



SEXED SEMEN is used on the top 100 cows and maiden heifers. In recent years, all the best dairy heifers have been retained on farm – hence the reduction sale in July Ref:RH260421347



KNOWE FARM team, Laura, Rachel, Jan, George, Claire and Neil. Missing is Laura's partner, Sandy Nicoll Ref:RH260421323

By Patsy Hunter
Photographs by Rob Haining

Breeding the best in all dairy breeds

FOR most pedigree farmers, there is nothing better than seeing the progeny of various mating programmes grow and develop and noted Ayrshire cattle breeder, George Templeton, has enjoyed a lifetime devoted to various cow families and that of his own – wife Jan and their three daughters, Laura, Claire and Rachel.

As the third generation of George Templeton's to milk cows at the Knowe, Auchinleck, and one which is about to celebrate a centenary of farming on this lowland dairy unit, he has always been at the forefront of modern genetics. Originally, a real enthusiast of the traditional Ayrshire, he has slowly but surely introduced red and

white Holsteins into the mix to benefit the business, and black and whites.

A former president of the Ayrshire Cattle Society and long-term council member of both Cattle Services Ayr Ltd and AgriScot, he is also a keen showman. But with so many top breeding females in the herd, a shortage of breeders' sales to sell them at and, last year's Covid sale restrictions, he is finally having to bite the bullet and stage a herd reduction sale.

Having reached capacity and with 600 head of dairy cattle on the farm at present, the family is selling some

150 cattle to include 50 milkers, 50 in-calf heifers and 50 calves from the award winning Knowe Ayrshire and Knowside Holstein herds, at Carlisle, on July 9.

Females from the herd's high performance Brown

Kate family, which traces back 60 years; the White Lily family that goes back some 50 years and the Barbies and Beatrices, hailing from Willie Watson Muirton and Jan's father, Bill Kennedy, Strandhead, respectively,

will all be included, not to mention some of the more recent acquisitions in the Irnolas from Bankend and the Silver Bells from Humeston.

It is however, a Beatrice that goes back to the Strandhead dispersal in 1997, that is

perhaps the family's most famous cow, with Knowe Beatrice 7, not only winning the inter-breed honours at the biggest dairy show in the country, Ochiltree, in 2016, but also the breed honours at the Highland the same year. A daughter of the Red and White Holstein, Sterndale Rose Royce Red, she was also reserve Red and White heifer at AgriScot in 2012.

Knowe Bertha 193 Ex94-2, a 100% Ayrshire and a daughter of Brieryside Pearly King, has also been one of the herd's star performers, bagging the runner up cow

Continued on page 34

Explore the possibilities...

Time to have that balance...

When did you last take time out to truly explore the possibilities for you, your herd and your business? What would you do if you could free up time? Focus on being a better farmer or having a better lifestyle – or both? What if you had the opportunity to redress that balance? Why not take a look at dairy automation for your farm?

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LELY



WITH THE better weather, this small group of yearling heifers are out at grass Ref:RH260421349



IN-CALF HEIFERS out at grass and due to calve at 25 months of age Ref:RH260421333

Continued from page 33

championship at AgriScot in 2012, having two weeks previous, won the inter-breed cow honours at the West of Scotland Dairy Show at Rowallan, – beating the 2012 SuperCow, Syke Sybil, in the process!

There have been so many other cows from the herd – made up of more than 16 Excellent-classified cows and 86 VGs – that have made their presence felt at Ochiltree, Catrine, the Highland and

AgriScot, over the years too, with George, his wife Jan and their three daughters all enjoying the shows and the farming way of life.

“Our three daughters have always been interested in the cattle and still are, and fortunately, Claire and her partner Neil Sloan, are keen to take the business further which is great for us all,” said George adding that their eldest Laura, is an accountant in Ayr, Claire works for the materials handling company

Hyster Yale in Irvine and the youngest, Rachel is a radiographer at Ayr Hospital. “Everyone wants to keep the farm in the family and this way we can as Neil already works here full time alongside Logan Howat,” George added.

The reduction sale comes some 99 years after the family bought the farm in 1922. In those days, this lowland grassland enterprise comprised 180 acres, but has since seen an additional 200

acres added.

Very much a traditional family farm relying on the best of Ayrshire genetics for most of that time, it has nevertheless evolved into a modern dairy unit with the introduction of Red and White and black and white Holsteins, which in turn have helped bolster overall milk yields, and, by selecting the most suitable sires, components to match that of the best traditional county cows.

It was in fact George, who as president of the breed in 2008/09, relaunched the Red and White register within the Ayrshire Cattle Society, which in turn helped to boost registrations and in the long-term, membership of the society.

As a lifelong enthusiast of the Ayrshire, he is also the first to admit the benefits of both Red and White and black and white Holsteins.

“Father bought his first Holstein some 30 years ago in Millburn Bertha, from Davie Smith, High Chapelton,

ONTHEspot

- **Biggest achievement?** “Elected Ayrshire Cattle Society president, which has allowed us to go so many places and meet so many new people and being presented a Lifetime's Achievement award from the Society three years ago.”
- **Best investment?** “Selling 100 acres and being able to buy another 150 acres in the neighbouring Langholm Farm, in 1981. We also built a dry cow shed in 2018 which has made a huge difference as the cows now have a lot more space and comfort and they can be split between far off and near calving groups. These cows now calve down better, are healthier and go on and milk better.”
- **Best advice?** “Granny Templeton always said: ‘Always admit when you're wrong son.’”
- **Most influential herd sire/cow family?** “White Lily cow family and our Knowe Direct Line Ayrshire bull.”
- **What are you looking forward to in your retirement?** “Being able to take things a bit easier but also help out and give advice when required, and travelling.”

and tried to convince me to go down the black and white route but, at that time, I thought the Ayrshire had plenty to offer without introducing another breed.

“Now, having used a lot of Red and White sires over the years, milk yields are 2500kg higher and our cows are still

producing good amounts of butterfat and protein, by selecting the right sires and diet,” he said, adding that Greg Leishman of Advanced Nutrition, assists in working out feed rations.

“There really isn't that much difference between the modern Ayrshire/Red

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KNOWE BARBIE 2, classified Ex91 is bound for the sale later in the year
Ref:RH260421341



COWS ARE fed a TMR mixed in a Keenan fed wagon, with high and low yielders fed for maintenance plus 35 litres and 22 litres, respectively. There are with no in or out of parlour feeders
Ref:RH260421326

and White and the Holstein here although the black and whites tend to hold their peak yields for longer but we're not looking for big, extreme cows."

As it is, overall milk yields stand at 9100kg at 4.32%BF and 3.40%P with a calving interval of 383 days. Heifers join the herd at 25 months of age, which combined with the longevity of the traditional Ayrshire in the mix, ensure an average herd lactation of four plus, with some cows even milking into their seventh and eighth.

Most of these long serving girls are daughters of West Mossgiel Modern Class, a bull bought from the late Robert Cunningham, that bred attractive, high yielding, long living cows.

Going further back, the business relied upon a number of top breeding bulls from Lessnessock in the early days, which included Lessnessock Will Cheer. He bred Knowe Direct Line, a bull retained for breeding, bred from the herd's Dainty Lass family, that did particularly well.

West Mossgiel Modern Class, Cuthill Towers Madison, Adrmore Crown Napier, Caldervale Realisation, Gwynnog Primetime, Harefoot Simply Perfect, Ruby Com, Be-king, Brieryside Hail and Knowe Warrior, a son of Carnell Warrior, also made their mark on the herd, with many others from Cattle Services Ayr Ltd, also used.

Some of the most successful red and whites have been Attico Red, Blondin Mr Pickfish, Atomium Red and Aladdin Red.

George added: "We select sires for everything, but components are one of the most important traits when our milk contract is with Lactalis who pay a premium for protein.

"We can get an extra 0.02p per litre for 3.3% milk and another 0.02p above 3.4% so we not only select sires for high components but are also continually tweaking the diet to boost protein figures."

While the herd comprises pedigree Ayrshire/Red and White and Holsteins, they are managed the same way.

Calved all year round, high yielders are housed 24/7 and milked three times a day, while the low yielders giving 25litres and under are kept in a second shed and milked twice a day. They also go out to grass during the summer although mostly come inside at nights.

To keep it simple, there are just two feed rations, for high and low yielders - fed for maintenance plus 35litres and plus 22litres, respectively. Cows are milked through a 36 x 36 Westfalia herringbone parlour and there are no in or out of parlour feeders.

Milkers are dried off 50 days before calving onto a mostly straw-based ration, with a special pre-calving concentrate plus mineral mix provided two weeks prior to

giving birth.

George has also installed the new Cow Scout, the Westfalia activity system over the past six weeks, which is helping to tighten up AI times and conception rates, with the first aimed at 50 days post calving with any failing to come in heat, inserted with a progesterone prid by the vet who visits the farm every two weeks.

Sexed semen is used on the top 100 cows and heifers with the remainder AI'd with British Blue fertility plus semen with Aberdeen-Angus semen used in recent months for heifers.

In recent years, all the best dairy heifers have been retained on farm - hence the

reduction sale in July - while the beef calves are reared on farm until 2.5-three months of age, and sold through Ayr Auction Mart to a top of £440 per head.

There will always be changes in farming, but the one good thing at Knowe is that the business is remaining in the family for all to enjoy, which coupled with the improved margins witnessed in the sector can only be a good thing for the next generation.

"The milk price is heading in the right direction, albeit behind that of other farming sectors, and Brexit has not been a bad thing for the industry, so you would think dairying should be good in

FARMfacts

- Farm size: 380acres
- Herd numbers: 285 mostly Ayrshire and Red and White and 300 followers and 30 Holsteins. Just shy of 600 cattle in total.
- Herd average: 9100kg at 4.32%BF and 3.40%P with 383 calving interval
- Cropping: Two main cuts of silage and a smaller third cut and 50acres of spring barley grown for feed and straw
- Diet: TMR for high and low yielders fed for maintenance plus 35litres and 22litres, respectively. No in or out of parlour feeders
- Milking: High yielders three times a day with low yielders twice daily and at grass during summer months

the short to medium term. "Covid has not really affected our industry - if anything, it has helped the milk price," concluded

George who is looking forward to getting back to the agricultural shows and to watching the next generation take part in them!



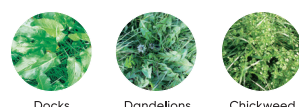
KNOWE FARM near Auchinleck and home to the Templeton family

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