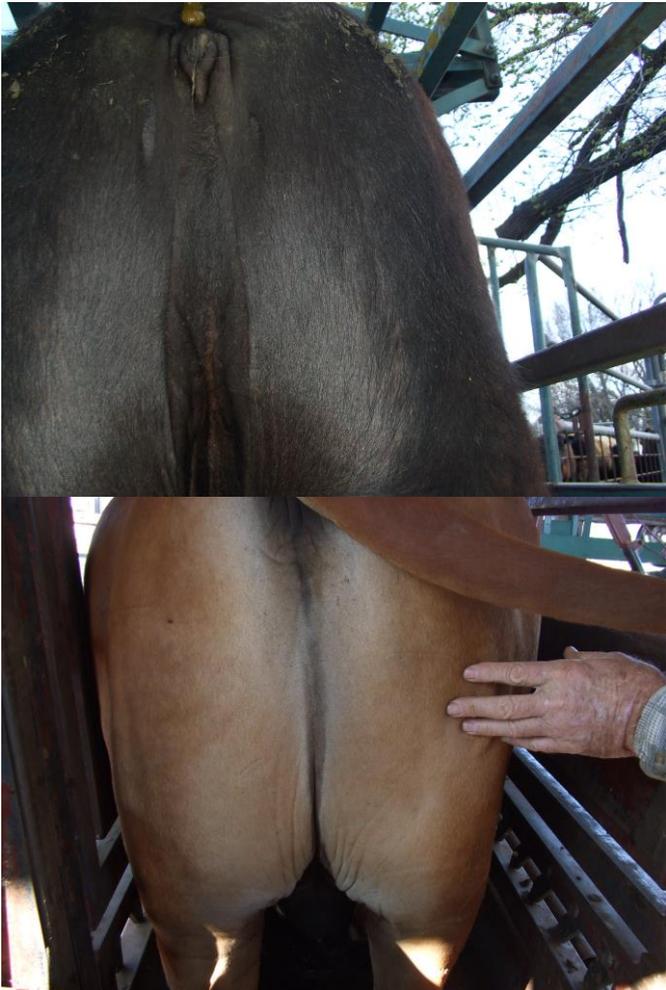
#### 6. THIGH FEATHER:

- Usually found on the interior surface of the lower thighs and encroaches into the escutcheon with descending hair forming a re-entering angle with a point, which, whether it is sharp or rounded, encroaches onto the udder.
- Can be found on both thighs but usually only on the right one.
- It has whiter hair than the ascending hair of the escutcheon that indicates a defect in the secretion of the mammary glands and a lessening of yield proportionate to its size.
- It can be found in all grades but more commonly in the three lower grades.
- The amount that this feather encroaches onto the escutcheon must be taken into consideration when estimating the yield of milk because it will lower the yield and grade of the cow.

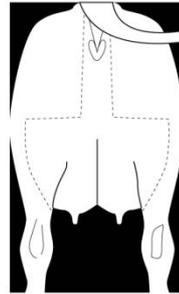
#### 7. DART FEATHER:

- This feather has ascending hair that is soft and silky.
- It resembles a dart or arrow with the tip pointing downward about 10 cm. above the escutcheon that reaches up to the vulva to which it is attached by a vertical line along the juncture of the buttocks.
- Its widest point is at the orifice of the vulva and is usually about 2 cm.
- It is one of the rarest of the feathers.
- It is only seen in those classes where the escutcheon doesn't reach the vulva.
- It indicates quantity and persistence of milk.

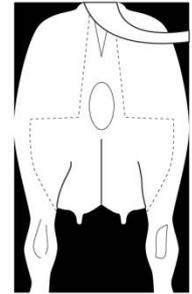
BUTTOCK FEATHERS



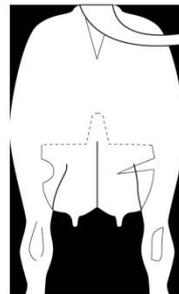
BULL ESCUTCHEON



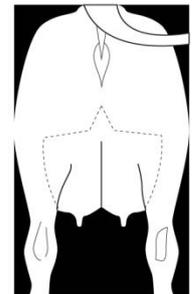
4 - VULVOUS FEATHER



5 - ALTERNATE FEATHER



6 - THIGH FEATHER



7 - DART FEATHER

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 I would welcome any feedback from you on any subject that is discussed in this newsletter. I have had some feedback over the time we have been publishing it and it is most appreciated and helpful. Please keep the feedback and comments coming.  
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Thank you for your continued interest in our newsletters, our website and our book. Please feel free to order one of our books and become familiar with the CLMS system and the directions we are taking in the overall scheme of animal and food production for human consumption  
**PLEASE FEEL FREE TO CONTACT US ABOUT ANY ITEMS IN THIS NEWSLETTER, ON OUR WEBSITE OR IN OUR BOOK. WE WELCOME PRODUCER INPUT AND INTEREST AND WANT TO INVOLVE YOU IN WHAT WE ARE DOING.**  
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**ESCUTCHEONS**



NOTE LARGER OVAL FEATHERS ON RIGHT