



# T *Blazing* TRAILS

By Kindra Gordon

"We've had great teachers and great advice... we're living our dream."

*-Trey Wasserburger*

**A**s a young boy, when Trey Wasserburger envisioned his future it included rodeo dreams and possibly a career as a teacher and coach.

While he grew up with well-established Wyoming ranch families on both sides of his pedigree, Wasserburger was the youngest in his family, and says, "I've known since the day I was born if I was going to ranch I would have to do it on my own."

But in 2013, a bareback ride went horribly wrong, leaving Wasserburger with a broken back and a prognosis that he may not walk again. Defying the odds, he did recover, and as a man of faith, took the incident as a sign. Of it he says, "I think God wanted me to go in a direction I wasn't headed."

## NEW DIRECTION

Wasserburger left the rodeo circuit behind, married his college sweetheart, Dayna, and headed to Nebraska where he worked with her family's feedyard. Throughout high school and college at the University of Wyoming, he had worked on ranches and had run his own yearlings on summer grass, so he also pursued running more yearlings and replacement heifers in the rewarding markets offered in 2014 and 2015.

As Wasserburger began earning his stripes in the Nebraska cattle scene, a mutual friend – Greg Wilke, regional president of First National Bank at North Platte, introduced him to Bill and Barb Rishel in 2016. Looking to retire and without a family member interested in taking over their Angus operation, the Rishels were hoping to meet the right young

family to continue their legacy.

While Wasserburger didn't have prior purebred experience, he "fell in love with the Rishels' cows," and fortunately for him, Bill and Barb recognized the passion, work ethic and commitment that Trey and Dayna possessed.

By Jan. 1, 2017, the transition was a reality and TD Angus at Rishel Ranch was established. The young Wasserburger family moved into the Rishels' home and purchased the land around it. They lease summer pasture. Bill and Barb have relocated to Lincoln to be closer to their grandchildren, but Trey and Bill still visit frequently. Herdsman Kenny Hanson is continuing with the operation and the ranch employs two additional full-time workers.

Of the opportunity, Trey says, "Bill and his wife selflessly made this happen." Wasserburger also recognizes the responsibility, saying, "If I told you I didn't have big shoes to fill, I'd be lying. To start off with a guy's legacy, that sets the bar awfully high, and it's something we don't take lightly."

In the four years since, TD Angus has continued to hold the annual spring production sale, which also includes several ranch-ready Quarter Horses, and has strived to grow. They've added a calving barn, are developing bulls at the homeplace, increased cow numbers in order to sell 250 bulls annually, are running 1,500 yearlings and are custom breeding 400 to 500 heifers to TD Angus/Rishel bloodlines for customers. The Wasserburgers also offer a feeder calf buyback program for bull customers, with

calves placed into feedlots owned by Dayna's family.

More recently, TD Angus started an annual feed test program for their customers' calves. Cattle can be consigned in lots of 50 head or more and must be sired by TD Angus bulls. Animals go on test for a year (March to March) and producers can retain whole or partial ownership. After finishing data is collected at Tyson Meats in Lexington, Neb., information is shared with producers and \$25,000 in prizes is awarded with \$5,000 each in the categories of average daily gain, feed conversion/efficiency, highest yield, highest prime percentage and highest CAB percentage.

Trey, now 32, says the project has "been a lot of fun" to engage producers in learning more about genetics and carcass data, while also fostering some competition. In 2020, its inaugural year, 4,600 steers and heifers were harvested. He expects even more for 2021.

Like other cattlemen, Wasserburger knows the ranch "to do" list is always lengthy. But he remains energized and optimistic, and says the rush he used to get from rodeo is now fueled by cattle pedigrees and bull sales. He says, "I'm committed; I've got a lot of gas left in the tank."

He credits Rishel – and many other great mentors – for bringing him to this point. As well, having his wife Dayna involved at every step and pulling in the same direction has made the journey possible.

"We've had great teachers and great advice... we're living our dream," Trey concludes.

## CAPITAL PURCHASE:

On Jan. 1, 2017, Trey and Dayna purchased everything from "scoop shovels to herd bulls" from Bill and Barb Rishel, who had devoted their life to building a reputation Angus herd.

## FAMILY:

Wife, Dayna; son, Westyn, 4; and daughters, Gentry, 3, and Gwyn, 1. Trey grew up near Gillette, Wyo., with both sides of the family involved in ranching. Dayna is a native Nebraskan with her own stellar cattle pedigree.

## ADVICE TO OTHERS:

"Surround yourself with good mentors. If you show people you are committed and hard-working, people in our industry want to pass on their knowledge and experience."

## NOT TAKING RANCH LIFE FOR GRANTED:

Trey recognizes his blessings. He notes that around the world people are often envious of the wide-open spaces, the gorgeous ranch landscapes and being horseback amid a content herd of cows. "They want that for a vacation, and it's our life," he points out.