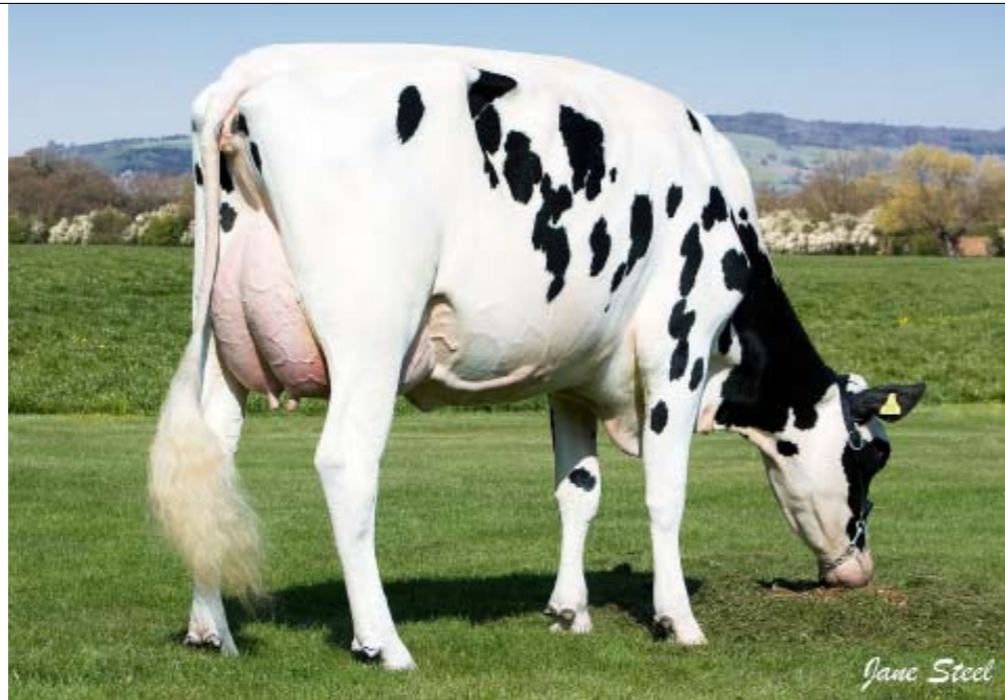


**Miller family**

A fantastic dairy herd, run by a dedicated and committed family team. Attention to detail in nutrition, breeding and fertility are all key to the business' success.



Number of cows:	280
Milk sold per cow:	11,350kg
Farm size:	330 hectares
Feed efficiency:	1.64



Shanael Bolton Golden: a total of 40 embryos have been sold across Europe and North America

Worcestershire-based family's dedication earns silver salver award

Family fortunes

We spoke to the runners up in this year's NMR/RABDF Gold Cup competition to find out how they wowed the judges and how their determination could well see them in future line ups of finalists for the award, vying for gold.

text **Ann Hardy & Rachael Porter**

When the Miller family moved to Worcestershire from Somerset, with 46 milking cows and around 300,000 litres of quota in 1996, they could scarcely have imagined where their journey would end. Today they are not only heading rapidly upwards from the 280 cows they currently milk, but the family has also been identified as one of the leading dairy farming businesses in the country, taking the much-coveted NMR Silver Salver awarded to runners up in the 2011 NMR/RABDF Gold Cup competition.

Father Mike says that they are thrilled with their achievement: "It's praise indeed to come runner up to Tom King's herd and it's been a huge lift for us all.

It'll inspire us to go on and enter the competition again in the future, to see if we can win it."

Behind the Miller's success – and the expansion to what has now become 330 hectares of tenanted land at Greville Hall Farm near Evesham – is total dedication and commitment from the whole family. Overseen by father Mike, with mother Shan controlling calves and accounts and brothers, Steve and Paul, taking on cropping and cows respectively, the whole business ticks over with a sense of unity and purpose.

At its core is the Shanael herd of Holsteins, whose NMR annual average production of 12,014kg at 3.68% fat and 3.17% protein, on three-times-a-day milking.

This reflects carefully considered breeding and attention to detail in management. "It's got a lot to do with nutrition and cow comfort," says Paul, who ensures that the cows consume high quantities of forage.

"We're aiming for a dry matter intake of 26kg for the high yielders, 22kg for the lows and 21kg for the heifers, and our actual dry matter intake averages 23.33kg across the three groups," adds Steve, who is specifically responsible for feeding.

The TMR for the high yielders comprises 22.3kg maize silage, 8kg grass silage, 5.5kg caustic wheat, 1kg hay, 1kg alfalfa, 0.25kg wheat straw, 7kg blend, 2kg moist mix, 2kg hi-pro soya, 0.5kg protected fat, 0.27kg sodium bicarbonate, 0.3kg minerals and 0.03kg urea.

Scratch factor

"The hay and alfalfa is just to give extra palatability and some 'scratch factor' and we may grow 16 hectares of the latter for the first time next year," he says.

Designed to provide maintenance plus 45 litres for the high yielding group (and maintenance plus 35 litres for the lows and heifers), he says the efficiency with which the TMR is converted into milk is an increasingly important measure.

This currently stands at 1.64 (feed efficiency is the yield of energy corrected milk per kg of DMI) and milk is sold to Cotteswold Dairy in Tewkesbury.

"Feed costs per litre keep increasing," says Steve. "They currently stand at

12.93p, of which 8.68p is the purchased feed cost, so we are aiming to grow more high quality forage on the farm."

Fertility is another area which is being attended to closely and is underpinned by fortnightly visits from the vet to pregnancy test and investigate 'non-bullers'.

"We aim to start serving after 42 days, as soon as they are clean and ready to go, and we have no aids to heat detection except for a white-board," says Paul.

With a calving index of 430 days, the aim is to reduce this to 400. "But we do a lot of embryo transfer work, so this isn't going to be easy," he adds.

That the Shanael cattle are worth the effort to produce embryos is unequivocal, with several having commanded high sale prices and performed well in the show ring.

At the top of the game is Shanael Bolton Golden VG88, who has given one of the highest two-year-old yields on record in Europe and has a PLI of £284.

Flushing programme

Having produced 16,160kg in 305 days, she went on to produce 33,225kg in the total 678 days of her first lactation. She then entered a long-term flushing programme.

Some 40 of her embryos are dispersed across Europe and North America, including bulls to AI and the 9,500gns heifer by Palermo, which sold this summer at the Genetics Elite sale in Carlisle.

"She's a real once-in-a-lifetime cow, and the AI companies are very interested in her progeny," says Paul.

With a breeding policy that focuses first on type – 'at least two points Type Merit and generally three' – as well as production, health and fertility, Paul hopes to retain the competitive edge seen in a high demand for Shanael stock, including Holstein bull sales of around 30 head a year.

"We also enjoy showing at the Dairy Event and the South West Dairy Show, but it's not the be all and end all," he adds.

"The most important thing for us is milk production and efficiency, but pedigree produces an important income and brings an extra dimension and makes everyone more interested in the cows."

Further interest comes through wildlife schemes, including Entry Level Stewardship, which was embarked upon for its financial incentives but now makes the farm a 'nicer place to be' for everyone involved.



Looking forward, the family plans to continue moving the business forward – both in term of productivity and efficiency. The milking herd will have reached 350 head by the end of the year. "And we hope to sell in excess of 12,000 litres of milk per cow next year." Beyond that, the family will continue to focus on running the business as

well as they can. "We're very optimistic," says Paul.

"Steve and I have been written into the tenancy for 25 years and we are expanding as a family and increasing our acreage.

"We hope that one day – maybe in 10 years – we'll be farming 600 hectares and milking 500 cows." |