

Rusty — The accidental herd sire

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ECR Rusty was an accidental herdsire for Egypt Creek Ranch.

He was a good buck, but I didn't think he was the biggest or the best. I never intended for Rusty to be one of my top replacement bucks, but fate had a different idea.

Rusty was born on this ranch in 2002, one of several dozen kids that were born that year. Most were sired by Southwest Cisco, a reddish buck that was as rough and wild as the Texas ranch on which he was born. In fact, Cisco was so wild, he died in the pasture of pneumonia after his first kid crop, before I could figure out a way to catch and doctor him. (That's when I learned the lesson of having a catch-pen in every pasture.)

Rusty inherited the hardiness of his sire, but the elegance and quiet temperament of his mother — a beautiful, solid white Klondike daughter. Rusty was one of the fastest growing buck kids on the place his first summer. By the time he was a yearling, I figured he would make someone a good herdsire, so I offered him and several others for sale.

For some reason, Rusty got picked over. He was a plain, light red-colored goat. His cohorts were wilder colored. One was light gray with a black mane and back stripe. Another was pink with white polka dots. And another was a grayish roan that, from the right angle, looked purple. I'm not sure if it was the color or the fact that he was a little taller and thinner looking than the others, but come wintertime Rusty was still in the yearling buck pasture.

One thing I noticed was that Rusty barely grew during his second year, which was surprising, given how big he had gotten his first year. Remember, I feed very little grain now and even less back then. On pasture, the daily gains are small, but should be consistently going upward. Rusty's weight just sat there. Until his third year.

When the first green grass began to sprout, Rusty bloomed. The lanky, scrawny buck doubled in size that year. His muscles rippled and his coat became redder and brighter. He never needed deworming, his hooves were rarely trimmed and he never had so much as a runny nose. My goal has always been to raise low-maintenance goats — Rusty was NO maintenance. That year he joined my string of herdsires.

Another buck I had at that time was named Black Gold. He was black and gray with short legs and the deepest body of any goat I had ever raised. I sold Black Gold to a commercial producer in Tennessee and delivered him one weekend. By the time I got home, the producer was calling me to say that Black Gold's legs were too short and he couldn't reach to breed his taller Boer-cross nannies.

From experience, I knew that with goats, where there was a will, there was a way. But to avoid an argument with the customer, I offered to replace the buck with someone taller. The only buck available was Rusty, so I took him to Tennessee, dropped him off and brought Black Gold home. The producer reported back that Rusty was working out just fine.

But a few months later the producer called and said he was selling most of his goats and was I interesting in buying him out. I made a deal, on the condition that I got Rusty back also. Once the details were worked out, I made another trip to Tennessee, picked up Rusty, and about 30 does, all carrying Rusty kids!

That deal was probably one of the luckiest moments in my goat-producing history. I got a good herd of goats, Rusty was back home, and that set of kids turned out to be some of the best percentages I had ever raised.

Rusty was a 100% New Zealand Kiko, so I used him extensively in my fullblood herd, but his hardiness made him a great cross on Boer and Kiko percentages. He delivered parasite resistance, hardiness, quick growth and colors ranging from pinks to blacks to paints. His kids did well in buck performance tests and his daughters were great, productive mothers. His offspring brought some of the highest prices ever paid for Kiko breeding stock.

Needless to say, I never let Rusty leave the farm again. I have daughters, grand-daughters and great-grand-daughters on the ranch. His 2010 son, ECR Rusty's Rambo, is already one of our top herdsires. A 2012 son, ECR Pharoah, a top finisher at last year's Western Illinois University buck performance test, already has kids on the ground waiting for evaluation.

Rusty turned 11 on Feb. 12 and is now retired. He spends his days under a shade tree in the back yard in a former dog run. He gets a healthy ration of senior equine feed and a scratch on the head each day. We

usually try to avoid accidents on the farm — that Rusty was able to remain a part of this ranch was a good one.