

Judging the Ayrshire and Guernsey lines this year is Colin Christophers, whose Rosehill prefix is widely known among Ayrshire cattle breeders. Wendy Short caught up with him ahead of the show.

Milk from the 170-cow Rosehill Ayrshire herd run by Colin Christophers and his family is turned into the internationally-renowned Rodda's Cornish clotted cream. There is all-year-round calving on the farm, and turnout is usually from April until October on the 330-hectare (134 acre) Trenerry farm, near Truro.

The cows spend the winter in the cubicle housing, receiving a simple mixed ration comprising grass silage and 2kg of a 25% protein blend across all groups, plus an 18% concentrate fed to yield in the herringbone parlour.

The family relies mainly on selective breeding and high quality grass production to achieve the minimum butterfat specification of 4%, with the actual figure currently standing at 4.43%. The average yield is 7,400kg, with protein at 3.47%.

The Rosehill herd was founded in 1962 with purchases from the dispersal of the Trevarno Ayrshires in nearby Helston. It is managed solely by family members; Colin, his wife Jenny, and their son David work full-time, while daughter Debbie and granddaughter Megan work part-time.

There is a long line of show champions in the herd history, but sadly the circuit has been out of bounds for about a decade due to bovine TB restrictions. That has all changed for this season, and by mid-July there were no less than four prestigious awards to add to the collection.

"We took a team to this year's Royal Cornwall and came away with the Ayrshire champion and the breed reserve," says Colin.

"Our champion was Rosehill Premier Very Light, a sixth

'The Ayrshire has looked after our family'

lactation cow with an EX95 classification by our own bull, Rosehill Premier.

"Our reserve champion was Rosehill Panache Whisky, an in-milk heifer by Haresfoot Panache. He was a son out of Haresfoot Enigma Pamela; a female we purchased a decade ago and has served us well. Pamela is still in the herd at age 17 and we hope to be able to flush her again as we have in the past.

"Showing has always been a shop window for our cattle and a significant element of the business. It is also an important

“Showing has always been [...] a significant element of the business

COLIN CHRISTOPHERS

part of family life and everyone enjoys helping out.

"Nevertheless, show days are long days. As we have no staff, we get up very early and milk before setting off, starting the second milking as soon as we arrive back home."

Rosehill cows clinched the

same titles at the Liskeard Show this year, with top position awarded to Rhos Vicking Matilda, an EX94 fourth calver by De La Plaine Vicking. Meanwhile, the in-milk heifer, Rosehill Pink Indiana sired by Rosehill Pink Floyd, took the blue ribbon.

Genetics

Genomic testing has helped to increase the herd's genetic progress and the figures for two young home-bred bulls are 'equal to anything available on the open market', says Colin.

They are destined to enter an AI programme in the future, but 12 months bTB-clear status is required before their semen can be harvested. Natural service is used at intervals on the farm, which is rented on a council tenancy, in cases where a suitable match has been identified.

One of the young bulls is Rosehill Buckleup, a Whitecroft Panell son out of Rosehill McCoy Bouquet. The other is Rosehill Valedictorian, a Haresfoot Panache son. Valedictorian's dam is Rosehill Magic Oh Velour.



Colin and David Christophers



The cows spend the winter in cubicle housing, receiving a simple mixed ration comprising grass silage and 2kg of a 25% protein blend.

"Haresfoot Panache is the number one bull for butterfat percentage within the breed," says Colin.

"Like all livestock producers, we do not just breed for one trait, and although butterfat is

important to meet the demands of our milk contract, we are also looking for sound conformation and high production potential.

"A sire's country of origin is not as relevant as its suitability for our type of cow, but British

bulls seem to give us the best results. However, we have used semen from Scandinavia, Canada and the USA.

"The biggest influence on the herd to date is a bull that we bred at home. He is Rosehill

Blackthorn, who did a great job on the farm and produced 24 EX-classified daughters.

Blackthorn's pedigree can be found in most of the cattle on the unit and he stood at stud.

"Prior to the herd losing its

PICTURES: Fairmap Photography

bTB-free status, a number of cows were flushed, with several of our bulls going into AI programmes.”

Milk targets

Many years ago, Colin set a target to breed cows which would give 100,000kg of milk from the standard diet over 10 lactations. This goal has been achieved on two occasions, and the successful cows have multiple progeny in the herd. Although, bTB has inevitably had a negative effect on longevity.

“I felt that I was being extremely ambitious with my target for the cows, but these two animals have shown us it is within our capabilities and that is very encouraging.

“When it comes to bulls, a PLI of £150 is a minimum, with plus figures for milk, butterfat and protein. AI sires must also be ‘type improvers.’

“The genomic data for the

Ayrshire is affected by the relatively low numbers within the breed, but registrations are holding their own and several new breeders have come on board in recent years. There is also a growing interest in milking multi-breed herds, and the Ayrshire has benefited from the trend.”

The vast majority of females are bred pure, but a small number will go to either the British Blue or the Aberdeen-Angus. Their calves would historically be sold at about four weeks and this policy has been reintroduced now that bTB restrictions have been lifted.

Cattle judging is a ‘thoroughly enjoyable pastime’, says Colin, who has officiated at many events including the Royal Highland and the Royal Welsh, as well as at Balmoral Show, Agri-Scot and numerous county-level events.

He is also familiar with the Jersey and there are a few

examples of the breed at Trenergy, while his father, Redvers Christophers, kept Guernseys alongside the family’s Ayrshire cows.

Stockjudging

“My interest began at the age of 12, when I joined the dairy stock judging training classes at my local Young Farmers Club. Nowadays, the roles have been reversed and I am the coach for the same training sessions.

“Stockjudging has taken me all over the country and I derive great pleasure from my appreciation of cows, regardless

of breed. Judging is one of the few occasions when the only person I have to please is myself.”

Asked whether he would consider switching breeds, Colin’s answer is emphatic.

“Definitely not. I was brought up with Ayrshires; the breed has excellent conformation when it comes to udder, legs and feet and it is also easily managed, with bags of style and plenty of ‘get up and go.’

“The Ayrshire has looked after our family and we enjoy looking after our cows,” he says.

Methane production from slurry

»A 2021 project at Trenergy saw the installation of equipment which converts methane from the covered slurry tank into electricity to power the milking parlour.

The council tenancy has

also led to a link between the organisation and the farm, with methane refined and collected on a weekly basis. It is used to run 13 council-run, road service vans, as well as heating tarmac for road surfacing.



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