



*Dennis Pluth owner and operator of Pluth Homestead Ranch.*

**T**he pastures slope from an elevation of 2,500 feet down to 1,400 feet at the shores of Clear Lake, California's largest and oldest lake, also known as the Bass Capital of the West. Tucked into the Intermountain Range between the Sonoma Valley and coastal California, with vineyards shadowing the ranch's borders, Dennis Pluth's Homestead Ranch is a part of his blood and history, and its 2,000 acres are dotted with oaks, and Shorthorn cattle.

Pluth's great grandparents

homesteaded 160 acres overlooking Clear Lake in the 1870s, although they didn't have cattle in mind at the time; Great Grandfather was a miner at the nearby quicksilver (mercury) mine. The homestead did support sheep and hogs for Pluth's grandfather, and when they were market ready, the area was still so isolate, they had to be driven 50 miles to the railhead at Calistoga.

The mercury mine closed at the end of World War II, but by then, sheep had taken over the hills of the Homestead, and ranching was firmly

## *Pluth's Homestead Ranch* **Shorthorns Since 1979**

BY KATHY PETH  
PHOTOS COURTESY OF PLUTH'S RANCH

a part of the Pluth history. Pluth's father hadn't felt the lure of the land, but an uncle had, and Dennis spent every available moment with him. When it came his time to shoulder the responsibilities and pleasures of the ranch, he kept some sheep, and brought in Hereford cattle.

By 1979, Pluth was looking for a way to increase the milk production of his cow herd, and to bring up weaning weights. The late 70s were boom years for Shorthorns; the West Coast in particular saw an explosion of interest in the versatile, milky, meaty animals. Pluth was at the Cow Palace in San Francisco in 1979 when he spotted a bull called Liberator. "He was Reserve Champion at the big bull sale there," Pluth remembers, "but when I bought him, everybody thought I was crazy."

"I said I'm going to cross him on those Hereford cows and I'm going

to get some great heifers. And I did. Those F1 heifers just absolutely excelled with their milking ability and their ability to wean good thick calves." His experience with Shorthorn cattle was already so positive that a couple of years later when there was a Shorthorn dispersal sale about forty miles away, Pluth went with an empty truck and came home with a truckload. He was in the registered business.

The white faces faded from Pluth's pastures, replaced by 75 purebred Shorthorn mother cows, a herd that is fed by a show string that operates out of K-Kim Cattle Company in Pickrell, NE. Pluth is committed to keeping the Shorthorn genetics from his program in the public eye, and to do that he has K-Kim fit and show his animals. Leaving them in Nebraska keeps them close to the hub of American Shorthorn Association Major Shows.



*Shorthorns offer a wide range of coat colors, from red to white, with red and white, and roan in between.*

"Showing establishes you to your fellow breeders, proves that you have superior genetics in your herd," says Pluth. "You want to sell to other breeders who like to bring in different genetics, try new out-crosses. Sometimes," Pluth chuckles, "you have to put a lot of nuts and bolts together to find the perfect combination, you have to keep trying."

Pluth believes that in commercial feedlots, Shorthorns offer superior carcasses, fast growth, and docility. "I can walk through my herd," he says, "and some of them might be lying down and I have to walk around them." Cattle that stay at the feed bunks are bound to gain better than the ones that hang at the back of the pens, and tests show that Shorthorns want to gain faster than other cattle anyway.

For the cow-calf man, Pluth points out that Shorthorns are well known for their mothering abilities, their milk production, and their nearly perfect udders. "They also cross well with other breeds," he points out.

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*A pair of Shorthorn cows graze the banks of Clear Lake, Clear Lake Oaks, CA.*

Pluth has a personal preference for red polled cattle because commercial bull buyers find it easier to buy red bulls than the red and whites, or roans, as the red color tends to blend with existing herd colors. "I never buy a bull that I think will throw flashy colors," says Pluth, "but the white ones are okay here, they're the ones you can spot way out on the range, especially if the cows are shaded up and in the

brush." Despite the usefulness of white animals in the field, Pluth doesn't deliberately breed for them, and when he recently had phone calls from two commercial cattlemen looking for white Shorthorn bulls, he didn't have them.

"I said, 'Listen boys, every time I've had white or roan bulls, I can't give 'em away, I have to send 'em to the sale barn.'" He chuckles. "They want to cross the white bulls on

Angus cows, get those blue calves. I don't have any and I don't think I'll be having any in the future.

"We don't have the demand for Shorthorns that they do in the Midwest, so I stay with nice red bulls, they cross with Angus and most likely the calves will come out black so you can't tell [they're cross-bred] by color, that way the commercial cowman can throw in a Shorthorn once in awhile and step up his genetics."

Homestead Ranch still runs 150 commercial ewes, producing fat lambs, but the emphasis is on good Shorthorn genetics. Pluth, who is hoping one of his grandsons might take to ranching, works with Border Collies and a Kubota flatbed 4-wheeler as his hired hands.

Seedstock producers are committed to making the best possible genetics available for the modern cattlemen, genetics with the flexibility to offer a boost to any commercial herd. Dennis Pluth has spent nearly 30 years developing top Shorthorn cattle on his Homestead Ranch, cattle that are assets to any purebred or commercial operation.

