

LONGHORN CROSSES PROVE THEIR CAPABILITIES AND PROFITABILITY WITHIN SCOTTISH SUCKLER HERD

Longhorns are bucking the trend in the north of Scotland for Stephen Sutherland and family as he praises them for their ability to perform at the very highest standards as a suckler dam sire.



Left: Stephen, Centre: Kenneth senior, Right: Kenneth junior

Having purchased their first Longhorns some 25 years ago, Mr Sutherland says they can compete on a par with a Continental suckler cow for their ease of calving, natural fleshing and ability to produce a quality native sired carcass with around 60% of his herd carrying Longhorn genetics. "The main reason for using Longhorns is to breed our own replacement females each year," explains Stephen, who farms alongside his father Kenneth senior and brother Kenneth junior.

The family also employ three part time stockmen as well as having three very eager junior stock people in the form of Kenneth junior and wife Fiona's children, Amy, Jack and Tom.



Running more than 400 cows across their 2000-acres through six farms near Thurso, Stephen is known for selling some 220 plus suckled calves each spring with trade topping at £1230 for his Longhorn sired calves.

"In order to breed replacements, a Simmental bull goes onto Longhorn cross cows and the Longhorn bulls go onto all the Simmental cross cows and heifers that are being used to breed replacements. Any cows that are not being used to breed replacements go to the Charolais bull," explains Stephen.

"Not only do the fantastic markings that we get from the Longhorn sired calves create a little interest in the market, but more importantly the tops and cover on these cattle make for a lot of repeat custom," he adds.

"Easy calving, natural fleshing and fantastic temperament are some of the traits you can't fault with the Longhorns"

One of the first Longhorn bulls to run on the farm appeared in the form of Long Ash Fruit, a Long Ash Captain son out of a Culcombe dam, bred by the notable Dorset-based Sid Hollier. Fruit was purchased from local breeder, Raymond Gunn in 2011. Running alongside Fruit was Bollin Eugene, a Blackbrook Mayhem son, purchased privately from Peter Close as an older stock bull.



One of the herd's stock bulls, Blackbrook Endeavour.



Other notable sires have included Fishwick One in a Million and Fishwick Oligarch both bred by Peter Close, Berwick-Upon-Tweed and purchased from his on-farm production sale in July 2015.

More recent purchases of stock sires include Blackbrook Fortune Hunter and Blackbrook Endeavour from John and Pat Stanley.



Photography: Anne MacPherson



◀ This year's group of bulling heifers.



◀ A typical Longhorn cross cow with Simmental sired calf at foot.



Stephen describes the selection process before bulling the cows as an incredibly important one, ensuring he has the best performing cows in the herd to run with both the Longhorn and Simmental bulls for 12 weeks from mid-June.

"All replacement heifers are put to the bull to calve at three years old. The Simmental cross heifers run with Longhorn bulls and Longhorn cross heifers with the Aberdeen-Angus." These generally calve from the end of February onwards with scanning usually taking place between the end of October and beginning of November, aiming for 97-98% in calf, he explains.

Stephen runs a strict cull policy with those cows over 10 years of age being culled or those that are generally poor performers, have bad feet or temperament issues or any cows or heifers not in calf at the time of scanning being sold through Thainstone market or sent directly to ABP at Perth.

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The majority of the herd is wintered on comfort slat mats and fed ad-lib silage, while the cows also receive Harbro Super Suckler minerals via bucket or powder all year round. All cows calve on slats and are then moved to individual pens with all bull calves being ringed the day after birth, Stephen explains. "The outfits are kept in bunches of five until the calves become stronger, then introduced to larger groups," he adds.

All calves are dehorned as well as being vaccinated for both pneumonia and black leg. They also receive a copper bolus before being turned out usually in mid-May. Stephen explains that even with the slightly slower growth rates with the Longhorn sired calves their natural ability to thrive off grass reaps rewards with a cut in costs of creep feed.

By mid-October cows and calves head home for winter and upon return they are all treated with Cydectin Triclamox pour on for worms, fluke and lice while calves also receive their second pneumonia and black leg vaccines. Generally, two to three weeks post housing the calves are weaned and preparations for sale day begins.

Once weaned they are wintered on bedding and fed a diet of silage and Harbro Beefstock nuts, about 1kg per 100kg body weight. Those heifer calves that are selected for replacements and any calves that are kept to feed through the summer receive a combined diet of ad-lib silage, straw and 2.5kg of the Beefstock nuts daily.

The tops, cover and fantastic markings on Longhorn calves makes for a lot of repeat custom

By March there are some 220 calves ready for sale at Quoybrae, usually weighing between 400-420kg. Stephen strongly believes that Longhorn sired calves have some of the best conformation of any native breed with that quality being reflected in trade with his recent batch averaging £1230 at just 11 months old and 420kg.

Some 30-40 Longhorn cross heifer calves are kept each year as replacements with Stephen having no doubt about their maternal capabilities. "Easy calving, natural fleshing and fantastic temperament are just some of the many traits you just cannot fault with the Longhorn crosses." Their hardiness and longevity prove invaluable as is evident with the weather on the north coast of Scotland producing short, cool summers and long, wet, bleak winters, all of which the Longhorn copes well with.



Longhorn cross and Simmental cross bulling heifers running with Red Aberdeen-Angus

Photography: Anne MacPherson

