

Bringing a New Bull Home



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Buying a bull is an investment. This investment should contribute to the genetics and sale income of your herd for many years. If you are to get the most from your new bull, it pays to look after him well, especially in the first season of use. This report discusses management strategies to maximise the productive life of your bulls.

At the sale

It is important to consider many facets when buying bulls including growth, fertility, carcase value structural soundness and temperament. When you go to a sale, inspect the bulls in the yards or pens and note any unusual behaviour or activity. Beware of bulls that are continually pushing to the centre of a mob, running around, unreasonably nervous, aggressive or excited. Note this behaviour in the sale catalogue and don't bid on these bulls.

During the auction, the behaviour of some bulls may change. Some bulls that are quiet in the yard or paddock may not like the pressure and noise of the auction and become excited. Others that were excited before often get much worse in the sale ring. Behaviour in the yard or pen prior to the sale is a much better guide to temperament than behaviour shown in the sale ring.

After the sale

At auction sales, remember that possession is yours after the fall of the hammer. So, careful treatment of animals from that point on is important. Insurance against loss in transit, accidental loss of use or infertility is sometimes provided by vendors. Where it is not it is worth considering insurance to cover transport and the first three to six months of use. Complete the delivery instructions supplied by the vendor or agent. Before you take delivery of your new bull, ask what health treatments he has received. For example, has he been vaccinated with 5-in-1? How often? When was it last done? Has he been vaccinated for Vibriosis? Leptospirosis? Three-day sickness? Knowing what has been done can reduce the need for further health treatments.

If you take the bull home yourself, consider the following:

- Handle him quietly at all times, no dogs, no buzzers. Talk to the bull and give him time and room to move.
- If you buy bulls from different vendors, you should separate them on the truck.
- Make sure that the truck floor is covered with sand, sawdust or a floor grid to reduce the risk of bulls being injured or going down in transit.
- If you can arrange it, put a few quiet cows or steers on the truck with the bull and let them run with the bull in a yard for a while before loading and after unloading.
- Unload and reload during the trip as little as possible. If necessary, rest with water and feed. Treat bulls kindly — your impatience or nervousness is easily transmitted to an animal unfamiliar to you and unsure of his environment.
- If buying bulls from interstate, organise any necessary health tests before leaving and work out if any other requirements must be met before cattle can come into your state (for example, dipping for ticks or testing for Johne's Disease).

When you use a professional carrier:

- Make sure the carrier knows which bulls can be mixed together.
- Discuss resting procedures for long trips, expected delivery time, truck condition and quiet handling.
- Give the bull's ear tag and brand numbers to the carrier and get the carrier's phone number.

In buying bulls from far away, you may have to fit in with other delivery arrangements to reduce cost. You should make it clear how you want your bulls handled.

Arrival

New bull buyers are often concerned about the apparent bad temperament of a bull that seemed quiet enough when purchased. Bulls can become upset and excited in the sale and delivery process. They are subjected to strange yards, different noises, loss of their mates, different people, different handling methods, trucking, unloading, new paddocks and different water and feed. This can upset animals which are normally very quiet.

When the bull arrives home, unload him at the yards into a group of house cows, steers or herd cows. Never jump the bull from the back of a truck into a paddock. Bulls from different origins should be put into separate yards with other cattle, steers or cows, for company.

Provide hay and water, then leave the bull alone until the next day, before giving routine health treatments.

Consult with your veterinarian and draw up a policy for treating bulls on arrival and then annually.

For example, if they have not been treated before, all bulls should be drenched for worms, fluke if necessary, treated for lice and vaccinated with:

- 5-in-1 vaccine
- vibriosis vaccine
- leptospirosis vaccine in areas where it exists
- three-day sickness vaccine in areas where it can cause problems
- tick fever vaccine for bulls introduced into tick areas

Give particular attention to preventing new bulls bringing vibriosis into a herd. Vibriosis, a sexually transmitted disease, causes infertility and abortions and is most commonly introduced to a clean herd by an infected bull. Vaccinated bulls are free from vibriosis so vaccinating bulls against the disease should be a routine practice. Vaccination involves two injections, 4–6 weeks apart, at the time of introduction, and then a booster shot every year. Keep the bull away from any females that may come on heat until both initial vaccinations are completed.

When working bulls through the yards, handle them with care. Preferably work them with other cattle and do not use force unless absolutely necessary.

After administering routine health treatments, leave the bulls in the yards for the next day or two on feed and water to settle down with other stock for company. A bull's behaviour will determine how soon it can be moved out to paddocks.

Mating new bulls

Newly purchased young bulls should not be multiple joined with older herd bulls. They will not be allowed to work much and in

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keeping them away from the cows, the older, dominant bull will knock them around. Use new bulls in either single sire groups or with other young bulls their own age. If a number of young bulls are to be used together, run them together for a few weeks before joining starts. They sort out their pecking order quickly and have few problems later.

The Australian Association of Cattle Veterinarians (AACV) defines a normal, fertile bull as “expected to get 90% of 50 normal, cycling females pregnant within 9 weeks, and 60% of these should become pregnant in the first three weeks of joining”. This expectation would apply to 2 year old bulls, but not to younger bulls.

Yearling Bulls

In recent years the selling of yearling bulls has become more common. Don't overwork young bulls. Mating loads of only 25-30 females are recommended for yearling bulls.

Managing older herd bulls

Older working bulls also need special care before mating starts. They should be tested or checked annually well before the joining for physical soundness, testicle tone and serving ability. For older bulls a serving ability test is useful as it makes diagnosis of problems such as arthritis and lameness easier. All bulls to be used must be free moving, active and in good store condition. Working bulls may need supplementary feeding before the joining season to bring up condition.

All bulls should be drenched, treated for lice and vaccinated with 5-in-1 and for vibriosis, annually. They may also need leptospirosis and three-day sickness vaccinations in some areas.

During mating

- Check bulls at least twice each week for the first two months. Get up close to them and see each bull walk; check for swellings around the sheath and for lameness. Watch them work if possible and pay particular attention to any sign of abnormal serving problems like “corkscrew penis” or too many cows returning to heat.
- Have a spare bull or bulls available to replace any that break down. Replace any suspect bull immediately. If you have to replace a bull, get the bull checked by your vet. Sometimes prompt treatment for small problems can avoid culling. Vendors that provide guarantees on their bulls will usually require a veterinary certificate indicating the problem with the unsatisfactory bull.
- Rotate bulls in single sire groups to make sure that any bull infertility is covered. Single sire joining works well but it has risks. The bulls must be checked regularly and carefully or the bulls rotated every one or two cycles. If you need to record sire lines, it may pay to use similarly bred bulls in any rotation or this requirement is hard to achieve.
- Yearling bulls are still growing strongly, so tend to be leaner, carrying less body fat reserves. The condition of the yearling bulls is critical. If they drop below condition score 3 sperm production may be impaired. In extensive conditions with only average or poor quality feed, the joining season should be restricted to 6-8 weeks.

After mating

- Look after bulls. Feed them well.
- Pregnancy test females and cull infertile bulls.

Taking Bulls to Northern Australia

The environment in northern Australia offers special challenges for Angus bulls. Experience shows that properly handled, Angus bulls can adapt to the heat and extensive rangeland conditions giving good calf crops and productive working lives. The following suggestions are offered for those looking to use Angus bulls in northern areas:

- Buy bulls younger and take them north to acclimatize well before the breeding season starts. Yearling bulls have adapted well when given time to acclimatize but they need to be fed well enough to allow adequate growth before the mating season begins.
- Buy structurally sound bulls, preferably grass fed without excessive condition. These bulls will adapt quickly and suffer less setback when taken north.
- Use Angus bulls by themselves, don't mix them with older, fully grown bulls or mickeys. They will not get as many calves in mixed mating groups if the other bulls dominate simply because they are older and better adapted.
- After the mating season ends, pull the Angus bulls out and look after them in preparation for the following season. They may need a bit of better feed or supplement during the dry season.
- In “ticky” areas, “blood” the Angus bulls on arrival. Angus bulls may need more treatment for ticks and buffalo fly than Bos indicus bulls but no more so than other British Breeds.

There many of examples of successful crossbreeding with Angus in northern Australia. The crossbred calves are fast growing, mid maturing with excellent carcasses. The crossbred females are highly fertile and productive.

Bulls are a large investment for breeding herds and they have a major effect on herd fertility. A little time and attention to make sure they are fit, free from disease and actively working is well worthwhile.

Checklist For Bringing A New Bull Home

- Insurance
- Carrier Instructions
- Health Policy
- Settle In Properly
- Health Treatments
- Bull Management
- Annual Testing and Health Treatment
- Regular Checking
- Buy Bulls that Suit Your Needs
- Protect Your Investment

Further Information

Further information can be obtained from:
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