

Tomroll Highlanders and Longley Whitebred Shorthorns

A Brief History

After saying goodbye to my beloved Ayrshire dairy cows I made the decision which was to control my life, that was to get involved in and breed Highland cattle. In the early years probably due to beginners luck I managed to develop a good record. I marketed my surplus heifers in Oban and enjoyed a market average in excess of 500 gns. Which was a very good price in the early 1970's. all was going very well until one particular Oban spring sale when which three of the best heifers I have ever bred I was unable to receive a bid in excess of 300 gns. I can remember the disappointment and the questioning on what was a very long journey home. An experience like that served to focus my mind on what to do next.



Cross Highland Heifers

In the early years I had come to know and appreciate the capabilities of the Highland cow, her maternal instinct was way in excess of anything I had worked with before. She seemed to be able to regulate her output of milk to the demands of the calf and to give birth without assistance in any extreme weather condition. With all these superior attributes it struck me that if I could find a compatible sire I just might be able to produce a suckler cow all my neighbours were looking for. Thus I started my crossing programme.

Being a life member of the Rare Breed Survival Trust, I turned to their lists for my first attempt to find a crossing sire. The Longhorn being my first choice , but concluded that the Highland and Longhorn breeds were too alike as the off spring did not improve on either parent. I decided to try the traditional beef breeds and started with the Hereford, followed by the Aberdeen Angus and went on the Lincoln Red Beef Shorthorn and Luining. All of these produced a steer carcass with a good conformation and increased growth potential. However I seemed to finish up with what I could call a non-descript female a plain red heifer with no improvement to her mothering qualities.

Just at this time , the invasion into the UK of continental breeds was in full flow headed by the charolais so I decided to give them a try, I was impressed with my first charolais calves and as they grew I was even more impressed. The improvement however was definitely on the male side.

It was at this time that I learned a very important lesson. I realised that it was no good trying to improve a breed without reference to where it was going to live. My farm was 300m up the Pennine Hills and all my cattle were out wintered. I grew kale for the steers and I remember my first winter comparing pure Highland steers with Charolais cross steers, and on many a snowy day the Charolais cross steers would spend their time hiding behind the stonewalls surrounding my

fields whilst the Highlanders were out reaching under the electric fence for another mouthful of kale. This was no good for me so it was back to the drawing board.



Longley Cows & Calves



Longley Holly and Heifer Calf

It was about this time I reviewed my crossing programme and came to the conclusion I could improve the Highland steer with almost any breed but I was not producing the suckler cow I was looking for, there was no uniformity in any of the female I had produced so at Carlisle in 1977 Nether Oakshaw Tom was purchased.

When the calves came in the next spring I took my first look and asked myself

“What have I done”?

The cross calves were very small and looked a dirty grey colour, it seemed as though I had taken a step backwards! All I could say was that the first 14 cows I had tried, had calved very easily, the calves were fast to their feet and had suckled whilst still being wet. Of the fourteen calves only three were heifers. By the time my three cross heifer calves were ready to wean I had decided I had found what I was looking for... They had developed into well grown, square looking cattle and possessed an attractive strawberry-roan colour.

They looked a picture, but could they perform as well as they looked?



Cross Highland Heifers

At every stage of their development I was delighted with my Whitebred Shorthorn cross heifers and impressed with the relaxed and placid approach they had to everything I did with them. When it came time for them to produce their first calf, they all calved within a week of each other, completely unaided with big Simmental cross calves.

Looking back into records, number one had twelve calves, all alive at weaning, in twelve years of breeding with calving dates between 15th March to 27th April and an average weaning weight of 315 kilos. Number two had fourteen calves again all alive at weaning in fourteen years of breeding with calving dates between 19th March to 8th April and average weaning weight of 285 kilos. Number three had 15 calves with one year in the middle of her life with none, the fifteen again were all alive at weaning with a calving variation date between 31st March to 16th May and an average weaning weight of 315 kilos.

The answer to my question: Could they perform?.... I would say an emphatic yes!



Murtholm Powerline



Blackburn Monty

My Whitebred Shorthorn cross Highland heifers excel in every aspect of modern suckler calf production. With their tremendous hybrid vigour they can calve to any breed unaided, have low feed requirement, regular calving intervals, enhanced milk yield, improved conformation, an ability to survive outside all year round, an average life expectancy of fourteen years with a placid temperament and display an attractive colouring.

**Adrian Wheelwright
Sunnyside Farm
Cleish
Kinross
KY4 0HY
Tel: 01383 832812**