

# Show circuit success for recently founded Moralee herd

*Established just eight years ago, the Moralee herd has taken the Hereford world by storm, turning out regular show ring champions and pedigree sale toppers, as well as producing quality beef for direct sales. Hannah Park reports.*

Progress has been rapid since the first five pedigree Hereford cattle arrived with Tom and Di Harrison, near Stocksfield, Northumberland, in 2011, forming the foundation of the Moralee herd, which is now made up of 40 breeding females and followers.

With Tom working full-time for Northumbrian Water and, until recently, Di also working full-time off-farm, the couple was originally looking for a venture which could be managed alongside other commitments.

Tom says: "After doing our research, we were drawn to the Herefords for their docility and how easy they are to handle as a breed, but latterly their ability to finish off grass, longevity and fertility are also big pluses."

Before retiring, Tom's father Arnold ran a herd of Limousin cross cows and later bought-in and finished store cattle on-farm.

Although this was disbanded shortly before the Hereford herd was established, Arnold still remains on-hand and, particularly during show season, is involved with day-to-day work on-farm.

The herd, named after Di's maiden name, Moralee, and High Moralee, where her parents farmed in northern Northumberland, is run over the farm's 93

hectares (230 acres), which runs down to border the River Tyne.

This is mainly made up of grass and shrub land, alongside 36ha (90 acres) of arable ground, which is contracted out.

Explaining their route into showing, Di says: "It was never strictly the intention to get into showing to the extent we have.

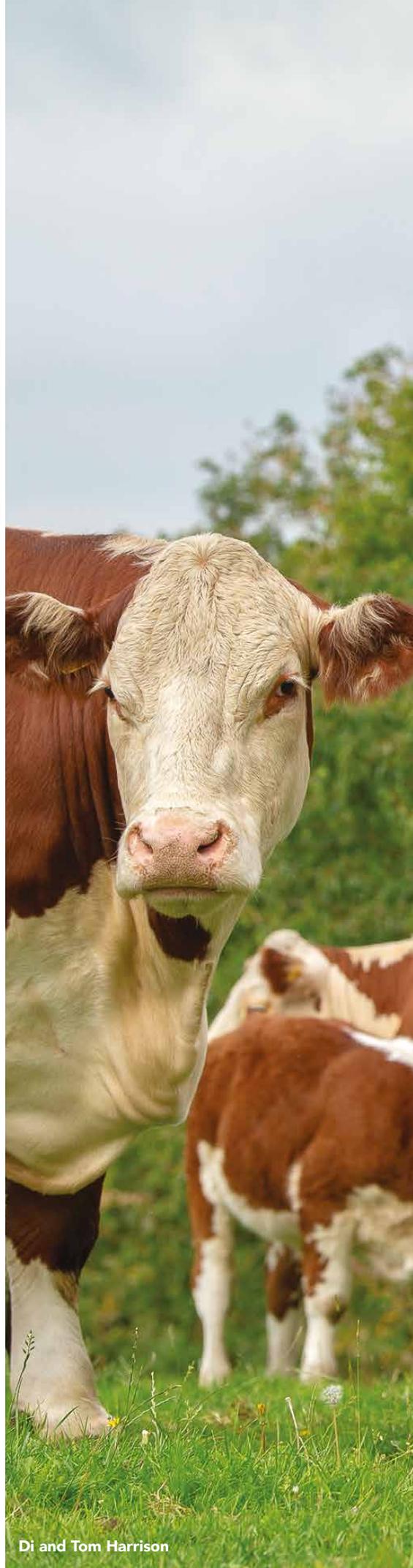
"Although we both come from showing backgrounds, it had always been from an organisational side of things, so exhibiting was new to both of us when we started, but it has just spiralled."

## Progression

And showing has certainly snowballed. Since exhibiting for the first time at Agri Expo in 2012, Tom and Di have progressed from doing two shows per year to exhibiting at some 13 events on the circuit in the summer of 2018.

It is fair to say the successes have come thick and fast since then, with stand-out titles so far including taking the breed championship at the Royal Highland in 2017 and the native junior interbreed championship at the 2019 Royal Welsh with home-bred bull Moralee 1 Rebel Kicks KS R12.

Making their second time exhibiting at the Highland unforgettable was Coley 1 Pippa 356, a four year old cow the pair



Di and Tom Harrison





**Stock bull, Cornriggs 1 Knight Rider**

bought from Heather Whitaker's herd in Yorkshire as a maiden heifer.

Pippa's dam, Frenchstone P. 1 Boo, was 2013 female Hereford of the year, and its sire was Australian-bred Days Calibre G74.

Unstoppable on the circuit last summer was their home-bred 17-month-old bull, Moralee 1 Rebel Kicks, which has brought some of the herd's biggest wins to date.

Kicking off at Agri Expo last November, it has dominated the championships at almost every show it has been exhibited at. Most recently, it took a multitude of wins which peaked with the junior interbreed native championship title and

reserve junior interbreed overall at this year's Royal Welsh, to mark the couple's first interbreed win.

Rebel Kicks' successes also include taking reserve overall and male champion at Northumberland Show, where they have won a breed championship for the last four years, including in 2016 when they swept the championship board in the Hereford section.

Out of Romany 1 Dawn, a dam bought from Kelso-based Robert Wilson, Rebel Kicks is by what was the herd's first stock bull, Danish-bred SMH King Size 87K, which stood third in the Hereford sire of the year line-up in 2018, before winning it in 2019.

## Unbeaten

Success has also been enjoyed in the sale ring, most notably at last year's Designer Genes sale when one half of the unbeaten pair, Moralee 1 Kylie KSR1 and Moralee 1 Kimberly KSR7, was offered for sale and saw Kylie sell for £8,000, the highest price the couple has received to date.

It is this success of the pair's dams, the original Moralee 1 Kylie and Moralee 1 Kimberly cows, and Coley 1 Pippa, which led the couple to carry out some embryo work with these three cows this summer.

Tom says: "We wanted to fully exploit our herd's top genetics, continue to progress and increase the number of progeny we have to show and sell.

"Coley 1 Pippa is considered within the breed's top 5 per cent, so when we considered it had the potential for just 10 calves in its lifespan, it made sense to double or even treble that number using in-vitro production.

"As a result, we have more than 50 embryos between the three cows which will return to us. We are also looking to put four Kylie cross King Size embryos in the Designer Genes sale this year, with potential for export to Europe, a breed first which we are excited to be involved in."

The Harrisons credit their strict selection criteria as one of the main reasons for their successes, and having found more purchasers looking for poll cattle in recent years, are also breeding for this gene.



**Numbers stand at 40 cows, plus followers**



# NATIONAL SHOW HERD OF THE YEAR



Tom & Di Harrison,  
The Old Potato House, Stocksfield, Northumberland  
moraleeherefords@gmail.com www.moraleeherefords.vpweb.co.uk  
Tom: 07962 076854 Di:07962 076853

## Farm facts

- ◆ The Moralee Hereford herd was established in 2011 with five breeding females bought from David and Kate Dickinson's Mallowburn herd, Catcleugh, Newcastle-upon-Tyne and later with additions from Robert Wilson's Romany herd, Kelso
- ◆ Numbers stand at 40 suckler cows, plus followers, run over the farm's 93 hectares (230 acres)
- ◆ Numerous show ring successes to date have included breed championship at the Royal Highland in 2017 and native junior inter-breed championship at this year's Royal Welsh
- ◆ The herd was named show herd of the year 2019
- ◆ Alongside marketing and selling breeding bulls, the Harrisons also finish animals to supply their beef box scheme, with some 18 cattle sold via this avenue last year

Show potential is also key, alongside correctness in legs and feet. Power and depth, as well as style, are all qualities looked for in heifer replacements, which are generally calved at 30 months old to allow for the growth they are looking for.

For this reason, the herd is split into spring and autumn calvers, with the former calving during March and April and later in September and October.

## Society sales

Not dissimilar to other pedigree breeders, marketing and selling breeding bulls forms an arm of their business and Moralee sires will be heading to Society sales in Hereford in October and April, as well as the new February sale in Shrewsbury.

Any animals which do not make the grade, male or female, are finished to supply their beef box scheme, which the pair established five years ago.

Tom says: "We run a strict selection process at calving and will castrate any bulls at or soon after birth which do not have what we are looking for in a breeding bull.

"The decision will be on anything from markings, to how it is bred, or whether it is poll or not.

"All heifers are registered, but we are selective on what we keep for breeding, so any animals which do not make the grade will be finished and sold via the box scheme."

An idea which snowballed after the pair was keen to try some of their own beef, Di says their customer base has largely grown in the locality through word of mouth and, more recently, social media.

Cattle are finished off grass and taken to a local abattoir and butcher at 14 to 15 months at 600kg to produce a 300kg carcass, with one animal typically returning 12 to 14 boxes. With a continual flow of orders, 18 animals were finished for the box scheme last year.

Di says: "The scheme is returning us a good added value and although it was always meant to be a sideline, it has become a major part of the business and is certainly equalling pedigree sales.

"Numbers-wise, the herd is continuing to grow as heifer replacements come through and will likely increase to 60 cows in the next few years."

Di says: "We are always trying to improve and look for something different and while the boxed beef outlet is strong, we can make a healthy profit on animals not sold down the pedigree route.

"The number of shows we do costs a fortune, but we would not be in the position we are now in terms of getting our name out there if we did not do it. It will always be a shop window."



For more about the Harrisons' show successes, see page 128