The Namibian Brahman

BEEF IT UP

A breed of beef cattle, scientifically classified as *Bos indicus*.

In Namibia since 1954
The adapted breed for Africa

Take a closer look at the attributes of the Brahman
Introduction

Brahmans, a subgroup of the *Bos indicus* cattle, influence the beef industry world-wide, and their genetics is sought by cattlemen in the tropics and subtropics. Their global development is a success story unparalleled. *Bos indicus* cattle have been serving man for thousands of years. Throughout their evolution they have endured famine, insect pests, diseases and extreme temperature fluctuations.

Through natural selection these cattle came to have the ability to survive and thrive where other types have failed. In their expansion, these cattle have improved beef production in every country in which they have been introduced, as they are mated to existing native cattle.

With strict selection, guided by the standard of excellence, the Brahman has been recognised for its exceptional hardiness and physical stamina, its ability to profitably produce on marginal lands and the fact that they live twice as long as normally expected.
The 12 Brahman Fundamentals

- Brahmans are genetically versatile.
- Brahmans adapt to Namibian conditions, they show commendable hardiness.
- Brahmans are inherently resistant to ticks and biting insects. They restrain disease.
- Brahmans tolerate high temperatures.
- Brahman and Brahman crossbred cows make excellent mothers.
- Brahmans are known for their longevity.
- Brahmans forage well upon the available veld.
- Brahmans will walk long distances in search of grazing.
- Brahmans show a marked resilience to drought.
- Brahmans are intelligent – they have a highly developed survival instinct.
- Brahmans have an alert behaviour – they do not take kindly to abuse.
- Brahmans transmit an amazing degree of hybrid vigour to their crossbred progeny.
Genetically Versatile
– the valuable characteristics

The following traits illustrate the versatility of the Brahman’s genetic make-up. Consider these aspects carefully, and you will realise what one could achieve by using this breed judiciously.

Adaptable and Hardy

Ever since coming to Namibia, Brahman cattle have made themselves at home under the prevailing cattle-ranching conditions. That they are still here, and flourishing, attests to their power of adaptation in an extensive and often harsh environment. Brahmans are well adapted and can withstand vast climatic differences.
Resistance to Ticks and Diseases

They have a thick skin texture, a short, dense hair coat and the ability to jerk their hides when they feel irritations on their bodies. They also secrete sebum, an oily substance, from their skin, which is effective in repelling insects. All this helps to make the Brahman and its crossbreeds remarkably resistant to ticks and other insects, an ability that accounts to a large extent for their being able to withstand diseases.

Heat Tolerance

Brahmans have a large hide area, a higher density of sweat glands per square cm of hide and a low respiratory rate. Brahmans have dark skin pigmentation, which filters the intense rays of the sun. They have a special feature of sweating freely, which contributes greatly to their heat tolerance. Their thick, glossy hair coat reflects much of the sun’s rays; furthermore the abundance of loose skin increases the body surface area exposed to cooling. All this contributes to the Brahman’s high level of heat tolerance. On the hottest days, one can find them resting in the full sun without any signs of stress. This is of great importance in a country like Namibia.
Excellent Mothers

Purebred calves are small to moderate at birth. It is documented that Brahman and Brahman cross-females calve easily. Brahman cows are well known for their mothering abilities. Many breeders and livestock producers will attest to the extreme lengths to which they will go to protect their calves.

Don’t fool around with a Brahman cow that has a small calf at foot – this is inviting trouble! This behaviour is not indicative of bad temperament; it is all part of adaptation.
**Longevity**

A trait usually overlooked by many, but extremely important in terms of productive efficiency, is longevity. The Brahman is unequalled in length of productive life – it is not strange to come upon cows still producing at 15 years of age and sometimes even older. They retain their teeth much longer than other breeds.

**Avid Foragers**

Brahmans will not stand at the gate waiting for hand-outs! Once in the veld they forage actively and make the best use of the available grazing. They have the ability to utilise lower-quality feed to their advantage. It has been scientifically proven that Brahman cattle have one of the most advantageous net-feed-intake traits, which makes them excellent feed converters and profitable producers of beef. In addition they are good browsers and thus they make effective use of all available forage.
Good Walkers
Due to their efficient mobility, Brahmans can cover great distances in search of grazing and water points. This is a huge plus factor in dry and extensive farming practices. In times of drought when it becomes necessary to move cattle over long distances, breeders have reported in amazement about the Brahman’s ability to walk.

Drought Resistance
When times of drought come around, Brahman cattle have repeatedly shown a marked resistance to the hostile changes that occur in the environment. Breeders and livestock producers have repeatedly expressed open admiration for this valuable characteristic that the breed possesses. They have the ability to reproduce on a regular basis in stressful environments and even in the most severe drought situations they survive with the lowest quantity and quality of fodder.
Brahmans are Intelligent

Astute cattle breeders have all noticed the extraordinary level of intelligence that Brahman cattle exhibit. They cleverly turn this to their advantage when handling their animals. Sensible use of this characteristic can be a great help. Those who do not realise this, usually experience trouble when working their cattle. Never think that Brahmans are bone-heads; keep an eye on them and see what they can do. They are very responsive to kindness and are quite gentle when handled properly.

Brahman Behaviour

There is a lot of genetic variation when it comes to the behaviour of Brahmans and much has been written and spoken about the temperament of Brahman cattle. Stay away from irascible, ill-tempered individuals like in any other breed. Adaptability and temperament go hand in hand. Livestock producers who prefer gentle cattle simply have to select those that are more docile. Handle Brahmans gently and with patience – remember, if you treat them well, they will treat you well! Good temperament in Brahman cattle is up to us – not up to them!
Hybrid vigour impacts on the growth of weaners and steers

In the first cross, i.e. Brahman with any other breed of cow, the growth, vitality and sturdiness of the F1 progeny strikes one immediately. They have smooth coats, adapt quickly and will turn the scale at weaning. Brahman cross-calves are sought after and regularly achieve top prices at auctions. They are easy to either feed or grow out in the veld due to their efficient fodder conversion. They have the ability to easily reach marketability in terms of growth, carcass quality and high-yielding carcasses with the desired fat, which is a huge economic factor in their favour.

By 18 months to two years, crossbred steers will have grown into strong, robust individuals, rounded off well on the veld, ready for marketing. This is the payoff, because they weigh! At 2 to 2½ years Brahman steers can still attain the prime A grade, because they shed their milk teeth a little later than other breeds, thereby qualifying for a premium. Of all the Namibian beef exported to markets in South Africa and the European Union, 75% comes from veld-reared Brahman crossbred cattle.
Hybrid vigour assists in the production of future top-class, sought-after F1 mothers

The resulting hybrid offspring is consistently superior in daily weight gain and carcass efficiency, as well as inheriting many economic characteristics from its Brahman parent, such as drought resistance, heat tolerance, disease resistance and increased longevity. The F1 female is highly regarded by cattlemen as a maternal machine!

One could also market the F1 and/or F2 heifer progeny for slaughter. However, they have such a potential that most livestock producers usually do not have the heart to do this. They keep the best ones for breeding, knowing that these crossbred heifers have the makings of great cows.

High-class F1 and F2 Brahman crossbred cows are the outstanding females that really brought the Brahman’s message of hybrid vigour home to Namibian producers. As adapted, functional cows they play a key role in the production of beef in this country.
Crossbreeding Plans

Good results accrue from using purebred Brahman bulls on European- or British-bred (Bos taurus) cows, or conversely, European- or British-bred bulls on pure Brahman, Brahman F1 or F2 (Bos indicus) cows. The hybrid vigour (or heterosis) derived from the Brahman component, will bring forth excellent growth in the crossbred calves, helped along considerably by the superior mothering abilities of the Bos indicus type dams.

Some ranchers believe that in order to manage successfully in Namibia’s dry and extensive conditions, their cow herds need a greater percentage of Bos indicus characteristics to ensure a higher degree of adaptability. They would then use Brahman bulls on Brahman F1 or F2 cows.
The International Impact of the Brahman breed

Cattle ranchers in America developed the Brahman breed. Down the years, the Brahman has spread to more than seventy countries around the world. In these places, mainly in the Southern Hemisphere, the breed has adapted to prevailing climatic conditions, whether tropical, subtropical or dry and extensive. It has therefore become an integral part of beef production in these countries. Having found acceptance in so many parts of the world, the global Brahman gene pool is widespread indeed; in addition, one comes across considerable variation within the breed as well.

Synthetic Breeds developed from the Brahman

Ranchers around the world crossed the first Zebu cattle that came to their country with the local breeds – some of British origin. This introduced a new era in the world of beef cattle breeding. One of the outcomes, of course, was the evolvement of the Brahman breed itself. Apart from this, however, cattle ranchers had already become aware of the singular qualities of the Zebu, as well as the unique characteristics appearing in the developing Brahman type and the crossbred it produced. They schemed upon ways and means of using these superior traits to meet their own particular environmental needs, and obtain too, a certain uniformity in respect to confirmation and other traits. So the Brahman gave rise to a number of synthetic breeds, of which some of the best known are –

- Santa Gertrudis (Brahman x Shorthorn); Simbra (Brahman x Simmental); Brford (Brahman x Hereford); Beefmaster (Brahman x Hereford x Shorthorn); Brangus (Brahman x Angus); Charbray (Brahman x Charolais); Droughtmaster (Brahman x Shorthorn) and Bramousin (Brahman x Limousin).

In the tropics of some continents Brahmans are crossed with some well-known milk breeds in order to take advantage of the outstanding characteristics of the F1 cross-females to supply milk to the local inhabitants.
The Brahman in Namibia

Over the past decades since 1954 the Brahman has dramatically changed the composition of the national commercial herd and made strong inroads into the communal herds of Namibia. The reason for this is its ability to cross so well with virtually any other breed of cattle. In addition, the breed’s versatility allows it to perform well in an environment that changes frequently due to unforeseen climatic conditions.

The Namibian Brahman Breeders’ Society, by far the largest breed society in the country in terms of number of breeders and stud cattle, is a progressive breed society that embraces change and modern breeding technologies. A compulsory and effective system of inspection of every registered stud animal is in place. This ensures that trained and qualified examiners will inspect the conformation of all pedigree animals as a prerequisite for registration. In this way the breed society strives to ensure that they only record structurally sound animals with the desired type in their herd book. The main objective is, of course, that these cattle find their way to the commercial market.

The Application of Modern Breeding Techniques

The Namibian Brahman Breeders’ Society has linked up with an internationally renowned organisation known as BREEDPLAN International. BREEDPLAN has developed an internet-based system whereby a registration and performance analysing service is made available to the livestock industry worldwide. BREEDPLAN is the system of choice for many breed societies in all the main beef-producing countries including the UK, Canada, USA,
Brazil, Namibia, South Africa, Australia and New Zealand. This system accounts for various data pertaining to the Brahman breed globally and Brahman herds in Southern Africa, including Namibia. Growth, carcass and fertility Estimated Breeding Values are evaluated together in a multi-trait model. It can identify specific traits and estimated breeding values of individual performance-tested animals. In addition it can evaluate genetic trends of various traits over time. This is of course of enormous value to pedigree breeders and commercial beef producers alike. Namibian Brahman breeders are actively involved in recording growth and fertility traits – they are leaders in participating in the ultra-sound scanning for carcass traits. A performance-testing award system has been implemented to promote participation in recording additional traits specific for Brahmans. A Namibian Extensive Range-land Grazing Index has been developed to identify animals on a profit basis, taking into account our production environment as well as the requirements of the European Union and South African export market. The “TakeStock” analysis enables individual breeders to benchmark the rate of genetic progress made by their herds against that of the average progress of the breed. It also identifies the key performance indicators influencing the rate of genetic progress. Namibian Brahman herds take part in a “completeness of information rating” for recording data for performance testing.

DNA-analysis of all sires is compulsory to ensure sound pedigrees, and DNA-profiling of sires for various traits is applied. Through DNA-profiling and other techniques Namibian Brahman breeders have embarked on improving carcass and meat quality (including tenderness) for the local and export market. The developments in genetic improvement through the opportunities in genomics are closely monitored to ensure that Namibian Brahmans are at the forefront in applying international modern breeding techniques.
To conclude

- Namibia has a wide range of grazing environments and climatic conditions. **Brahmans** are the ideal breed to adapt to these different natural conditions without special treatment.
- Namibian livestock producers value the easy-care attributes of **Brahman** cattle which give them the management flexibility to match seasonal demands.
- **Brahman** cattle thus enable livestock producers to maximise productivity across a range of environments in Namibia. The **Brahman** is therefore a very cost-effective breed.
- With an increasing worldwide consumer demand for natural, free-range beef, the **Brahman** breed has enhanced the ability of the industry to deliver.

- If you produce natural, veld-grown beef, take a long look at the **Brahman** down the years and into the future – it will be the common denominator of cross-breeding! The Namibian **Brahman** is set to continue its role as the mainstay of a 21st Century Livestock Revolution.

From the pasture to the plate, **Brahman** and **Brahman cross-cattle** prove they have the genetics for total beef performance!