

UltraBlack breeder looking for growth

By MEGAN CECHNER

ALBERT Bookham is making his mark on the WA cattle industry with the establishment of the State's first UltraBlack cattle stud.

At 19 years of age, Albert is already well on his way with Black Storm WA, his small but growing stud operation that he manages alongside the cattle operation and cropping program run by parents Graham and Marilyn and brother Stephen on their 7500 hectare Lake Hinds property.

Albert has tried his hand at a few different farming roles, including a couple of years at the Bindoon Agricultural College and WA College of Agriculture, Narrogin before getting involved in cropping, shearing and sheep carting.

Ultimately it was cattle that turned out to be his passion and two years ago, at age 17, Albert decided to establish an UltraBlack stud.

"I was never really interested in the sheep and while I have the patience and quite enjoyed shearing, when I went to Bindoon Ag and started showing and fattening cattle, that's when I realised I wanted to breed cattle," he said.

"They've all got a huge personality and characters in their own right, you watch them and they're all different from one another and young bulls are so cheeky.

"I like Bos indicus cattle because of their nice shiny coats but there's no money in them – you've gotta be black."

After seeing a story on UltraBlacks on ABC's Landline program in 2013, in October 2015 Albert and Graham made the trek to Beaudesert in Queensland to purchase their first load of UltraBlacks from Nindooindah stud.

They returned with 29 cattle made up of 25 PTIC females, two weaner females and two weaner bulls.

The herd size sits at 78 UltraBlacks, with an additional 12 Angus cattle.

He said the strength of the UltraBlack compared to Angus was its durability and fertility.

For example, recent pregnancy testing showed the UltraBlacks had achieved 75 per cent pregnancy rates, compared to the Angus with 30pc success rates.

"They were in the same paddock, same conditions and everything – I think it comes down to the hint of Brahman content," he said.

"They have 18pc Brahman in them and that keeps their Angus carcass (attributes) and their fertility up but makes them able to handle the heat and humidity."

Albert said even on the predominantly ryegrass pastures and broad-



Albert Bookham with his UltraBlack cattle. The 19-year-old has established WA's first UltraBlack stud, Black Storm WA at Lake Hinds.



acre paddocks, the cattle were performing well.

While the bulls are being supplementary fed to keep a uniform growth rate, the cows were paddock fed only.

Much like sheep, this has been also paying off for the family in reducing its chemical burden and the incidence of herbicide resistant weeds on the property.

"They seem to go alright here and we can graze them all year around at one animal per hectare for the most part and sometimes more," he said.

"They have been on some pretty random pastures – things you wouldn't think they would eat like cape-weed and saltbush – they'll get rid of it all."

Slow, steady and careful selection is

the plan to grow the herd to about 2000 over the next five years as Albert selects on structure first and growth second, although neither appears to be a problem so far with the breed.

Nor does temperament as Albert said the cattle were like "Brown's cows to handle – they get fat quick and do nothing".

Since the breed was moved out of the Angus multi-breed six months ago, Albert said he hoped to see a premium placed on UltraBlacks.

He wouldn't be the only one – Minderoo station near Onslow, owned by Andrew and Nicola Forrest, joined 5000 of its Minderoo composite cows to 150 UltraBlack bulls to increase fertility and feed efficiency.

The breed was also beginning to feature in the Harvey Beef 100-day grainfed program.

It appears to be working as growth from the first drop has been "hugely impressive".

"At 12-months-old, four out of the 12 calves are 600 kilograms.

"They grow like they have rockets under their hooves," Albert said,

"Compared to everything else we see a pastoral animal take about four



The current UltraBlack stud numbers stands at 78, with plans to grow the herd over the next few years to between 1500-2000 head.

years to get to full weight – here I have bulls that are a quarter of other's age but double their weight.

"Let's face it, the quicker you can turn an animal off, the more money you're going to make."