

## INNOVATION DRIVING SUCCESS AT WATTLE GROVE SPECKLE PARK



A COMMITMENT to innovation and a determination to build a modern, high-performing seedstock business has helped place Dale and Bin Humphries' Wattle Grove Speckle Park stud on an exciting trajectory of growth across both local and international markets.

Established in 2008, the stud is based on its namesake property near Oberon in New South Wales, but also spans 607 ha of agistment country throughout the Central West of the state, to house its growing herd of 300 elite females.

A recent import to the Australian beef industry by historical standards, having come into the country in 2007, the Speckle Park breed originated in Canada where Wattle Grove's foundation genetics were sourced. Today, Dale and Bin still bring in more than 400 embryos each year from their Canadian suppliers.

Bin said consistently strong sale results and a diverse spread of active buyers at Wattle Grove's series of yearly sales had demonstrated Speckle Park cattle had moved beyond being recognised for their distinctive markings alone.

"Wattle Grove Speckle Park was established after Dale saw the cattle on a nearby farm, and subsequent research led him to the firm belief this breed was what the Australian beef industry needed," Bin said.

"And, whatever potential he saw at that time, they are fulfilling it.

“Our stud, and the Speckle Park breed, now has runs on the board — we’re established, we’re seeing premiums paid for commercial cattle and the breed is being recognised not just for the coat but for quality and durability.

“People are now saying ‘these are more than just pretty cattle, they are legitimate cattle that can go and do the job’ and are buying them with confidence, knowing they will perform.”

The Wattle Grove lineup of sales has, for the last two years, included the Twilight Sale, held in February at Toowoomba Showgrounds, an online-only genetics sale in June and the annual, on-property auction in October. Each event is videoed and supported by Elite Livestock Auctions to provide an online selling platform — a strategy that has extended the reach of the sales to a diverse pool of buyers.

Over the 10 Wattle Grove sales Elite Livestock Auctions has hosted, 2,604 people have been active bidders.

Sale highlights over the last year have included achieving a world record price for a Speckle Park heifer with the sale of Wattle Grove P503 Cara S101 to Ivery Downs Cattle Co for \$75,000, with females across the board averaging \$19,030.

Wattle Grove Ba Da Boom Q127 was the stud’s top priced bull at \$65,000, while the overall bull line averaged \$12,916. Embryos peaked at \$5,200/embryo and semen at \$2,167/straw.

This year, the stud also hosted the ‘Rockin’ at Rocky Bull Sale’ in Rockhampton, to coincide with Beef Australia, where a full clearance of 27 bulls averaged more than \$13,000 and sold to a top of \$45,000 for Beef Australia’s Grand Champion Speckle Park male, Wattle Grove Dust n Smoke P07, secured by Speckle Park Brazil.

“We can see the demand for our product and for the breed is now strong, with our buyers coming from as far north as Mackay, Proserpine and the Atherton Tablelands in Queensland, right down to Tasmania, Victoria and across to South Australia,” Bin said.

“Around 70 per cent of our bulls go to the commercial market and 30 per cent will go back to the purebred market.

“We also export genetics to New Zealand and, this year, sent our first embryos to Brazil.”

The profile of the typical Wattle Grove buyer varies from new entrants to the industry to larger-scale, commercial operators in search of volume purchases.

“The beauty of our buyers is they are looking for innovation, they’re looking for something different to boost their bottom line. We’ve seen bigger guys come in who have been willing to give them a shot and now they’ve had success and they just keep coming back.”

From the stud’s first official sale in 2016, digital technology and online selling has been key.

“In the early days, what we wanted was flexibility on how we could do things, and we knew if people were looking at Speckle Park they were innovative and okay with doing something a little bit different,” Bin said.

“But today, this is mainstream and people are buying online with confidence, while not having to travel hundreds of kilometres or losing hours out of their day.

“We put a lot of time into ensuring we supply high-quality video, photos and everything they need ahead of the sale, because that is what they are making their decisions on.



“As time has gone on, the Elite platform has got better and better, and it is now really leading the way for us. It just opens up another whole market and a lot of people who would not normally access our sales.”

Strong plans for growth in the near future will further drive the need for a combination of in-person and online selling capability, as Dale and Bin look to secure more agistment and grow their bull offering to 250 a year, and to reshape the Wattle Grove sales calendar.

This year, the new ‘Fire & Ice’ female and genetics sale will be held at Toowoomba Showgrounds, and via Elite Livestock Auctions, on 4 June 2022. Bulls will be offered at the newly-established Annual Bull Sale, also in Toowoomba, on 15 October 2022.

“We still want to be able to support our southern buyers but also be closer to volume buyers in the north,” Bin said.

“We love people coming to our sales and it’s important to us to have these events and to provide that opportunity, but it’s also important we have that online component to complement it. I think the industry has moved on from being able to totally rely on people attending sales in-person.”