

**Philip and James Mattinson**

Twin brothers are following a breeding plan that's building on their herd's stamina, strengths and showing success.



Herd size:	<b>270 cows</b>
Average yield:	<b>7,995kg</b>
Calving interval:	<b>391 days</b>
Average longevity:	<b>Five lactations</b>



*Ideal mix: the Ayrshire and red-and-white Holstein herd is performing well in the show ring and the milking parlour*

Show cows with substance – fertility is key to longevity

# Style and stamina

A mixture of Ayrshire and red-and-white Holstein genetics are proving to be the perfect recipe for one Cumbria-based partnership, which is looking to breed a long-life herd.

text **Rachael Porter**

There are two 'masters' who dictate the direction of the breeding decisions that twin brothers Philip and James Mattinson take for their pedigree herd – the show ring and the milking parlour. "We're looking for the best of both worlds – a cow with good aesthetic and functional type and the robustness to last for several lactations in the milking herd," says James, adding that the latter, for them, is very much about feet and legs and fertility.

Their 270-cow pedigree Troutbeck Ayrshire and red-and-white Holstein

herd, based near Wigton in Cumbria, was founded in 2001. "We were just leaving school and our farm's sheep flock was taken by foot-and-mouth disease," James says. "Movement restrictions on the suckler beef enterprise meant that cash flow was dire that year and we decided that going back into dairy – there had been a herd on the unit many years before – would provide a steady income stream."

### Insight: genetic foundations

With their father, Frank, on board, they decided to take the Ayrshire route: "It's

a robust breed – ideal for grazing on our unit, with good feet and legs and plenty of the fat and protein needed for our milk buyer's contract, which pays a premium for high constituent milk.

"Cows and heifers were also expensive to buy post FMD, so we wanted to make sure we bought cows that would last for several lactations. Ayrshire represented, at that time, what we thought was the biggest bang for our buck."

They bought the Upper Woodhead herd of pedigree Ayrshires and some cattle from the Whiteford family's Middle herd, as well as a few other smaller groups of cows, and began milking with around 90 head.

In 2006, the family took the chance to sell their farm and buy a larger one, which then allowed them to push cow numbers gradually up to where they are today.

A decade ago their cows were, indeed

completing upwards of seven or eight lactations. This figure is closer to four or five now, since the introduction of red-and-white Holstein genetics. And James would like to push the average up to five or six lactations.

### Plan: longevity

So, how are the pair working towards that? “Back in 2001 we had a lot of cows that were 50:50 Ayrshire and red-and-white Holstein. And they were pretty fancy too – ideal for showing, with lots of milk and plenty of capacity and stature. They also had good legs and feet and we knew we wanted to breed in a direction that would retain these qualities. For us it’s been very much about maintaining what we’ve bought it and not losing any of the key type or production traits,” explains James.

James says that Dutch dairy genetics have been crucial in helping him and his brother Philip to build the herd that they’re milking today.

“The CRV Avoncroft sires that we select produce the medium-sized, robust daughters that have good legs and feet and also produce milk with high constituents. And they also have what it takes to dazzle in the show ring.”

The herd is currently averaging 7,995kg of milk at 4.5% butterfat and 3.4% protein and solids are key to meeting milk buyer Arla’s contract – milk from the herd is destined for cheese production.

Fertility is important to the Mattinsons too. And they look at Better Life Efficiency and Health scores when selecting sires. “These values ensure that we have fertility and longevity ‘covered’,” says James.

They always look for a plus for milk and feet and legs score must be at least 108. And there must be a positive percentage for both Better Life Efficiency and Better Health to maintain herd fertility.

James and his brother Philip use an on-line filtering system to help them decide exactly which sires to use on their herd. “We add in the traits that we’re looking for – the ‘must haves’ and it suggests which ones are the best matches for individual cows.

“We can select from between 40 and 50 sires on line. The website allows us to tinker with the figures and set different parameters for different cows and heifers.”

Daughters milking in the herd include: Classic, James says that they have used more than 600 straws across the herd; Delta Fidelity; and Delta Lilac.

“And we’re extremely pleased with them,” he says.

Sires in the flask include Fantasy and genomically-tested Colorado: “We’re using Colorado quite heavily at the moment. But we do have a lot of bulls – both daughter-proven and genomically tested – in our flask at any one time. Most of them are CRV Avoncroft sires.

“We feel that the figures and information on these sires is extremely accurate. What we get is what we expect. We’re never disappointed. I think that’s because 95% of Dutch herds are recorded, so there’s plenty of data available. And that improves reliability.”

The brothers also say that the quality of the semen is better than others they’ve used.

“We get more cows and heifers in calf when we use CRV Avoncroft semen and this means that we’re using fewer straws per pregnancy. So it’s cost effective too.”

### Improve: future plans

Yields are increasing for the all-year-round calving herd. James would like to see the herd average at around 9,000 litres, but without compromising on solids.

“And we’d like to milk a few more – possibly up to 300 head – but when that happens very much depends on the milk price,” explains James.

Herd calving interval has also reduced a little to 391 days and he’d like to see that continue to edge downwards as he



Brothers Philip (left) and James Mattinson: “We’re looking to increase herd longevity”

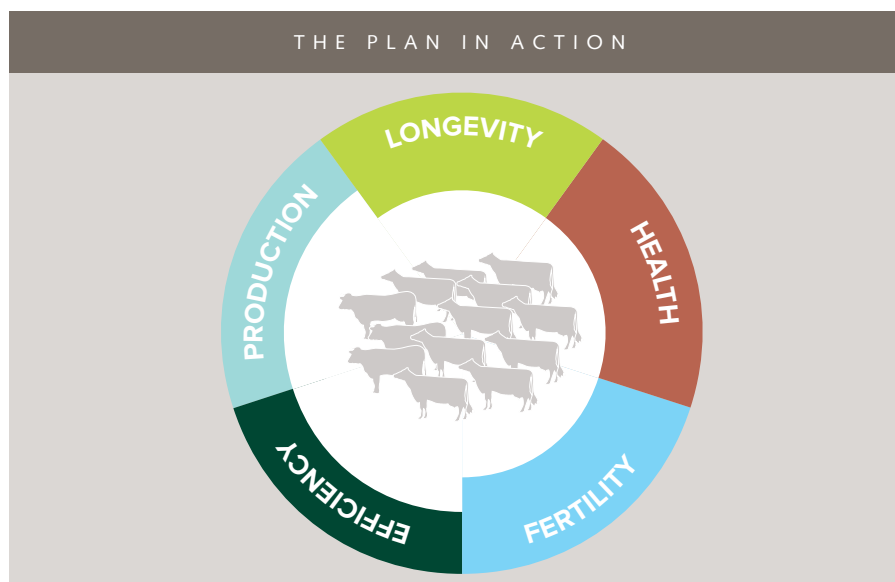
continues to select for fertility, via Better Life Health.

“Our breeding plan is very much about maintaining what we have and this requires considerable thought and careful planning and selection.

“We enjoy showing success at Dairy Expo and AgriScot and we want that to continue,” says James.

“We enjoy showing our cattle and it serves as our shop window. We usually sell between 40 and 50 heifers a year, although sales have been fewer during the past couple of years as we’ve pushed up milking herd numbers.

“But when we’re ready to start selling more heifers again we want to make sure that we have some sale-ring stars to grab buyers’ attention,” he adds. |



### What traits are key to suit the management of the Mattinson family’s herd?

#### Longevity

Profitable cows combine high production with good longevity.

#### Health

A healthy cow is usually efficient and an efficient cow has to be healthy.

#### Fertility

Is important as poor fertility is one of the most important reasons in culling cows.