

ROBERT LAMONT (MONTY) ATKINSON

(1902 - 1986)

A MAN OF VISION, honesty and simplicity. A superb horseman and cattleman, acute observer of all things in nature and recorder of his life and times. Monty was one of the innovators of the North Queensland cattle industry. His early observations of possible benefits of crossbreeding *Bos taurus* and *Bos indicus* cattle led him to become proactive and to be at the forefront of the development of the Droughtmaster breed. He was a true pioneer, and together with a few other innovative cattlemen and cattlemen, they succeeded in developing our great breed, at times scorned by a notoriously conservative industry.

Monty's first encounter with Zebu cross cattle was in 1921, 101 years ago. While riding from Cashmere Station, on the Herbert River, to Bluff Downs Station north of Charters Towers, Mont observed crossbred Zebu cattle on Christmas Creek Station, on the Burdekin watershed. He immediately noticed the sleekness of their coat and the hardiness these cattle exhibited, compared to the British cattle in the same mob. In 1922, Monty visited Taronga Park Zoo in Sydney where he saw a young red Zebu bull that impressed him so much, he purchased it for 20 Guineas for Cashmere Station. Unfortunately, the young bull died during the sea voyage to Cardwell, which delivered a blow to Monty's breeding ambitions.

It wasn't until 1932 that Mont and his wife Ruth, began breeding Zebu cross cattle on Glen Ruth Station, previously known as Cashmere. They purchased two red Zebu cross bulls which were descendants of the bull Mr William McDowell of Christmas Creek Station had acquired from the Melbourne Zoo prior to 1918. These two bulls were crossed over Devon/Shorthorn cows.

A major genetic step was taken in 1941 when progeny of Zebu cattle imported in 1933 by a CSIRO authorised syndicate, were released for the wider cattle industry. Mont's brother Ken, who founded the Wairuna Brahman Stud, had secured the imported grey Nelore bull, Abel. Mont was able to buy some red, half-bred bull calves from Ken to continue his breeding programme.

The grading up of the Cashmere and Glen Ruth herd took another leap forward when, in 1944, the property Mungalla near Ingham, was purchased. It was fertile coastal country, suited to more intensive breeding programmes and reliable road and rail transport.

In 1952, Monty and some other cattle breeders experimenting with Zebu crossbreeding formed the Australian Zebu Cross Beef Cattle Association. Mont was elected President. Among the first members were, Ken Atkinson (Wairuna), Maurice de Tournouer (Wetherby), Hugh Innes (Walla), Lionel de Landelles (Cherokee), Bob Rea (Kirknie), Frank Fraser (Burnside), John Murray (The Orient), Harry Collins (Kelso) and H. Hawkins (Colbrae).

Then in 1956 each member had decided which particular cross they wanted to breed, so the Tropical Beef Breeders' Association was formed. Monty was elected President. Three distinct types were emerging. The reds were called Droughtmasters, the blacks were called Brangus and the Hereford cross, Braford. A separate register and Standard of Excellence was developed for each breed.

In 1962, all three breeds formed their own individual associations. The Droughtmaster Stud Breeders' Society was confirmed at a meeting in Townsville's Queens Hotel, on July



The man who made it all happen, Monty Atkinson showing jubilation and appreciation in receiving an Honorary Life Membership of the society in 1971 from Bob Russell president 1970 - 74.

3rd of that year. Monty was the inaugural President (1962-1963).

Mont's two sons, Rob Snr and Alan, together with their respective families, played significant roles in the establishment and development of the Droughtmaster breed.

Mont was influential and respected by his peers. But one of his greatest legacies is his influence over the generations that followed. The registered family studs still recording Droughtmasters today are Mungalla, Glen Ruth, Cashmere, Valley, Farnham, Lamont and Durack.

Robert L. (Monty) Atkinson was recognised by Droughtmaster Stud Breeders' Society (DSBS) with Life Membership for 'Service to the Breed', in 1968.

He was Patron of the DSBS from 1966-1985. 1952-1956. President of The Australian Zebu Cross Beef Cattle Breeders' Assoc. 1956-1962. President of The Tropical Beef Breeders' Assoc. 1962-1963. President of The Droughtmaster Stud Breeders' Society 1966-1985. Patron of The Droughtmaster Stud Breeders' Society 1965-1985.

Contributed by Rob Atkinson



Monty and Alan Atkinson, Townsville Show, 1949/50



Monty Atkinson, Risdon Sale 1953