

GREAT YORKSHIRE SHOW

The majestic English Longhorn has captured the hearts of the team at Longbridge Longhorns and the herd has expanded and enjoyed success on the local show circuit. **Katie Fallon** reports.

A love for Longhorns leads to showring success

The Longbridge Longhorns team will be exhibiting at a host of shows this year, including Lincoln, Garsang, Lancashire, Halifax and Ryedale, as well as the Great Yorkshire Show, which is hosting the national Longhorn competition, where there will be a strong show of the breed.

The Longbridge Longhorn herd was established 12 years ago by first generation farmers Jane Grant and

Trish McDonnell, who farm near Easingwold in North Yorkshire.

Ms Grant began her farming journey as a teenager while studying agriculture at Askham Bryan College, York, alongside working for the family haulage and animal feed business.

She started out buying continental store cattle from local livestock markets and finishing them on tenanted land.

In 1995, the family moved to Easingwold after acquiring two



The Longbridge Longhorns herd was established 12 years ago and now comprises 150 pedigree Longhorn cattle.

PICTURES: TIM SCOFENER

farms which allowed them to grow the cattle enterprise.

With more space and a growing passion for cattle, Ms Grant went on to build a modest herd of Charolais and Simmental cattle over the years, before falling in love with the Longhorn breed.

In her words, 'the lure of the beautiful English Longhorn proved too great' and they went on to buy 11 pedigree Longhorn cows and a stock bull from the rare breeds sale at York livestock market in 2011.

The herd has since grown significantly, and they now run 150-head of cattle, including 70 breeding females plus followers, and three stock bulls across the farm's 121 hectares (300 acres) of grassland.

Since establishing the herd, Ms Grant and Ms McDonnell have been keen to expand, by breeding their own replacements as well as introducing fresh bloodlines from other pedigree Longhorn breeders.

Over recent years, new additions

to the Longbridge herd have come from well-established Longhorn breeders, such as the Treverton herd in Northamptonshire and the Blackbrook herd in Leicestershire.

Several breeding females were also bought from various dispersal sales, such as the Gorse, Hartford and Heronbrook herds, as well as breed society sales at Worcester auction market.

Herd manager Graham Walker and herdswoman Alisha Lack have been instrumental in driving the herd forward over the last couple of years, helping to deliver Ms Grant and Ms McDonnell's ambition to keep improving and refining the quality of stock and bloodlines over the next decade.

Calving

Mr Walker explains all the cows are served by one of the farm's three stock bulls and calving is split into two batches with heifers calving in January and the remaining cows calving in March onwards.

Most of the heifer calves are kept as replacements, with any surplus sold at pedigree sales, along with the best bulls which are also sold for breeding.

He says: "This year is our first year selling breeding bulls and we have sold four two-year-old bulls into pedigree herds."

Any bulls which do not make the grade for breeding are either finished on farm and sold live-weight through Selby or York livestock market at 15 to 18 months old or sold to local wholesale and retail butchers.

“The Longhorn has never had anything added to it, they are still the original breed with no other breed influences

GRAHAM WALKER



The cows are served by one of the farm's three stock bulls and calving is split into two batches.



All the cattle are fed on silage with additional concentrate feed given to finishing bulls and to youngstock through winter.

All cattle are housed over winter in straw yards and turned out to graze pasture through spring and summer, usually from mid-April



The farm's new hydraulic cattle handling system.

through to November, depending on the weather. This year, 9ha (22 acres) of kale was planted for the cattle to graze over summer.

A new hydraulic handling system has recently been installed in conjunction with the herd's expansion, to ensure an efficient and safe working environment when handling cattle.

Mr Walker says: "The new system also puts less stress on the cattle and offers greater flexibility for handling due to the adjustable race, allowing for longer horns which is essential when working with Longhorns."

With herd health a key priority,

Farm facts

- Longbridge Longhorns founded in 2011
- 121-hectares (300-acre) grassland farm just outside Easingwold, North Yorkshire
- 70 pedigree Longhorn breeding females plus followers
- All calves are tag-tested for BVD
- New hydraulic handling system installed to improve handling and safety
- Electric cattle brushes in each shed to promote herd welfare while housed in winter



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Jane Grant and Trish McDonnell have had great success with their English Longhorn cattle.

the team at Longbridge works closely with the local veterinary practice and all cattle are now vaccinated and monitored for bovine viral diarrhoea (BVD), leptospirosis and IBR, as well as calves' being tag-tested for BVD.

"We are monitored, but we are not accredited, our primary focus

is animal health," says Mr Walker.

The herd's welfare is paramount and each shed has an electric cattle brush to help promote the cattle's wellbeing throughout the winter housing period.

Mr Walker says: "They spend hours with the brushes, it is really rewarding to watch."

As well as driving the herd forward in terms of expansion, both Mr Walker and Ms Lack have been key influences in the herd's presence in the show ring over recent years.

Having kept Longhorns since 2005, Mr Walker began showing in 2007 and with Ms Lack showing her grandparents' herd of Beef Shorthorns since 2012. Both have a keen interest in showing.

Herd

They also each have their own small herd of Longhorns, under the prefixes Willowtree and Newton, which they show together with the Longbridge herd.

The Great Yorkshire Show in 2021 was the first outing for the team at Longbridge, where they took a team of three cattle including two heifers and a bull, all of which were individually placed in their classes.

Ms Lack says: "We did not go to any other shows that year because of Covid-19, but everyone loved it and got the taste for showing."

During the 2022 show season,

they competed at several local shows including the Great Yorkshire, Ryedale, Malton and Egton, as well as Northumberland and Nottinghamshire county shows.

Mr Walker says: "We also entered the Longhorn society's northern herd competition winning best large herd, and champion calf."

However, it is this year where the team have seen their best results to date with a team mostly made up of home-bred cattle comprising of 12 cattle from the Longbridge herd, as well as cattle from both Mr Walkers and Ms Lacks herds.

They claimed the breed and reserve native breed championships at Nottinghamshire County show, with a homebred bull calf, Longbridge Whistler.

Champion titles were also achieved at Northumberland Show, where they took home breed championship with first calver, Longbridge U-turn, and reserve junior heifer champion with March 2022-born Longbridge Wendy.

Accolades

They also won best junior bull with Longbridge Whistler and were first in the senior heifer class with Longbridge Velvet.

As Longhorn Cattle Society members, the team remain passionate about the majestic breed, and Mr Walker says they make an excellent choice for any cattle breeder.

He says: "The cows have longevity, are easy calving, milky and make excellent mothers. The Longhorn has never had anything added to it, they are still the original breed with no other breed influences, which does mean it takes longer to get to where we need to be as the animals are not as big, compared to the likes of the Angus."

But it is the heritage and tradition of the breed which Mr Walker says makes them special as well as being one of the UK's oldest pedigree native breeds.

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Herd manager
Graham Walker
and herdsman
Alisha Lack.