

Herd improvement on a grand scale

By BRIAN PILBEAM, Dip. Agr.

One of Australia's most ambitious group herd improvement schemes has begun in North East Victoria.

Members of the Victorian Commercial Hereford Breeders Group have installed 50 of their most promising young bulls in a post weaning weight gain test.

The Victorian Department of Agriculture will give technical assistance and help with the collection and interpretation of data.

The experiment is only part of a long term search for breeding improvement by the group.

Site for the test is Wappan Park, the 3000 acre property of J. Tehan and Sons at Bonnie Doon (Vic.), on the banks of Lake Eildon.

The Victorian Commercial Hereford Breeders Group has 13 members who joined together last year with the general aim of maximising genetic improvement in members' herds through adoption of objective selection methods.

They also hope to promote the sale of stock with performance records and progeny tests.

The bulls range from about seven to 11 months in age.

At this stage the group are confining themselves to the post weaning test.

Potential sires

Early this month each member brought young bulls representing about three per cent of their breeding herd to the test area at Wappan.

Rather than conduct individual tests the group are running the cattle on the one property to minimise environmental differences and enable a more valid interpretation of results.

Wappan Park has ideal facilities for handling and weighing the cattle and is



MR IAN HOPKINS

weighed on arrival at the site.

Jim Tehan and his brother Tony gave each bull a condition score.

The bulls are running in a 120 acre paddock, well watered by two dams and with a good cover of barley grass, sub clover and danthonia species on light Divide soil.

The recording program for the bulls consists of three main weighings, one at the start, another in the middle and one to conclude the test. At these, the weights will be recorded in the early morning over three consecutive days.

This recording will be supplemented by monthly weight checks. The final weighing is expected in late November or early

certificates for brucellosis, Johnes and tuberculosis and we will probably dip." If an animal becomes sick, the vet and owner are immediately notified, Mr Tehan said.

Members of the group have drawn up a roster to spread the work of the regular weighings.

At the start of the test the cattle looked well and settled very quickly.

Mr Ian Hopkins, a department beef industry officer based at Werribee (Vic.), said such a group of young bulls together may exhibit interesting social behavior.

Mr Hopkins will work closely with the group in this initial experiment and help lay guidelines for future development of the improvement scheme.

When the post weaning test is finished each animal will get a weight gain score and be ranked for conformation on a hoof to hook by a leading cattle expert.

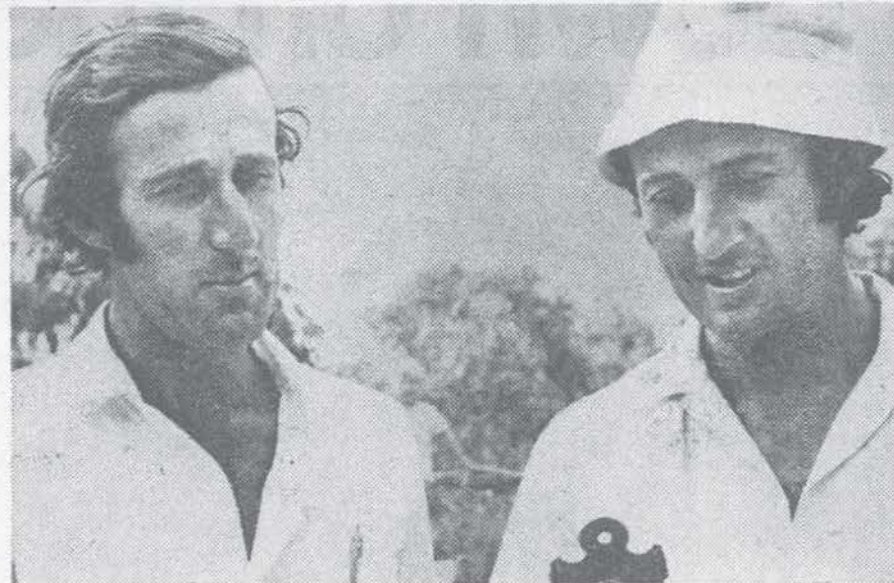
Only commercial and heritable traits will be considered. Emphasis will be placed on muscle development, fat cover, soundness of feet and legs, any skeletal abnormalities and percentage pigment in the eye.

The group's chairman Mr Tom Vance, Bridge Creek, Mansfield (Vic.) said when the results have been analysed it is hoped to identify the genetically superior animals and make them available to the group.



Some of the bulls under test (above) move in the new yard in front of the sheltered crush and scales.

RIGHT: Discussing some of the condition scores given to the arriving animals are, left, Mr Jim Tehan jr. and his brother Mr Tony Tehan.



Bulls may be sold to group members by sealed tender. If the owner wished to retain the animal he enters his own tender, Mr Vance said.

Other members in the scheme are Mr Geoff Cookson, Alexandra, Messrs Rick and Hugh Long, Yea, Mr Graham Stoney, Mansfield, Messrs Don and J. G. McRae, Molesworth, Mr John Sinclair, Molesworth, Messrs Geoff and Robert Ritchie, Mansfield and Mr David Yenken and Mr Peter Tallis both of Mansfield.

The deep-rooted