

Dream Come True

A heifer four generations in the making claimed the champion bred-and-owned title for Allison Davis.

by Sara Gugelmeyer

Imagine accomplishing a dream you had been working toward since you were 7 years old. Also, imagine that dream represents a decade of careful planning and hard work. That's exactly what happened to Allison Davis last summer when she captured the 2022 Grand Champion Bred-and-Owned Heifer banner at the National Junior Angus Show (NJAS). She was also named Premier Junior Breeder.

"It was so cool," Allison says about the moment her heifer was slapped champion. "Like a dream come true."

Mark Davis Family Angus is located at Shelbyville, Tenn., and is owned and operated by Allison's father, Mark; mother Loretta; and herself. The family has been breeding Angus cattle on a small scale for the last few decades, but it's been since Allison has been old enough to show that the family has really made a name for themselves in the Angus business.

Mark works as a freelance cattle fitter and clipper in addition to raising Angus cattle for commercial cattlemen and show homes. Although Allison played with Herefords for the first couple years of her junior career, as soon as she was old enough to show in the National Junior Angus Association (NJAA), that's all she's done.

Growing up with Angus

"I am an only child," Allison explains. "I've always joked I never had the option; showing cattle is just

something I always did. But really, I don't want to do anything else. I learned a lot growing up in the barn — responsibility and time management, and building connections with the animals."

Showing Herefords when she was 7 and 8 was fine, but then in 2013, Allison and her parents made the trip to Kansas City, Mo., for her first NJAS.

"That very first junior national, she had to show in the owned division," Mark explains. "The heifer was out of a cow that wasn't in Allison's name, but every heifer since has been bred-and-owned."

The program the Davis family has used is to show a senior calf, bring her back as a senior yearling, then she goes into their herd of cows. Then they bring the best cow back as the pair, and then the calf out of the pair shows and the whole process starts over.

"When I think about Tennessee junior Angus, the Davis family is some of the first names and faces that pop into my head. It's been neat to watch what they do," says Alex Tolbert, American Angus Association regional field manager. "Every year, count on them to have a senior heifer calf, a senior yearling and a cow-calf pair



The 2022 bred-and-owned winner AED Rita 037H.

PHOTO BY PEARLS PICS, COURTESY OF AMERICAN ANGUS ASSOCIATION

or two — everything home-raised. They are exclusively bred-and-owned people."

The lineage

The 2022 bred-and-owned winner AED Rita 037H, aka "Harley", is a perfect example of that.

"She is four generations bred-and-owned," Allison explains. "Her great-grandmother is still in our herd, although I wasn't old enough to show in the junior shows when she was being shown, I did show her as a cow-calf pair."

In 2014 Allison showed Harley's great-grandmother, "Rita Raye," and grandmother, "Margarita," as a cow-calf pair at the NJAS. Margarita was chosen as bred-and-owned reserve champion late heifer calf.

Then in 2019, Harley's mother, "Strawberita," was grand champion bred-and-owned cow-calf pair at the NJAS. At the 2021 NJAS, Harley was

Here's an awesome example of an Angus family who do a very good job of managing what they raise and maxing out the potential. — Alex Tolbert, regional field manager

selected bred-and-owned reserve champion late heifer calf.

"This family line has always been special, because they've always done a lot of winning," Allison says.

It's a pride reflected in Mark.

"It's exciting to see cattle we've bred for so many generations win the biggest junior breed show in the country," he says.

Early on, Harley almost didn't make the cut.

"She probably wouldn't have gotten shown if the Atlantic (National Angus Show) wasn't in Lebanon last year," Allison explains. "Because of COVID they had it in Tennessee rather than Maryland, so we decided we could take a cow-calf pair to support the show, and Harley was the calf on the side of the cow. We knew she was special, once we saw how well she did as we progressed through the summer getting her prepped. She just kept getting better and better."

Tolbert recalls noticing Harley then, too.

"They paraded her around at the side of the cow, and you knew then, this was a nice heifer calf. It's neat to watch one on the side of the cow and then come back and do so well as an individual," he says.

Harley's lineage dates back to 2012 when the Davis family began breeding that cow family. Hers is from one of three cow families the Davises have been breeding for four generations.

"It is neat because we have so many generations deep in these cow families," Loretta says. "We have a connection and know everything about them. We can remember what it was like the day we mated the cow and when the calf was born. It's neat and it's our thing."

Although the Davises don't raise huge numbers of cattle, they have developed a niche.

"We try to breed to get sound, functional, practical cattle that have a good look to them," Mark explains. "They are not necessarily 100% straight-up show-ring-bred cattle. We try to breed cattle that have the look we want, and enough performance and maternal traits that they are going to go out and make real productive females."

Competitive edge

Showing in the bred-and-owned division helps keep the Davises from competing against their customers, and showing cow-calf pairs helps customers know they aren't hiding something in the back for Allison to show.

"Whatever we are going to show, we already picked it out to show as a pair," Loretta says. "It's just us, besides hiring help when we're gone to a show. If the three of us don't do it, it doesn't get done around here. I think that makes us unique. We just want every generation to be better, human and bovine, and we're so proud of Allison and our cattle."

In addition to her show ring accolades, Allison has been active in national and regional junior Angus activities. She's served as president, vice president, secretary and treasurer at various times for the Tennessee Junior Angus Association. She is vice chairman of the Atlantic National Junior Angus Board. She's also been a youth ambassador for the Tennessee Cattlemen's Association, and is the junior chair of the 2023 Eastern Regional Junior Angus Show which




will be hosted in Lebanon, Tenn.

Allison is currently a freshman at Kansas State University, majoring in agricultural communications. She hopes to pursue a career working with youth through a breed or cattlemen's association. But first, she has two years remaining to show in the junior shows.

Harley will have her first calf this fall, and the Davises are excited to see what she produces. They also have a maternal half-sister to Harley that's in the show string for next year.

"We know it's going to be tough to accomplish anything like that again," Mark says, "but we will try as long as Allison is eligible for NJAS."

The Davis family's success is a true testament to a small operation.

"I think it's so cool to prove everybody wrong that thinks you have to go spend 20 or even \$50,000 to do well. Here's an awesome example of an Angus family who do a very good job of managing what they raise and maxing out the potential," Tolbert says. "She's a cool heifer, for sure, but to me it's everything behind her that makes her special — the family, the history of breeding several generations of cows there. They're great people, and that's the foundation of our association, family operations of all sizes." 

Editor's note: Sara Gugelmeyer is a freelance writer from Lakin, Kan.