

# We're not ruining your goat, Don Smith tells South Africans



BY TERRY HANKINS  
*editor & publisher*



The conversation was often heated between Texan Don Smith (yellow shirt) and South African Stephanus Malan but ended with laughs and a cup of tea.

While the growth of the market wether business is a bright spot in the U.S. goat industry, Boer breeders in South Africa are not pleased at all. "They think we are ruining the Boer goat," said Don Smith of Talpa, Texas, one of the first importers of the South African meat goat breed. "They don't like those tubular bodies on these show wethers. They think we are messing up the breed they spent 80 years to develop."

On May 7, Don, Walter Kemp, also of Talpa, and Pat Arias of California began a month-long trip across South Africa and neighboring Botswana. The purpose of the trip was to visit as many Boer goat ranches — or studs, as they call them in South Africa — as possible. One important stop was in Adelaide to visit with Stephanus Malan,

president of the South African Boer Goat Breeders' Association.

"I had been getting word that they were not happy with the way Americans were breeding Boer goats," Don said as he sat down to talk with me in Louisville, Ky., recently during a break in the International Boer Goat Association National Show. "They have been hearing about all these high prices being paid for show wethers and wether sires and does."

It has not been uncommon in recent years for market wethers to bring \$10,000 or more and does and bucks to bring from \$20,000 to \$40,000.

"The South Africans see these high dollars in the headlines and they are concerned about the direction in which we are taking the

South African Boer,” Don said. “They call these wether-type goats stove pipes with toothpick legs.”

“I told Stephanus that the true Boer breeders in America were still breeding pure Boers. I explained to him that many of these wether-type goats are derived from commercial goats and are not pure Boer goats — they are crossbreds. They’ve been crossed with Ibex and myotonic goats.”

The Ibex is a family of wild goats found across the mountains of Europe and Asia. They were imported into the United States by wild game hunters and are a common sight on Texas’ big game ranches. Myotonic goats — also called fainting goats — have long been known for their unique hip muscling and large loin eye.

By researching the Internet and reading on some of the wether-related chat groups, it seems that some breeders are taking the best traits from all these animals to make the perfect market wether — at least what is considered perfect by today’s judges.

The Ibex extends the frame and tightens the skin, the myotonic improves the muscling and the Boer adds the overall mass.

Don said he was able to somewhat calm down the South Africans regarding the wether goats, but on the flip side, he discovered that the South Africans are following the Americans in making changes to the fullblood Boers.

“They have made their Boers as straight on top as the Americans,” Don said. “The South African Boer goats used to have a dip behind the neck — that’s gone now. They have taken the big wrinkles off the chest and now have pleats.”

Don noted that in his own breeding program he had gone beyond pleats and had bred for tight, smooth skin on the chest. “But when we did that we lost the beautiful Boer head. We had to go back to the pleats to get the head back,” he said.

The South Africans also are now counting the teats on the



Pat Arias (left) and Don Smith (right) work with Deidre and Peter Kirby to determine which does to cull at their Boer stud in Gaborone, Botswana.

bucks, Don said. Some South African genetics have been known for producing any number of teats, from two up to eight.

“They want two teats or four teats on their bucks,” Don said. While a good udder is important only on the females, “the South Africans feel the bucks have more influence on teat structure than do the does,” Don said.

## Botswana bound

While visiting with Stephanus Malan was near the top of his to do list while in South Africa, one of the key reasons for his trip was to visit with Peter and Deidre Kirby in Gaborone, Botswana. This re-



tired couple had recently purchased 350 head of Boer goats to begin a meat goat operation in that country. How they came to recruit a Texas rancher to help them launch their goat operation in the Boer goat's native region of the world is a true story of connect the dots.

I should back up here and note that when Don, Walter and Pat flew into Johannesburg, they were met at the airport by Bob McColaugh. Bob and his wife, Doreen, are Americans that have retired to the Mokolodi Nature Reserve in Botswana. Bob was Pat's ag teacher in high school in California. Bob later went on to work for the U.S. government, helping farmers in other nations learn modern agricultural techniques. Pat and Bob had kept in touch over the years, with Pat keeping Bob up to date on the Boer goat industry in the U.S. (Pat, like Don, is a certified Boer goat judge.)

Bob and Doreen met Peter and Deidre in Gaborone, and when the Kirbys needed help with their Boer operation, Bob recommended Pat and Don. And that's how the Texan and Californian got summoned to southern Africa.

"The Kirbys sincerely wanted our help," Don said. "They are not goat people — this is all new to them. They let us go through all 350 goats. They told us that it did not matter what they had paid for a goat, if we thought it needed to be culled, they would cull it. And they did."

Don and Pat also helped the Kirbys purchase five Boer bucks.

"They are on the right path now," Don said. "If they stay on this track, they will have one of the best Boer herds in Botswana."

### 3,000-mile safari

Don, Pat and Walter traveled a total of 3,000 miles in just under a month during their visit. Pat's old school teacher, Bob, did all of the



Walter Kemp managed to do a little hunting while in South Africa.

driving. The entourage's first stop was the Boer goat stud of Tollie Jordaan in Somerset East. Tollie is well known in the U.S., having judged several national shows and partnering with some Boer breeders in the past. He also owns Tollies African Safaris, which offers guided hunting expeditions, a spa and luxury chalets.

Don laughed and said they may have had their priorities mixed up because their first stop was to go hunting instead of looking at goats. Walter, on his first trip to South Africa, bagged several animals.

"It was a great trip," Walter said. "It was the beginning of winter there, so the weather was perfect. It was in the mountains — the people there were wearing jackets, but it felt good to us, having just left the Texas heat."

### Boers, Boers, Boers

With the hunting trip under their belts, the Americans proceeded to visit the Boer goat studs of JR Jordaan, also in Somerset East; Albie Horn in Kuruman; Johnny Henderson in Jansenville; Nico Botha in Britstown; and Lucas Burger in Griekwastad. The names of some of these breeders run deep in the pedigrees of many U.S. Boer goats. They and their families have made contributions to the Boer breed for generations and began their relationship with U.S. breeders with the first imports in 1993.

While pedigrees are vital to most U.S. fullblood breeders, they

are not considered important by the South African Boer Goat Breeders' Association.

"The South Africans don't register by pedigree, but by inspection," Don said. "If they meet breed standards and pass visual inspection, they can be studded (put into the herdbook). If they don't pass, they are called a flock goat."

He noted that a flock goat can have a superior offspring that can be inspected and studded.

"When it comes to the pedigrees, it is up to the breeders to keep up with the families," Don said, "but the association does not keep up with that."

## Those red goats

The South African Boer Goat Breeders' Association registers Kalaharis through its office, but the organization does not consider the red goat to be a Boer. A Boer must be white with a red head, and have no spot anywhere on its body that you cannot cover with your hand. A Kalahari must be red with no white spot that cannot be covered by a hand.

"Everything else is neither a Boer nor a Kalahari," Don said, which would exclude all types of painted Boers, which are so popular in the U.S. In South Africa, they are just goats and raised for commercial production or slaughter.

So where did the red goats come from?

"We talked to a lot of people who raise Kalaharis, and all but two told me they came from correct colored Boers," Don said.

The big exception was the Jordaan Kalaharis, Don said. "Tollie said he went to some of the old tribesmen there and got red goats. All the other breeders started with traditional."

## Americans honored at regional show

While at Lucas Burger's stud, Don was able to look at the best bucks this pioneer breeder had. When one young buck came through,

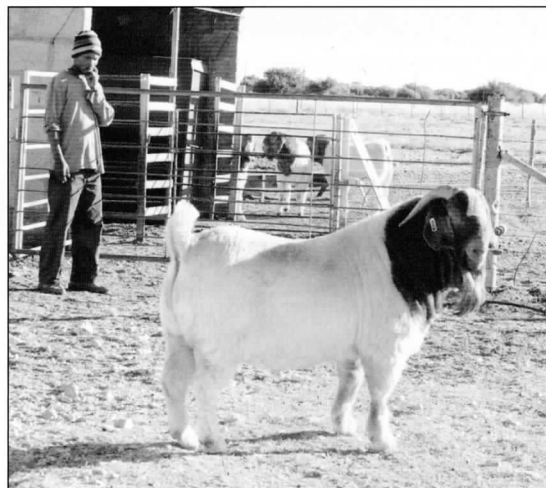
Don said "That's the one right there!" It was a young, thick buck whose Afrikaner name translates to "Big Tire".

Don's trip coincided with Burger's regional Boer goat show in Rustenburg, so they took Big Tire to the show and he was selected grand champion buck. Don noted that 650 goats were present at this show and more than 1,200 are expected later this year at the nationals.

Don and the group of Americans were recognized during the show and were presented gifts at the banquet. Don received a replica of the awards that will be handed out at the national show.

"It was obvious that the South Africans were very

pleased that we were there and interested in their goats," Don said. "I would have bought Big Tire and brought him home but I don't know when we will ever be able to import goats again because of the hoof-and-mouth scare. That's sad because we need this new blood if we are going to keep improving our Boers." ■



## Big Tire

(Above) The buck known as Big Tire was the best buck at Lucas Burger's Boer goat stud, according to Don Smith.

Lucas Burger (right) with the buck after he was cleaned up and shown at the regional show, where he was selected grand champion buck.



Don Smith (left) with Tobie Fourie of South Africa. Both men are often referred to as the grandfather of the Boer goat industry in their respective countries.

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