

Itty Bitty COWS

— BY JACKIE LARSON

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In a world where bigger is better and longhorns are celebrated for their span, Dottie Love's itty bitty cows are anything but ordinary.

Love raises Miniature Zebu cattle on the Palmyra Road ranchette she shares with husband Tom Sale. Her enthusiasm for the diminutive breed is anything but small. "They're like fish in the aquarium – it's the most wonderful thing to watch," she said. "They're more sensitive, more active and more curious. They're just beautiful."

In order to be considered Miniature Zebu, the animals must stand no taller than 42 inches tall behind the hump on their neck. "What's important is that they're proportionate, and you can lose that if they get too small," she said, making sure the distinction is drawn between "dwarfish" (not good in the miniature world) and "small." "The Miniature Zebu are just naturally small. About 40 breeds grew up, appropriate to their purpose and forage. These miniature zebu could go through rice paddies without hurting the paddies."



**Dottie Love and Cubby the
Miniature Zebu steer.**

Take Cubby, for instance. The size of a stout Shetland pony or Great Dane, he is mild-mannered and affectionate. On an ornately beaded halter, he willingly follows Love onto the deck, standing placidly by the swimming pool as a guest pets his soft grey fur. He's quieter than any house dog, and his big brown eyes rimmed with hopelessly long eyelashes meet a stranger's gaze with faint interest. Cubby is, well, something of a people cow.

"He's just like a dog, he's sweet and affectionate. The Miniature Zebu's personalities are so wonderful. Every one of mine has different personalities. Some are stubborn, some are needy – some like to show off," said Love.

Apparently, Miniature Zebu respond to the Golden Rule. "They treat you like you treat them," Love said, quoting a Rowlett Zebu breeder named Gibson.

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The Zebu breed comes from the *bos indicus* species. Different in several ways from the more common *bos taurus* breeds hailing from Europe, *bos indicus* breeds like the Zebu, the American Brahman and the King Ranch's Santa Gertrudis descend from breeds native to the Indian subcontinent. *Bos indicus* breeds share certain traits – a pronounced hump at the shoulder, a deep dewlap, highly muscled skin adept at twitching away flies and a natural resistance to parasites that has made them a hit with Texas breeders.





These Miniature Zebu are barely as high as their fence.

The smaller Miniature Zebu have many things in common with their bovine cousins. Denizens of a monastery in Northern California have Miniature Zebu, and they are milking one, which in addition to providing for her calf provides a modest gallon of milk a day – about right for an itty bitty heifer.

So why does Dottie Love raise Miniature Zebu?

“Living lawn art. Pets. Lawnmowers,” She said. Take your pick. Or maybe the answer is simply “becows.”

“At the State Fair, people kept asking, ‘What is their purpose?’ Well, I raise them,” she said with a smile, adding that for people who just want to have a rare breed of cattle around, Miniature Zebu have some advantages. “They’re totally low maintenance, there’s no special feeds they have to have. They’re totally hardy,” she said.

Nimble and sure-footed, Love’s Miniature Zebu get to head for the back of the acreage in the summer, and can be seen wandering the hills in her back yard. (They live with an assortment of cats and rescued dogs, including a red healer named Edgar. He came with the house – and he’s blind, but that doesn’t stop him from enjoying life. Mild-mannered but

surprisingly adventurous, “every day he goes way out there, one step at a time,” Love said, pointing to the rolling landscape of the Palmyra Road neighborhood.)

In 2004, they showed their Miniature Zebu at the State Fair, which was a premier national showing of the Miniature Zebu breed.

“We had a wonderful time at the fair, and we won lots of ribbons and championships – plus we got lots of people interested in the breed. That’s great, because there are only about 1,000 of these in this country,” she said.

Last year Love raised her first two bull calves, putting them up for sale after showing them at the fair. One went to a home in Washington state, one to Oklahoma. She could have marketed them as bloodline champions for fancy prices, but



**Tom Sale and Dottie Love
with her paintings of
Miniature Zebu.**



decided to focus on finding them good homes. “I want somebody to simply enjoy them – I said they would only go to good homes. I wanted them to go where people treated them like family, basically where people kiss their cows – and I was assured these people do,” she said with a smile.

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Love is an artist by profession. She teaches art at the Johnson County campus of Hill College in Cleburne, and she creates art from reproducing, on silk, large prints from vintage photographs.

She has become fascinated with Zebu art – she has about 300 images and sculptures, and her love for

Miniature Zebu has also brought her back to her paint box. “I like to draw them – their bodies are so interesting to me,” she said.

Husband Tom Sale is primarily a sculptor, using a combination of found objects and media to create fascinating little dioramas, generally on the inside of suitcases or boxes, generally with a humorous subtext.

He taught at Navarro College until last year, leaving the classroom to focus more on his artwork, which he shows in galleries such as Grey Matter Gallery off Deep Ellum in Dallas.



Sale just got home from spending several weeks in Italy, where he and his parents stayed with a friend who was house sitting at the Tuscan farmhouse of Miriam Margolis, the talented actress who played Professor Sprout in the Harry Potter movies.

Not unexpectedly, perhaps, Sale had an assignment to do while he was in Italy. “She made me hunt down breeds of cows and bring back pictures,” he said with a chuckle. 🐄🐄🐄