**Herd Competition 2015**

**Midlands area report**

**Judge – Ray Bowler**

This is the final area of the country for me to be judge for and I have to say it has been the most difficult, all the herds, without exception have been of a very high standard, some excellent animals have been seen but I can only have one winner in each class.

There were 17 herds that entered, 5 large and 12 small.

Large Herds.

First place I have awarded to Martin Holdings and their Lawford herd. Mark & Gill have expanded their herd fairly rapidly over the past few years and today the herd consists of approximately 80 calving cows but with all youngstocK combined have over 230 head of Red Polls. The herd is managed on commercial lines, cows are predominantly spring calving which fits in with the 750 breeding mules and 150 commercial suckler cows. Many of the commercial cows are now Red Poll crosses as they are more milky and have far fewer calving issues than the previous continentals. The commercial cows are mated with a Blonde bull, in fact some of the Red Poll have been mated with the Blonde as well to produce Red Poll x Blonde suckler cows. Four Red Poll bulls are currently on the farm, 6yr old Uttwatt Arthur, 4yr old Kemerton China, 3yr old home bred Lawford Cobbler and recently purchased young bull Kemerton Earl Gray. The Kemerton bulls both have high EBV breeding values, the aim is in the near future to join the Signet scheme to get all the cattle with EBV figures. Mark currently weighs all the cattle regularly so has lots of data which is used within the management of the herd. The herd is a member of the Premium Health Scheme, he also has all his bulls fertility tested each year as he feels this is a very important aspect of herd management, poor fertility in the bulls means a poor calving rate which means less calves and therefore less sales. Finished steers sold either to a local butcher or to Woodheads on their native beef scheme. The aim is for them to be 26 -28mths old with a carcase weight of 300 – 325Kg grading at R3.

I was particularly impressed with the youngstock which shows what an improvement the bulls are making. They were well grown even in conformation and just looked correct.

Second place I awarded to the Pochin herd managed by Andrew Kirk. This is again an excellent herd with some first class animals, the in-calf heifers being particularly impressive. The herd comprises of about 40 calving cows plus youngstock. Stock bulls are Royal Roseman and Nobodys Grand Duke. The cows are spring calving with once again an impressive crop of calves. I thought the 2014 heifers and steers weren’t just as good as those at home, they were on park land some 30 miles away and looked to be a little short of grass. If I have a small criticism some of the older cows could do with culling, I know we say they are long lived and have a long productive life but I just felt some of them had been kept perhaps one lactation too long which showed in some big uddered ladies.

Third place went to the Ironstone herd of Alan & Jane Hewson. This herd continues to be the only milking herd in the country for which they must be congratulated. Currently the herd consists of 60 cows but at present only about 40 are being milked with the rest being used as multiple suckling cows to rear the calves. Cheese continues to be the main outlet for the milk with their Belvoir Ridge Creamery brand becoming very well know. Current herd sire is the homebred Ironstone Concorde who looked as if he had been working hard, well he had been, but he isn’t as well grown as I would expect a 3yr old bull to be. The cows don’t look any different from other Red Polls, we say we have dairy types and beefy types but in all honesty I can’t see the difference in this herd, the cows look just the same as suckler cows do in other herds. Some of the animals are great but others perhaps not so, so there is a very mixed bag, but in general the herd looks good and is certainly fulfilling the role which it is being kept for.

Other herds in the large herd class were the Ockley Brook herd of Jerry & George Stephenson and the Armoracia herd of John Keal. Both of these herds have very good animals and are run on commercial lines but on the day I thought the Ockley Brook cattle were rather too fit in condition, although the bull Kemerton Yallop looked very well, and the in-calf heifers were very impressive. They have just purchased 22 bulling heifers from the Woldsman herd to increase the herd size to about 50 breeding cows. The Armoracia herd were perhaps a little the other way with the shortage of grass starting to show in the cows condition, however the steers looked well. John is using a beef Shorthorn cross bull this time to try and get the steers to a greater weight but is keen to keep the cows pure for their maternal properties.

Small Herds

First place I have awarded to the Hunt Family’s Watergate Herd. This herd of 11 cows with 5 in-calf heifers to calf in the spring, and associated youngstock is in my eyes a truly outstanding herd of cows. Everyone, without exception, is of show quality, they are in excellent condition, the cows are suckling an even group of calves, the steers are developing well and the bull, Nobodys Orange Chilli is the best I saw on my travels. The animals are all quiet, can be handled in the field, are all halter trained and in general it was a pleasure to view them despite it raining when I visited. The cattle are grazed in the summer on a variety of sights, mainly in conjunction with the Wildlife Trust on conservation grazing, but also on other small parcels of land located throughout the area. I have to say it was quite a journey going around looking at them but it was worth it. Steers are sold to Dawn Meats, the returns they are getting from there are very satisfactory, with no hassle and they are quick payers. No heifers have been sold as yet, apart from a few who haven’t made the grade, which is as I have stated very high, as the aim is to build up numbers to about 20 breeding cows which will be the maximum that can be housed in the winter.

Second place I awarded to the Nobodys herd of Joy Broughton & Trevor Jones. Despite disruptions of late due to being re-located, the cattle in this herd are of very good quality. There are 6 breeding cows. The amazing cow, Nobodys Allspice, is still superb body wise but her udder is beginning to drop, her offspring are very good animals as well. Other animals in the herd are of very good quality as well with one cow, Nobodys Orange Breeze looking really good. Most of the cows are halter trained and are easy to look around. The very impressive bull Canute Orange Bombadier is also owned by Joy but was away on hire, however he was viewed later on at The Everdon herd. It was a bit difficult to find some of them as they are running in with the cattle of Jane & Guy Lambourne’s Wassledine herd.

Third place I have given to Shuttleworth College. Over the last few years this herd has gone through a few changes in management but is finally being managed by Anne-Marie Hamilton in such a way that is bringing the herd to the fore. The spring calving herd consists of 12 cows with a further 6 coming into the herd next year. The lack of grazing is a concern as they are being supplemented on silage at the present time. At present steer calves are sold at weaning to a local beef finisher but it is hoped that in the future they will be able to be retained and reared to finish as a new cattle building is in the process of being built. I liked the vision for the future that Anne-Marie sees for the herd which from an educational point of view is good to see. This year’s crop of calves are an even lot but perhaps a little behind other viewed. Herd Sire is Hinwick Zulu.

Other small herds visited were:

The Wassledine herd of Jane & Guy Lambourne. This herd consists 10 cows and associated offspring. The cattle look well but are a bit of a mixed bag, I would like to see more conformity within the herd. This I think will be forthcoming as the bull they now have, Pochin Ferryhill, is an excellent example of the breed with masses of scope and beefing qualities. His crop of calves were very good so hopefully the trend will continue.

The Mepshall herd of Mick & Penny Trundle. Only 2 cows which are showing signs of age but have a fantastic steer calf.

The Hinwick herd of Virginia & Richard Dawes. The herd has been reduced of late and now consists of 10 breeding cows together with associated offspring. All steer calves are sold as yearlings, I thought the calves looked well as did their young bull Appleton Claudius.

The Hollingmarsh herd of Martin & Caroline Kellner. These new members only have 3 cows at present, having purchased them as in-calf from Avenue Farms. The cattle again looked well but in this stiff competition I’m afraid they lacked substance. They are running in with a few crossbred cows, calves looked well. A Red Poll bull will be used on everything this year so that will be interesting to see how things proceed.

Natasha Fountain. Another new member who has purchased 6 cows form a variety of places. All have been put to a Hereford bull, there were some excellent crossbred calves. The cows looked well, run in with a few commercial crossbreds. She is in the process of buying a couple of in-calf cows from Alan Hewson.

The Spartacus herd of Mark Spicer. Only 3 cows at present but hope to build up to 7-8 in the next few years. Have 2 bulling heifers to go to the bull this time and a very good heifer calf born recently. The steers looked very well, ideal for the market place.

The Everdon herd of Michael Pell, managed by Peter Bowman. 12 cows together with associated youngstock. The cows looked well but were rather skittish so it made it hard to see them properly. A few of the cows are old ladies and really want culling as their udders are very large. The in-calf heifers looked good which hopefully will improve the general look of the herd. Some nice looking steers but very difficult to see properly as again were very skittish.

The Horninghold herd of Will & Gemma Kirby. 6 cows with 4 in-calf heifer for next year plus other youngstock. This is an up and coming herd for the future. Some very good cattle which have been bought from several places, the heifers looked very good as in fact did all the cattle, just in the correct condition, grass was in short supply but they were being supplemented with hay. The bull, Pochin Inverness is a long lean bull who is leaving some very good calves. Would have been fourth if we had a fourth place. As I have said this is a first class herd in the making.

Lyndale herd of Chris Holloway. This small herd consists of only 3 cows and calves but what 3 cows they are. They are 6th calvers and look like peas in a pod. They are in excellent condition and suckling 3 very nice 6 week old calves. The cattle are homed at the Warriner School in Banbury where Chris is the Farm Manager. Previous heifer calves have been sold off as yearlings with the steers finished for sale through the school farm shop. The farm also runs a herd of 20 Dexter cows with associated youngstock, 75 commercial ewes, 10 sows, 6 nannies, multiple varieties of poultry and about 30 acres of arable. For a school farm it certainly is an impressive set up.

Youngstock – First place awarded to the Lawford herd. The 2015 born calves were an excellent bunch of calves from the 3 stock bulls, Uttwatt Arthur, Kemerton China & Lawford Cobbler. There wasn’t a bad calf among them. 2014 yearlings, both heifers and steers, looked in excellent condition.

Second place to the youngstock of the Watergate herd, I think I have said all I can about this herd, I just liked the large number of youngstock that I viewed in the Lawford herd which made the difference.

Third place to the Pochin herd. Again another impressive group of 2015 born calves, maybe not as even as the first two, I wasn’t as impressed with the 2014 yearlings though.

Overall.

Overall I have awarded the Championship to the Watergate herd of the Hunt family, with the Lawford herd of Mark & Gill Martin in reserve. Both herds impressed me but I just felt that the quality of all the cattle in the Watergate herd I couldn’t see beyond.

Registered Bull.

Some outstanding bulls viewed that I’m afraid won’t get an award. In the end I decided on Nobodys Orange Chilli in the Watergate herd. This 6yr old bull is a long bull with tremendous hind quarters and top line, his masculine looks, together with his overall presence sold it to me. He looks like he owns his herd of ladies and stands there very proud displaying them. If he has fault he could perhaps be a little taller but nothing to make me put him anywhere else but first.

Second place I awarded to Pochin Ferryhill in the Wassaldine herd. Another 6yr old bull he once again impressed with his presence. . A long bull with excellent topline, he walked well on good legs and feet and had a well defined rump. Third place I awarded to Kemerton Yallop in the Ockley Brook herd. This 7yr old bull impressed with his stature and quality of flesh, however he had a slightly high tailhead which just knocked him down.

Other bulls deemed good enough for mention are: Royal Roseman, Uttwatt Arthur, Canute Orange Bombadier & Kemerton China. Two to watch in the future are Nobodys Grand Duke & Appleton Claudius.

Home bred Cow.

Again some exceptional cows viewed but in the end I came down on the side of the 6th calver Lyndale X Pippa. This cow shows all the qualities that I am looking for in a Red Poll, she has depth of body, excellent topline, walks well on good strong legs, has an outstanding udder and is in perfect condition.

In second place I went for Watergate Dewdrop, this 3rd calver, suckling an excellent 5mth old heifer calf, again is what I am looking for in a Red Poll cow. A superb body, she walked on excellent legs with a very good udder.

Third place I awarded to Nobodys Orange Breeze. This 4th calver is a quite unknown member of the herd, she hasn’t been out on the show circuit but has been at home steadily getting on with her life, but what an animal she is. The best udder of all the cows I saw, her only fault being that perhaps she lacks a bit if stature..

Other cows of note who haven’t been awarded a prize are: Nobodys Allspice, Pochin Gunby, Lyndale X Twinkle & Ironstone Della.

Homebred 2013 born Heifer.

I found an easy winner in this class, Pochin Jantestown. This in-calf heifer was just outstanding in all aspects, size, body, legs, developing udder and in general presence.

Second place I awarded to Nobodys Gypsy, this is a well-balanced in-calf heifer correct in every aspect but without the wow factor of the first placed heifer.

Third placed I awarded to Watergate Foxglove. Once more a first class in-calf heifer, I just thought her developing udder wasn’t quite as good as the two above – time will tell.

Other heifers deserved of mention are: Ockley Brook Clover, Horninghold Faith, Shuttleworth Dora & Lawford Dahlia.

Progeny Group

First place I awarded to the Lyndale trio of X Pippa, X Twinkle & X Polly. These 3 senior cows sired by Kemerton Sligo. They are basically like peas in a pod, all very very good animals. They were balanced and matched perfectly.

Second place went to the Watergate trio of Emma, Foxglove & Florence. These two in-calf heifers and one first calving heifer are by Sandilands Romeo. Once again a very even group of cattle.

Third place an Ockley Brook trio of Woldsman Young Man in-calf heifers Canna, Coco & Clover. These are also a very good well matched group of animals but were pipped by the maturity of the groups above.

Other progeny groups to note are: A Beasthorpe Samson trio in the Nobodys herd, a Grafton Lucky Jim trio in the Pochin herd, an Underhill Arch Duke trio in the Ironstone herd and an Uttwatt Arthur trio in the Lawford herd. There were other progeny groups but these were mainly 2015 born calves and are very difficult to place when there are older animals in the class.

Three Related Females.

A very high standard of entries. I decided to award first place to Nobodys Allspice, Ecstasy & Fennel who are all daughters of Coddenham Spice Girl. These are all excellent animals, very similar in style & type.

Second place went to Watergate Amber, Erin & Gretrude. Amber is the dam of both the other two. Once again a very impressive trio but I thought on the day not just as good as the Nobodys group.

Third place went to Ironstone Suzanne and her two daughters Ironstone Suzanne 4th & 5th. This group of dairy animals were excellent as well but were slightly on the small side compared with the other two.

Other groups of note were another group from the Nobodys herd, Allspice, Diadem & Gypsy. Allspice is the dam of the other two; and a dam & two daughters for the Pochin herd, Cotgrove, Ivy-Todd & Kibworth

Steer.

I have to say I was a little disappointed with the steers, there were several with potential but they were in what I call forward store condition and needed another couple of months to finish, so in the end I decided to place Steer No 300006 from Mark Spicer first, he was the best finished animal that I saw, in fact he was ready to go, in second place No 300021 from the Hunt’s, apparently they had sent off two excellent steers the previous week which were in perfect condition for the competition, in third place I placed steer No 400007 from Will & Gemma Kirby.

Mark Martin had recently emptied his yards of finished steers as had the Stephenson’s so that was somewhat of a disappointment although it is very important that when the cattle are ready for sale they are sent.

Suckled calf.

A very difficult choice here as I saw lots of excellent calves, however the one that took my eye was a 3mth old steer calf, No 200025 from Mick & Penny Trundle’s. What an excellent upstanding calf he was with plenty of length, leg and rear end.

Second place I gave to No 700056, a 4mth old steer calf in the Ockley Brook herd, with steer calf No 200003 from the Spartacus herd in third place. There were other very good calves seen but far too many to mention.

Registered Dairy Cow.

First place going to Ironstone Susanne 4th with Ironstone Della in second place. There was very little between these two animals, both are excellent cows with good udders and apparently are producing good milk yields, in excess of 5000litres/year. The only reason I placed Suzanne first was she has a bit more depth of body with her fore udder extending a little further forward than Della’s.

Cross-bred Dairy Cow.

Kirk Brothers freeze brand No 76, Katie 19th was the cow I placed first. This 5thcalving Red Poll X Holstein Friesian is a very impressive dairy cow. She is upstanding, walks well, has a capacious body, excellent udder attachment and has good teat placement. She has averaged over 8,000lites/lactation.

In second place I placed Tag No 700503, Tiger, from Alan Hewson. She is a Red Poll X Holstein-Jersey. In her first lactation, she has been calved 3mths and is giving 20litres a day. Not the biggest of cows but she has an excellent udder and I’m sure will grow on.

Finally I would like to say how much I enjoyed the three days, I said it was a difficult task to complete but it was made that much easier by the hospitality shown, a big thank you to everyone who made me so welcome and supplied me with coffee & cake! Also an even bigger thank you to Joy for arranging everything and on keeping me on schedule, I have to say it all worked like a dream. In total I travelled 742 miles, which just out of interest is about half the distance it takes to cover the Southern & Northern areas!