

Miniature "Panda" Cattle Bring Top Prices

Buyers pay top dollar for a new breed of miniature cattle that have a panda bear's white stripe, says breeder Professor Emeritus Richard Gradwohl who crossed seven other mini breeds over a 35-year period to produce "Rebel," his first "Panda®" miniature bull in 1998. Two years later, "Precious," the first Panda female, was born.

They have a black body with white "belt", black legs, ears and eyespots with a white face. Red and white Panda Miniature cattle are even more rare. Some of the black stock carry the recessive red gene, and when bred to each other, red Pandas occasionally result.

There are currently 33 head of belted, registered Panda Miniatures in the U.S.

To qualify as full miniatures, they must be less than 42 in. at three years of age. Panda calves are generally 20 to 35 lbs. at birth.

Most non-belted bulls are culled or sold as pet mini steers but non-belted females are registered within the Panda breed as "potential belted progeny," and used as breeding stock because they have a 50 percent chance of possessing the gene for producing belted

offspring when bred to a belted bull.

"Conformation, height and markings are the ingredients that go into pricing," Gradwohl says. "Belted Panda females (black) sell for \$15,000 to \$20,000 and belted males (black) are valued at \$12,000 to \$15,000. Non-belted females are less expensive at \$8,000 to \$12,000 each. We've had two belted red bulls born, which sold for \$25,000 and \$30,000, respectively. There's only one red Panda heifer in the world so far. I was offered \$35,000 for her, but I declined as I elected to keep her."

Gradwohl has only four Pandas on his 5-acre operation. The rest are sold in a "custom marketing program" which requires buyers to become "contract breeders," signing an after-sale marketing agreement that states that the International Miniature Cattle Breeders Society and Registry maintains control of any and all breeding decisions and gets a portion of revenue at sale time.

"For example, the price of a breeding pair would be sold at an agreed discount from the published list prices. When the breeding pair

has a progeny, we market that progeny when it is weaned at four months of age. Whatever the selling price for the progeny is, it is shared between the owner of the breeding pair and the registry, using a previously agreed-to formula," Gradwohl says.

The arrangement also requires that the registry furnish Panda Miniature semen at no charge, provide a free consulting service and carries out and pays for all marketing when selling the animals. Right now, there is a waiting list of several people wanting to purchase Panda Miniature Cattle, he says.

Gradwohl is the founding director of the International Miniature Cattle Breeders Society and Registry - an organization that handles the registration of 24 different breeds of mini cattle. It currently has over 7,000 animals on the books. Gradwohl works together with various individual breed registry chairpersons to establish standards for each.

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There are only 33 head of belted, registered Panda Miniatures in the U.S.

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"Fun Machines" Operate On Weed Eater Motors

Larry Pavlik, Orchard, Neb., recently sent FARM SHOW photos of some "fun machines" he built that operate on motors off old Weed Eater string trimmers.

"You can often buy old Weed Eater trimmers for \$8 or \$10 at auctions. Clean up the spark plug, and you can usually get the motors to run again as good as new," says Pavlik.

He often takes his radio-controlled "bull on wheels" to antique tractor shows. "Kids get a kick out of trying to lasso it," says Pavlik.

The 2-ft. long, rear-wheel-drive bull rides on four lawn mower wheels. The sides and head are made from plywood, with a pair of air horns serving as the bull's horns.

The single cylinder Weed Eater motor drives a generator, which operates an electric motor powered by a small battery. The electric motor chain-drives the rear wheels. Pavlik uses a radio transmitter designed for model airplanes to send signals to servo motors on the bull. The radio was converted to surface frequency in order to avoid interfering with frequencies used by model airplanes.

The bull can go forward, backward, and left or right. At shows, Pavlik slowly runs

the bull back and forth down a path. Kids straddle a wooden horse and use a rope to try to lasso the bull to stop it.

"I call it my Beetle Bomb. Kids really like trying to catch it. I've even had a few older guys try to rope it," says Pavlik. "The battery provides an extra boost on take-off and also can operate the bull on its own."

Pavlik also uses old Weed Eater motors to power homemade miniature dragsters. Each dragster measures 30 in. long and weigh about 25 lbs. It rides on the rear wheels off an old lawn mower, while the front wheels are off a model airplane. The motor chain-drives the rear wheels with the aid of a gear reduction system.

A pneumatic timer is used to set the dragster in motion. The timer clips onto the motor with a wing nut and is wired to the throttle on the motor. The motor has a clutch on it so when the motor is idle, the clutch is released.

In races, the dragster follows a cable strung out about 100 ft. or so. "When we're ready to go, we activate the timer which then pulls the throttle wide open. The motor really winds up fast," says Pavlik. "We run the en-



Kids sit on a wood horse and try to lasso Beetle Bomb, a Weed-Eater-powered bull.

gine for about 8 seconds and whichever dragster goes the farthest is the winner. One time I raced a dragster on an airport runway and clocked it at 60 mph. I use the same timer on several different machines."

He also made what he calls a "pulling quackter" or "little diesel duck" that's powered by a single cylinder diesel engine off a model airplane. The motor mounts on an angle iron frame that rides on four wheels. A duck lawn ornament was cut up and mounted on the frame. The rear wheels are off the model airplane.

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These 30-in. long dragsters race along a cable for about 8 sec. Whichever goes furthest wins.



"Little diesel duck" runs off a single cylinder diesel engine from a model airplane.

Pewter Miniatures Bring Back Fond Farm Memories

Any farm-raised man or woman who ever showed animals at the fair or worked with livestock will appreciate these pewter miniatures from designer Virginia Bartges. From key chains and pendants to desk set scenes, her work evokes fond memories of life on the farm.

"I started developing a few small things as gifts for customers of the family swine leasing and contracting business," says Bartges. "We used to do trade shows at pork producer meetings, and I had a display case of things I had done. People started asking if they were for sale."

After more than 20 years, her business is now full time. She has developed a long list of unique farm related pewter miniatures, including clocks and a new line of collector edition Christmas ornaments. She markets her items at major farms shows and from her website. Items range in price from \$5 for a small calf to \$65 for several livestock show scenes.

A few small swine items have since expanded into sheep, dairy and beef animals. Some include kids and adults working with the animals or in the case of "After the Show", two kids asleep against their cow.

"I always try to have a range of items so even little kids can find something," says Bartges. "I am already on my second generation as people who bought little pewter pendants for \$5 are now coming back to my booths with their own families and buying larger items. Kids 15 to 19 really like the 4-H things, and parents tell me it will often be the only thing they bring with them to college."

Her business is not without risk, however, as she makes a substantial upfront investment of time and capital in new items. Bartges credits her own ag background with her success. She points out that miniatures like hers can't be too breed specific, yet the conformation has to be correct.

"If I make a mistake and people don't want

them, it's my loss," she says.

As a mostly self-taught artist, Bartges also gives a great deal of credit to other artists who shared their knowledge with her. She also gives a lot of credit to her mold maker.

"He is an artist in his own right," she says. "I do all the original artwork in wax and contract the castings with a foundry on the East Coast. They produce rosin rubber-based molds which provide tremendous detail."

Each mold is good for 500 to 1,000 pieces. As a result, some swine and cattle pieces are sold out, as are a set of hay and grain farming scenes that sold for \$199. A secondary market is now developing for these pieces, but at a higher price than the originals brought.

"I have a following of people who have been very good to me and have bought one of everything I have ever made," says Bartges.

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Items range in price from \$5 for a small calf to \$65 for several livestock show scenes.

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