

LONGHORN PROVES IDEAL CHOICE FOR BOXED BEEF SCHEME IN DORSET

Ease of management, versatility and a growing demand for breeding bulls are just some of the attributes which make the Longhorn the ideal breed for busy Dorset-based couple Dave and Carla Phillips.

Dave's love affair with the Longhorn breed began 20 years ago when working with the dairy herd at Goodwood Estate, West Sussex. Dave fell in love with the two striking Longhorn cattle which came under his charge, roaming the Estate's parkland.

Some 10 years ago Dave moved away from dairy herd management to his current job as a vet tech cattle foot trimmer with Synergy Farm Health. Dave found life wasn't the same without cows to manage, so he decided to make his first cattle purchases and Longhorns seemed the obvious choice to establish the Etheridge herd.

The first two heifers did not have far to travel with Dave and Carla being near neighbours to Sid and

Anne Hollier of the Long Ash prefix. "I visited Long Ash through my work by becoming their foot trimmer and had great admiration for the female lines which Sid and Anne had produced and so my first two purchases were very shortly joined by a second pair of Long Ash yearling heifers," explains Dave.

The majority of the Etheridge herd is now descended from these four initial heifers, with AI used for the first three years, after extensive research into the male bloodlines from which to establish the herd.

These early AI sires included Parc Grace Dieu Tinhorn and Eyebrook Richard, a bull with a glittering show career including being part of the Burke Trophy winning pair at the Royal Show along with multiple breed championship and reserve interbreed titles.



Dave and Carla Phillips of the Etheridge herd, with two-year-old daughter and budding cattle enthusiast, Isla.

"We continued to use AI across the herd, moving from Eyebrook Richard to Fishwick Lord of the Rings which had won the Longhorn Cattle Society Bull of the Year title in 2012. He left a great impression within the herd, leaving the length and style we were hoping for.

"More recently, Genus sires have also been used, namely Carreg Superman and Carreg Sainfain both of which carry the Fishwick Macavity line, another well-respected prize-winning sire," adds Dave.

We are lucky that our ground allows us to out-winter cows and young calves.

The calving pattern at Etheridge allows for a spread of youngstock and finishing animals throughout the year.

"Once weaned at 7-8 months, they are in the shed on silage and creep, while the younger calves outwinter with their mothers on the chalk down. We are lucky that our ground allows us to out-winter the cows and young calves. The 80 acres of chalky downland which we farm are dry and free-draining, so we are able to just buffer feed with ring feeders in a Dutch barn and the cattle come and go as they please."

To add to their full-time jobs with Dave as lead Vet Tech at Synergy Farm Health and Carla working

as a conveyancing Solicitor, alongside two-year-old daughter Isla and new arrival on the way, the couple have also started a box beef venture.

"The aim is to kill about six animals a year for boxes, with these sold in and around the local area. We've already seen a huge surge in interest through word of mouth and the local community Facebook page. We are boxing animals on a 16-way split. I am assessing them by eye and they are killing out at 25-26 months at about 350kg deadweight. Anything over 400kg equates to negative equity," comments Dave.

The couple are passionate about putting a focus on where consumers' food is coming from and are aware of people buying less meat and but buying better quality and having raised levels of interest in buying locally with their grass-fed, sustainable Longhorn meat at the forefront.



Dave Phillips alongside one of his older cows, Long Ash Mandy.



In order to grow numbers to their ideal herd size of 20 breeding females, heifers have been retained within the herd and not regularly sold for breeding. However, now having reached their ideal herd size, bulls and heifers are being offered for sale.

"The annual bull crop sees one AI-sired bull retained for use within the herd at 12 months of age. This bull is then sold on the following year, as a proven yet still young bull, maintaining his optimum worth in monetary value as well as having given back to the herd in siring a crop of calves.

"Buying a bull is a huge financial outlay for a smaller herd such as ours which calved 14 cows in 2021. Therefore, if we can breed a bull by AI to use within the herd it allows us to keep up with a fast-moving gene pool, as well as maintain the value of a young sire before a fall in his value," explains Dave.

The 2022 calf crop is by Etheridge Tornado, a son of Fishwick Lord of the Rings and Etheridge Ultimate, by Long Ash Captain, who has since been sold to a dairy herd.

While working in his day job, Dave has noticed a huge leap in interest in the Longhorn breed since the Buitelaar scheme came in to play.

"This, along with the new Society approach to de-horning has combined to bring the appeal within the commercial and dairy enterprises to a new level. Disbudding bulls has made a huge difference to the dairy audience. A lot of farmers were massively put off by the horns for management within a dairy system, but as soon as the horns are off, they change their minds," says Dave.



Long Ash Jahola alongside her calf.

"In fact, we have now sold five disbudded Etheridge bulls to dairy farms. I am getting such good feedback about the Longhorn breed from dairy farmers. The ease of calving and small birthweights along with the get up and go of the calves means the bulls are often being used across the whole herd," he adds.

Shows are an excellent shop window for our own herd, both for marketing breeding stock and pushing the boxed beef.

Horns are left on within the breeding herd at Etheridge as Dave and Carla like to keep the herd looking traditional in its breed character.

Alongside breeding the best they can the couple also enjoy showing their cattle to help promote the breed. "Sid and Anne Hollier got me in to showing when I used to help them and it is just addictive and I've well and truly got the bug," says Dave.

Through attending local shows such as Gillingham and Shaftsbury, Dorset County and Devon County, the couple have picked up multiple awards along the way which has raised their profile. "The shows are an excellent shop window for our herd, both for selling breeding stock and boxed beef. It allows people to connect with us and our cattle and we enjoy it," says Carla.

The ability of the Longhorn breed to fit any management system, allows Dave and Carla to enjoy farming the Etheridge herd, while both working full time and having a young family. "We have a huge sense of achievement from our love of the Longhorn and the direction in which we are taking our herd. Other breeds just would not be able to tick all the boxes for us the way the Longhorn does," concludes Dave.



Etheridge Quartz Beauty is one of the herd's show cows.



Etheridge Unique and her calf.

