

THE STONELEIGH HERD

The Stoneleigh Herd of Sussex cattle was founded in 2002, a year after Debbie Dann and Alan Hunt had bought the RASE's herd of rare breed White Park Cattle. White Parks, for all their good looks and photogenic charm, are not the most commercial of breeds so they wanted a breed to complement the White Parks and that would pay the bills and ensure the cattle weren't just a glorified hobby.

After looking at a number of native breeds the selection was narrowed down to South Devons and Sussex (Debbie is originally from Hersmonceux in East Sussex). Sussex easily trumped the South Devons!



The dispersal of Mike Cushing's Coombe Ash Herd in May 2002 provided the ideal opportunity to buy some foundation cows and four cows with calves at foot and back in calf again found themselves travelling up the M40 to Warwickshire.



Coombe Ash Godinton 5th, bought as a calf at foot from the Coombe Ash dispersal sale and her heifer calf summer 2013



Stoneleigh Godinton 2nd and calf

Debbie's day job at that time was to run all the competitive classes for the Royal Show and Alan was and still is the Estate Manager for the Royal Showground's farmland. Since 2007 Debbie has been Breed Secretary for the Longhorn Cattle Society. This means that both Alan and Debbie have full time jobs and the cattle are mostly managed outside of work hours and have to be pretty low maintenance.

Cows are housed over the winter as all the grazing is rented and the cattle are easier to manage when they are indoors when the owners are working full time. Luckily Alan and Debbie are able to rent the old Dairy Unit buildings on the Royal Showground so feeding, bedding and day to day management is pretty straightforward with such excellent yards and facilities.

Calving is usually March and April and very few interventions are needed. The usual trouble that most keepers of Sussex cattle will identify with is ensuring the cows aren't too fat and that they calve in optimum body condition – a diet of barley straw and minerals usually suffices with haylage being introduced post calving to ensure the cows are milking well.

Cattle turnout is dictated by the herd's annual TB test which is usually at the beginning of May. Once that hurdle is hopefully jumped successfully the cattle graze paddocks in between Royal Leamington Spa and Kenilworth that run down to the River Avon. They always cause an amount of interest as it's not often a herd of Sussex are seen North of the Watford Gap!

Cows stay out until just before Bonfire night. If they are feeling brave Alan & Debbie will leave them out a bit longer but the close proximity of at least six large firework display venues near the grazing mean the cattle are usually removed from the field to prevent any mishaps. Creep is usually introduced to the calves in the late Autumn before they come in, and then the calves stay on the cows for a bit after housing and are usually weaned around Christmas by which time they are taking around 2kg creep per day. The calves are never pushed but respond well to creep feeding for their first winter. All steers are sold as yearlings to a local finisher who sells some via Newark Market and some to a butcher in Lincolnshire. Both the finisher and the butcher are members of the Longhorn Cattle Society so Debbie gets regular feedback with regard to how the steers are performing and the beef is always well received. Some heifers are retained, others are sold either to breeders or into commercial herds where they have been very successfully put to continental bulls. The offspring from these cattle have then been put back to a native bull to breed $\frac{3}{4}$ native suckler cow replacements – similar to a Stabilizer type system.

Whilst there isn't much time for showing the local Kenilworth Show takes place in one of the Show-ground carparks so the cattle have put in an appearance there on occasion and usually acquit themselves pretty well in the Native Any Other Breed classes.



Stoneleigh Iris 1st and calf

From the foundation of four cows the herd numbers fluctuated over the years and reached 20 cows over the winter of 2013/2014. Alongside the White Park herd it meant almost 30 cows would be calving in Spring 2014 which was too many given the external work pressures so a number of in calf cows were sold to bring the herd down to 11 in-calf cows. This freed up a lot of space in the shed and ensured calving and post calving management was pretty stress-free.

The herd is performance recorded with Signet and whilst not currently in a health scheme there is a vaccination protocol for BVD and Leptospirosis.

A number of bulls have been used over the years. Pyramid Major 1st from Mick Mills in Leicestershire has had a major influence in the herd, leaving strong cows but perhaps not with the height Alan and Debbie were looking for. Major is now happily ensconced at the local dairy farm serving dairy heifers and it's a real testament to the Sussex breed that his kind nature and lovely temperament have endeared him to the staff and he has a home there for life. The current stock bull Trottenden Poll Wellington 2nd was bought at the Spring Show and Sale in 2013 as a Junior bull and ran with the cows during Summer 2013. His first crop of calves arrived Spring 2014 and they are showing great promise. No assisted calvings and strong calves with length and depth seem to be this bull's stamp. Females have been bought from the Goldstone (Chandler & Dunn) and

Coopers (J Howard) herds at Society sales, and latterly two cows from the Petworth dispersal were added to the herd to bring in some different bloodlines.



Trottenden Poll Wellington 2nd

Debbie and Alan thoroughly enjoy their Sussex cattle and the last 12 years have flown by!