

Not By Its Cover

MIRANDA REIMAN



WOOSTER, OHIO

Some presents were wrapped in gold paper with a big red bow. Others were less elegant, but showed they were packaged with love. Some givers are even known for their ability to dodge traditional wrapping by handing over a shopping bag

with the present inside.

What do the ribbons and trimmings say about those sayings? Did an ordinary package surprise and warm the heart while other, fancier ones were mostly about the wrapping?

The holidays often bring great reminders of the wisdom that told us it's what's inside that counts: "You can't judge a book by its cover."

In the cattle business we might change that to, "You can't judge a bovine by its beauty."

I encounter people who are convinced that they can solve all their cowherd challenges by evaluating cattle on looks alone.

Never much of a livestock judge myself, I'm sure they get a lot closer to perfection than I would based solely on phenotype, but many seasoned ranchers tell me they've learned over the years that's not enough. They use reproduction records, cow families, EPDs (expected progeny differences), carcass data and now DNA to help them sort their best cows from the ones that head down the road.

One conversation really stands out as a great illustration of this "don't judge on looks alone"

thinking.

Although it had been decades, this South Dakota rancher held the moment like it was yesterday: "I can still remember the first time I got a Prime carcass and I thought, 'Wow, that cow must really look special.' So I went out and found her in the herd and I can still vividly remember looking through the cows and.....well, there she was.

"I was never so disappointed in all my life! She just looked like the rest of 'em.

"But the thing she did, is that she made me \$200 more than the cow standing next to her and it didn't cost me a thing. Her calf ran with the bunch; he just had the genetics to grade Prime and the rest of 'em didn't."

That was the day he said that he learned you don't have to have fancy cattle to produce great beef. For him, there was no question of "who done it" as far as numbers go. He knew. He kept records and used them, so that calf had to come from that cow.

Were it not for the records, he might easily have culled that cow the next time he was short on pasture. Given more years, she left more descendants in the herd today, and more of them can hit that high mark, which carried a bigger premium today.

It didn't happen with gate-cut assumptions.

Hundred of dollars are on the line in today's market. Still think you want to judge a cow by its cover? Δ

MIRANDA REIMAN: Industry Information Specialist for Certified Angus Beef LLC (CAB)