



Waldberg Drakensbergers have come a long way

By Izak Hofmeyr

The Waldberg Drakensberger herd has been in existence since 1890, when Udo Beneke's great-grandfather, Rudolph Beneke, worked as a transport driver in the Lüneburg district of Mpumalanga. He used black oxen to pull his wagon and until the day of his death maintained that they are the toughest oxen around.

The generations that followed also farmed with the herd – first grandfather Friedrich and his brother Helmut, then father Manfred and his brother Dieter. Today Waldberg is the second oldest Drakensberger stud in South Africa.

At one stage Dieter was forced to close down the stud, but Manfred continued with the commercial herd. Approximately six years ago Udo, who meanwhile had also joined the operation, decided to revive the Waldberg Drakensberger stud.

"Throughout all generations the stud and commercial herd were run side by side, with no difference between the quality of the cattle. This allowed me to confidently select and register some of my cows as stud animals, as they had been bred pure since the 1890s."

Adapting to harsh conditions

The key trait that sets their Drakensbergers apart amid the tough conditions of the



The most important trait that distinguishes the Drakensbergers of the difficult Lüneburg mountain areas from other cattle, is their adaptability and ability to utilise the entire farm's grazing.

Lüneburg mountains, says Udo, is their adaptability and ability to utilise the entire farm's grazing.

"I sometimes get anxious when I see where these cattle graze! They are not afraid of heights and graze right below the cliffs and on the steepest slopes. They utilise grazing that is difficult for other livestock to access."

Udo says that although it is unwise to compare breeds, he does compare the performance of his Drakensbergers to that of the other cattle on their farm. Both in respect of weaning and year-old weight, the breed consistently tops their red cattle by at least 10kg.

Udo farms in an exceptionally sour and tough area, with an annual rainfall of approximately 1 200mm. The area is also known for its high tick infestation levels. The Drakensberger performs well under these conditions.

"Since the revival of the stud, Udo has resolved to stick to strict selection policies. "I refuse to have animals on my farm that do not meet my standards."

After weaning the heifers are taken to the veld, where they have to prove whether they are adapted well enough to survive on the veld and remain on the farm. The bulls are also taken to the veld to undergo a year-long veld test before they are selected. Only then are they ready for the auction.

Worthy representatives

Udo says one of the reasons why he decided to revive the stud, was to recognise the efforts of his grandfather, Friedrich. Although he passed away when Udo was only six years old, Udo has fond memories of how his grandfather used to take them to look at the cattle. The seeds of his affection for the Drakensberger breed were sown way back then. "This sentiment is one of the reasons why we continue with this task. The other is the satisfaction I get from making progress based on my measuring their development, thereby setting my standards. Through this process I am able to identify the right animals, and I know that those carrying the Waldberg name are worthy representatives of the dreams and inputs of my ancestors."



Cows that are worthy of carrying the Waldberg name. They have been strictly selected for four generations.

For more information, phone Udo on 082 797 8088. Visit the website of the Drakensberger Cattle Breeders' Society, www.drakensberger.co.za