

BREEDERS OF OUR TIME:

By Kathryn Dick



Taking centre stage in this week's Breeders of our Time is the well-respected Ayrshire and Holstein breeder, Gilmour Lawrie.

Background?

Born in Ayrshire at the family farm, Brieryside, Monkton, where I farmed alongside my father and brother until 2001. During that time we showed many Ayrshire cows both locally and nationally. During the 1980s and '90s at our most local show in Ayr, we won the Ayrshire section a total of nine times and from the same show also added two inter-breed titles to our collection of prizes during this time.

Myself and my family have always been involved in Ayrshire cattle and the Brieryside prefix has been prominent within the pedigree Ayrshires circuit for 100 years - making us one of the oldest and recognisable herds not only in the UK but all over the world.

In 2001, the year of foot-and-mouth, I was given the opportunity to come to Sandyford Farm, where I established a herd of 250 Ayrshire cows and Red and Whites along with a few Holsteins. I took over Sandyford in my own right alongside my wife, Caroline, and five years later took on Shields, located just across the road. Here we farm around 300 acres of arable crop, including winter wheat and spring crops which are used to feed the cows.

I have three children, my youngest daughter, Emma, is a qualified pharmacist and an independent prescriber, and her achievements have made me very proud.

Louise, my other daughter and her husband, Fraser, have two children, Olivia and Oscar, and myself and Caroline very much enjoy our regular visits from our grandchildren - especially when they help us to feed the calves.

My father and grandfather had previously tried to buy Myremill, in Maybole and two years ago, we managed to secure the purchase and that's where my son Kevin is now farming. We have since built a new greenfield dairy complex for 300 cows and 300 followers there. Now Myremill is within the family, in total we farm two dairy units, one arable unit across 850 acres and milk over 600 head of dairy cattle, with 400 young stock.

My family are a huge part of my life and I enjoy and appreciate them all very much!

What qualities do you like about the breeds that you work with?

Having been born and bred with the Ayrshire cow and working with them daily I welcome that they have a good engine, and I like the hardiness that they offer. Ayrshires are known for their longevity, along with good feet and legs.

My milk is sold to Nestle for the KitKat biscuit, so I need good BF and P levels and I find the Ayrshire gives a wee bit more than other breeds I am familiar with.

First big show achievement?

I was seven years old and managed to win the Cow Hill Trust Cup for 'best calf' at Dumfries Show. It was a big achievement and still is to this day. One way of remembering the occasion is that during the parade, my calf took off and I got hauled along with it, clinging on for dear life!

This is where showing all started for me with the calves and as I got older and taller! I moved onto the larger dairy animals.

Best animal that you have ever bred?

Brieryside Swan 28 was a cow before her time and could easily compete in the show circuit today. She was a show star and in the same calendar year won the Royal Highland, Ayr Show and AgriScot - which had never been achieved by one cow. Her progeny can still be found across the two herds, with around seventy descendants of the Swan family making up the milking herd.

Best animal that you've ever seen?

I have a few. The first was one of the best I had ever viewed, in the form of Morwick Sand Queen, owned by the Howie family, at Morpeth. She had all the dairy qualities of a good cow with size and substance, with a super udder and good feet and legs - a truly great representation of the breed.

Another Ayrshire I admired was Dilham Dame Bertha 5, bred by Dilham Ayrshires. She was a fantastic cow in her day and has many descendants in countries all over the world.

The final cow I would like to mention is the American cow, Luck-E Advent Asia - I

was a big fan of her as she was a true dairy cow. With my son, Kevin and his wife, Alison, I work in partnership with Luck-E Holsteins when it comes to embryos and we have imported and implanted some Luck-E embryos on their behalf into our own Holstein herd to introduce new bloodlines to this country.

We rear and sell the odd one, having sold a daughter of Advent Asia to David Brewster, Boclair, for £8000 in December, last year.

If you could change one thing about your breed, what would it be and why?

When looking at the modern breed, the only thing I would change is to make the cows slightly milkier. The cows need to produce more litres to compete with the Holstein in the commercial world, however, when it comes to robustness and longevity you have to stick with the Ayrshire.

Abiding memory?

In the showing side of things, it would be winning 'SuperHeifer' and 'SuperCow' at AgriScot in 2012 - making me the first breeder to do so, with Brieryside Profile Cherry and Dilandy Debonair Tabitha Red owned in the Eastford Holsteins partnership.

Another was being runner up for the cow of the century competition in 2000 with Bankend Wren 104, where we were up against 20 champions from all four nations. In the end, it came down to myself and Alistair Laird, who beat me on the day with an imported cow. I like to joke that my cow was

the true British cow of the century! Wren also went on to win 'the treble' Ayr Show, the Royal Highland Show and AgriScot in the same calendar year.

Finally, I would have to add that watching my son, Kevin, win the Stockman of the Year trophy in 2016 is something I will never forget.

Biggest disappointment?

I tend to put any disappointments to the back of my head and concentrate on the positives and moving forward. In farming, there will be disappointments every day, but it is how you deal with them that determines how successful you will be.

Most influential person?

Firstly, there's my father as he started me on my journey with cows. He taught me right from wrong and he was a hard man but told you how it was - sometimes I did not like it, but it led me to where I am today.

Another would be my uncle Jim. He was probably one of my biggest fans and I was one of his. He gave me great advice over the years, and he was the guy that went around in the buggy at the shows! He was great for motivation and praise when you were due but was quite right to give a dressing down when you were due it too. I miss them both greatly.

During my YF days, it would be Jim Guthrie (formerly of Low Milton). He took the time to show me the finer points of cows and sheep. He is still a true stockman of his day.

My wife, Caroline, is one of the most influential

Gilmour Lawrie



GILMOUR LAWRIE

people in my career. She is always on hand to keep me calm, motivates me when I am having a bad day and definitely keeps me right - she is one of the most important people in my life.

Favourite sale to attend over the years and why?

I loved the Ayrshire sales when they were held in Ayr but now the Black and White sales are amongst the popular ones to attend. I have been exhibiting there for past five years which has led me in to founding the Eastford Holstein herd with the Yates family, from Castle Douglas. We have made a great friendship with Brian and Sheila. Caroline and I holiday together with them when time allows.

On one such holiday, we decided to buy a cow - or the girls did and, of course, the boys paid! This was for the legend that is Tabitha. We also bought another cow and the progeny of that Kiwi cow won SuperHeifer. The herd has grown over the years and our most recent sale average sits at over £5800 paid for seven.

The Holsteins are now a big part of everyday life and we flush cows and share animals with the Yates family. It is fair to say that our wee experiment has paid off!

Best breeder?

Alistair Laird for continually bringing out quality cows at every show.

Best advice?

Always buy a good cow when it is in good company and always buy cow families that will never let you down.

Also, take a photo and that will tell you where the faults are!

Biggest achievement?

Buying the farm that my father and grandfather tried

to purchase. Another would be winning inter-breed at the Highland with Tabitha. I have been lucky enough to have won seven Ayrshire titles at the Highland and to land the inter-breed title with a Red and White and an Ayrshire.

If you could have gone into another breed, what would it have been?

I'm getting into the Holsteins now, but in regard to beef cattle I would have to choose Aberdeen-Angus. I am quite passionate about the breed and I like to watch the judging at the Highland Show, as they've fairly upped their game over the past few years.

Anything you would go back and change?

I would have bought the farms 20 years ago when they were cheaper! I have loved my time with the cows and honestly could not vision me doing anything else.

Outwith the farm?

In 2017, I was president of the Ayrshire Cattle Society of Great Britain and Ireland and have held the position of business co-ordinator for some time. Another enjoyable and pleasurable committee I sit on is the AgriScot committee, where I now stand as vice chairman - the camaraderie and dedication there is second to none.

I like watching the Scottish rugby team play and I am also a big Rangers fan. There are only two teams in Scotland - Rangers and Rangers reserves!

Future of your breeds?

The Ayrshire cow will always be around, especially now down south as farmers are looking for a good grazing animal. They make a quality all-round cow.



ONE OF the herd's best Ayrshire's, Brieryside Respect Swan