



Side by side: Shorthorns and Holsteins rub shoulders at the Harries' unit



Same system: the two breeds both thrive on the management system at Gellirodyn



Blended Shorthorns: the Harries are looking to breed dairy-like milky Shorthorns

# Torn between two breeds

## Shorthorns and Holsteins are a winning combination

**Two breeds are living and milking in harmony on one Welsh dairy unit – so well that the herd owners would be reluctant to chose between the two. We spoke to them to find out why and what they feel the different breeds have to offer.**

It's a challenge and it keeps our interest going – just two of the many reasons cited by Ian and Eiddwen Harries and their son Owain as to why they run two herds, managed together on one system, at Gellirodyn Farm near Crosshands in Carmarthen.

A total of 120 cows – 40 Shorthorns and 80 Holsteins – are keeping Ian and Eiddwen busy at the moment, while son Owain is away studying at agricultural college. And they are very happy with the mix, which they say gives them 'the best of both worlds'.

Ian's love affair with the Shorthorn began in 1979 when he began helping his father-in-law look after and show the breed. "It progressed from there really. I bought my first Shorthorn cow and calf in 1994, when I was farming in partnership with my brother."

Ian moved to his own unit in 2000, taking the Shorthorn cow, her daughter and a calf he bought with him. "So I started with three Shorthorns and the herd has grown from there." He also brought 30 of the 60 Holsteins he was milking in the partnership to the unit and bought a further 56 cows from a farm sale.

At that point the Holstein Friesian herd was purely commercial, becoming pedigree – prefix Eola – in 2003/2004.

### Blended Shorthorns

The Gelli pedigree Shorthorn herd numbers swelled in 2001 when Ian took in six 'problem' cows, which needed specialist care, from his father-in-law's herd to help out when he was taken ill. When it was time for the cows to go back the foot-and-mouth disease outbreak meant that they couldn't be moved and

then his father-in-law sadly passed away. These cows were kept in the herd for a few years and Ian went on to buy more Shorthorns, beginning with nine from the Wiltshire-based Chicklade herd – a mixture of cows and heifers in milk. Another nine were then purchased from the Cotley herd, comprising six cows and three heifers. And more Shorthorns were bought at the annual pedigree show and sale at Chelford, near Macclesfield.

"I'm looking for very dairy like, milky, blended Shorthorns – not the old traditional type of dairy Shorthorn. The former can compete with our Holstein herd and thrive and succeed on our

system," explains Ian. He says that the traditional dairy Shorthorn would not survive at Gellirodyn. "They simply wouldn't be capable of producing the yields from our winter ration of grass and maize silage. The traditional Shorthorn would thrive on our summer grazing system, but would be inefficient on our winter feeding regime."

### Trouble free

Ian likes the challenge of breeding Shorthorns. "I always say that when keeping and breeding Holsteins you can afford to make a few little slip ups, but with the Shorthorn there's little room for error. And this keeps us on the ball."

Ian believes that the Shorthorns are easier to manage – they're more trouble free. "They're more fertile, in my opinion, and easier to get back in calf – possibly due to their slightly lower yields."

Shorthorn cows are averaging around 7,500 litres at 3.8% butterfat and 3.3% protein, whereas the Holstein herd is averaging around 9,000 litres at 3.6% butterfat and 3.1% protein.

"The Shorthorns are slightly higher on milk constituents and their yield is

impressive when you consider that the national average for the breed is around 6,000 litres," adds Ian.

He's happy with both breeds and says, if pushed to decide between the two, it would be very difficult to choose between them. "I consider myself to be a very Holstein-minded producer when it comes to yield and the milk cheque – to me they are the true milking machine. But if I was looking for an easier life – and cows that tend to look after themselves – I'd opt for the Shorthorn."

### Show-ring success

Not forgetting how his passion for the breed was first kindled, the family is also looking for a show-winning cow. In fact they have had considerable show ring success with both breeds, with 2006, in particular, proving to be a memorable year. Hooton Red Rose was crowned champion Shorthorn heifer at the Royal Show and took the overall reserve title too. Third-calver red-and-white Holstein Whartonspool Kite Helena also scooped a championship at the Royal. "That's the best we've done so far," says Ian. "And as bests go, it wasn't bad!"

A string of other successes in shows

across the UK in 2006 was topped by a win at the Royal Welsh by Shorthorn Cotley Hazel 67. She calved her fourth a week before taking the championship and went on to give 11,122kg of milk in 305 days, proving that the Harries' show winners also have bulk-tank success.

Holstein Weeton Shark Celicia 55 also did exceptionally well in 2006 and 2007. In her fourth lactation she was crowned four times with titles including the Welsh champions of champions in 2006 and the overall championship at the South West Holstein spring show in 2007. No surprisingly she figures in the Harries' show plans for 2008 and 2009.

"We are looking for pedigree show cows that can also put milk in the tank – we want the best of both worlds really. And we get that within each breed and by running the two breeds side by side."

The family is also planning to increase milk output by increasing total cow numbers to 140 cows by adding more Shorthorns and Holsteins. "We're working hard too to raise the herd quality to a standard that we're happy with and we're just about there and looking forward to selling some heifers to generate a second stream of income this year," says Ian, adding that they sold their first Holstein heifer in January. "The show ring is the shop window for both our herds, so we're hoping for more success at the shows this year to help generate some interest in any surplus stock."

Rachael Porter

Owain (left) and Ian Harries



