

Semiahmoo Shorthorns - A Real Family Operation

by Grant Alexander

In the last issue of the Canadian Shorthorn Report, we featured an article on Jim & Lynn Poole's Twin Maple Shorthorns in Nova Scotia. In this issue we are taking you right across the country to the Pacific coast. My computer tells me that as the crow flies it is 2752 miles from Middle Musquodoboit, Nova Scotia to Surrey, British Columbia or by travel miles it is 3820 miles. I mention this to give an indication of just how vast this country is and to show that there are excellent Shorthorn herds scattered from one end of this country to the other. To put this more in perspective, the Poole's are closer to Paris, France or the Panama Canal than they are to Surrey, BC and that Surrey is closer to Hawaii and Mexico City than the Poole farm.

I am sure you have figured out by now that we are featuring the Wood family in this issue. Gary and Margaret Wood and their family own and operate Semiahmoo Shorthorns, a name well known to Shorthorn breeders in Canada. The Semiahmoo operation has been a true family operation, as Gary and Margaret's



Wood Family

four children, Ryan, Amanda, Vanessa and Tyler have all been involved in the day to day work, as well as in showing their cattle. Today most of the children have moved from the farm, but their interest in the cattle remains very strong. Gary is just starting his term as President of the Canadian Shorthorn Association so it is very fitting that we feature him and his family in this issue.



Semiahmoo is a native Indian name for this area of British Columbia. The Wood's farm is located one mile from the Semiahmoo Bay on the Pacific Ocean, from which the farm received its name. They are also located one mile from the Canada/USA border as well as one mile from the city of White Rock, BC. It is a 30 minute drive to Vancouver International Airport. This is a highly populated area however, there is still a mix of urban and agricultural businesses. Gary comments that they are located in an area where there is lots to see and do and he adds that they are a few minutes away from two BC professional sports teams, the BC Lions and the Vancouver Canucks. He adds that they can be in their seats at Seattle Mariners and Seahawks games within two hours of leaving home as well.

This part of the West Coast of Canada also benefits from the mildest weather in the country as well. The annual precipitation for this area is 134 cm (approximately 53.6 inches) of which most comes

as rainfall. Gary states that they do get a few inches of snow each year, however, it usually doesn't stay very long. The winters are warm and wet, so they maintain their cattle on concrete from November to late March. Gary says "We usually have less than two weeks where the temperature drops below freezing each winter, so our

ground really never freezes. With all the rain we get during the winter months, we have to maintain our cows on concrete to keep them out of the mud".

When asked how he became interested in Shorthorn cattle, Gary's answer is similar to many other people in this part of BC. He says "I grew up near Ron and Belle Carter and I was very familiar with their Shorthorn herd. When we purchased our present farm in 1978, Shorthorns seemed like a natural choice to keep on it". Ron Carter was very influential in the development of the Semiahmoo herd, and the Wood family and the Carter's still work together, even though Ron passed away a few years ago. The two families have purchased several herd sires together over the years and the two time Canadian National Champion, Shadybrook Dreamer 2H, is the most well known.

Gary says that when he purchased the land in 1978, it was completely undeveloped. They set out to build a beautiful home as well as cattle facilities. He says that they tried to design the facilities so that the cattle could be handled easily and comfortably and that he got lots of help and ideas from Ron Carter, as well as from friends in the dairy industry. They developed a facility with 20 free standing stalls where the cows can lay in comfort and still go to feed and water at their leisure. This is the main reason that they have limited the size of their breeding herd to 20 females, as that is the number that can



be wintered easily with their facilities. With the free standing stalls, it only takes



Free standing stall system

a few minutes a day to feed the cattle and clean the area. They also retain 4-5 heifer calves as replacement females, but in order to enter the herd, they have to breed on their first service and replace another female in the cow herd. Gary admits that their replacement female policy is probably more ruthless than most breeders use, but with their limited numbers, it is a necessary management condition. The main barn is designed so that cattle can be moved from any part of the wintering area to the inside pens with minimal work involved. Several inside pens are used for calving, and later are used as pens for fitting their show cattle. These pens worked extremely well for fitting the Wood's 4-H steers and heifers over the years. 4-H played a big part in each of the four Wood children's lives while they were growing up. Each of the four children had either a Grand or Reserve Grand Champion steer at the Pacific National Exhibition, which is the biggest 4-H show in the province. They also had Grand Champion heifer at the Pacific National Exhibition for 8 consecutive years, a feat that has never been duplicated by any other family. Gary says his family is very proud of the 4-H accomplishments they have had and he is quick to add that 4-H was a great program for his family to be involved in.

The foundation females for the Semiahmoo cowherd were purchased from Ron Carter's Bar C Shorthorns as well as a few selected from the BC Shorthorn Association sale. Over the next few years, some very influential females and a major league herd sire would be added that would bring their herd to national prominence. In 1998,

Gary and Margaret travelled to the Shadybrook Farm sale in Quebec with Ron and Belle Carter. They purchased a bull named Shadybrook Dreamer 2H x, who went on to be a two time Canadian National Champion, as well as a three time Grand Champion bull at Canadian Western Agribition. Dreamer also won numerous other championships at major shows throughout his show career but his biggest asset was his breeding ability, as he sired numerous winning offspring for the Wood family. One of his sons, Semiahmoo Gringo 9L x was sold privately from their show herd at Agribition and he went on to become a leading sire throughout Canada and the US. Gringo sired many show winners and sale toppers, with some of his offspring selling for over \$20,000. A steer sired by Gringo topped a club calf sale in the US at \$30,000. At this time, the Shorthorn breed did not know about the TH defect, and it was only after the TH test had been developed that they found out that Gringo was



A typical Semiahmoo brood cow.

a TH carrier. Gary says that while the TH defect did affect his herd, he did not want to completely toss out the genetics of this great breeding sire so they have concentrated on identifying TH free offspring from Gringo and are retaining some of these animals in their herd. He comments that their present walking herd sire is a grandson of Gringo, and a double grandson of Dreamer, and he is TH free as well.

Gary and Margaret returned to the Shadybrook Farm production sale in

2000 and 2002 where they purchased a female each year that would become leading females in their herd. The first female was Shadybrook Roseanne 53K and she became a great show female and a great producing brood cow in their herd. Several of her offspring have become leading breeding pieces in several herds. Roseanne also was an excellent donor female in the Semiahmoo embryo transplant program. The second female they purchased from Shadybrook was Shadybrook Rose Petal 43M x. Her first calf was a bull calf named Semiahmoo Pedro 1P x. He was sired by Gringo, and he topped the 2004 Canadian Western Agribition sale at \$10,500 where he was named the Reserve Grand Champion bull.



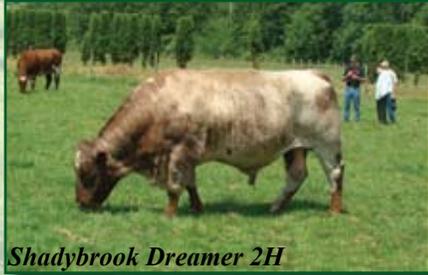
Shadybrook Roseanne 53K

The Wood's have been great supporters of Shorthorn events throughout the nation. They have been regular

exhibitors at most of the shows throughout BC each year, especially the Pacific National Exhibition and the Armstrong Provincial show. They have also travelled across the mountains each fall to attend Farmfair International and Canadian Western Agribition for many years. Gary says they have also shown their cattle at the Washington State Fair, in Pullallup, WA. Many people will be familiar with the large semi trailer unit that Gary has converted into a cattle trailer. Not only is this trailer used to transport the Semiahmoo show herd to and from the shows, but it also is used to transport many steers and heifers to many 4-H members in the lower Mainland of BC. For many years, Gary has assisted many 4-H families source good 4-H prospects for the shows in this area of BC from Farmfair and Agribition.

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Gary says they like to have a very short calving season, and prefer to have the majority of their calves in early January. Because of this, they synchronize the entire herd, as well as their replacement heifers and breed them all by artificial insemination at the same time. This allows them to use one or two leading sires on their entire herd. In 2010, they used the 2009 Reserve Grand Champion bull at Canadian Western Agribition to breed their entire herd. This bull is JSF Addicted 82U x*, by Jake's Proud Jazz 266L x*, who is owned by Braebank



Shadybrook Dreamer 2H

Shorthorns and Kenlene Shorthorns. In order for a heifer to be considered as a herd replacement candidate, she must have settled to her first AI service. Once the AI service is complete a clean-up bull is placed with the cows. This year this is a TH free grandson of Gringo.

The Semiahmoo herd has been regular consignors to leading breed sales across Canada. They have consigned some of their best each year in the Canadian Western Agribition sale, as well as previous National sales held

in Edmonton. Gary says they also sell breeding stock to breeders mainly in the lower Mainland area. He says he has a ready market for his polled bulls with a large natural beef producer in the BC Interior. This producer runs over 1000 cows and he has a pasture to plate marketing program. He purchases any yearling and mature bulls that Gary has each fall, providing they are polled.

Gary says that there is really no market for horned bulls in his area, so he castrates all horned bull calves shortly after birth.

After many years of wanting to visit

the Semiahmoo operation, I had the privilege and pleasure to finally get there in June, 2009. The cowherd was very impressive, with excellent uniformity and conformation. The cows were functional and sound. Shadybrook Dreamer 2H was still on display at 11 years of age, and was active and sound. I was impressed with the cattle, but it was the Wood family that impressed me even more. A person does not have to visit very long with Gary Wood, to realize that you are talking with a man who is extremely proud of his family

and his cattle. Semiahmoo is a true family operation where everyone has learned to work together and have fun doing it. They are located in one of the most unique parts of Canada, with many natural benefits available to them. This is a family that have "learned by doing" and learned that by working together and putting the extra effort in, that it is possible to reach new heights and accomplishments. If you ever have the opportunity to travel to this part of Canada, I would strongly suggest that you plan some time to visit Gary and Margaret and their family. You will be greeted with great hospitality and infectious enthusiasm for their Shorthorns and I am sure your visit will be enjoyable and memorable.

As I mentioned at the beginning of this article, Gary has recently become the President of the Canadian Shorthorn Association. I am very pleased that we have a man of character like him to be at the helm of our breed during these times. I hope he finds this position enjoyable and worthwhile. ♦