

SIMMENTAL

COMMERCIAL

ISSUE 1 MAY 2023



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THERE'S MORE TO SIMMENTAL

Welcome to 'Simmental Commercial', a new publication from the British Simmental Cattle Society (BSCS) aimed at highlighting the performance and added value of Simmental genetics in commercial herds across the United Kingdom.

In this first issue we feature herds in Northern Ireland, the midlands of England, and the north east of Scotland. It's a good place to start as through the summer of 2023, each will host a BSCS Open Day, open to everyone, and showcasing this modern beef breed, full of quality and the demonstrable traits of economic importance that bring profitability to beef producers.

With an increasing industry cost base, efficiency and all-round added value is going to be key. This is where the Simmental breed is resonating with commercial producers who recognise it as a no-nonsense beef breed, easy to look after, efficient, flexible, giving you more, and with a hard-working ethos that gets the job done.

Long regarded as 'go to' maternal mainstays of the suckler herd, modern Simmentals are easy keep, quiet, high quality suckler cows; full of nutritional milk, fertile, easy calving and who can wean calves at 50% of their bodyweight at 200 days. They can calve at two years old, and produce a calf every year in a long productive life. Versatile and flexible, putting any breed of bull to a Simmental female will give you fast growing, easy fleshing progeny.

In 2021, the Agriculture and Horticulture Development Board (AHDB) confirmed British Simmental as the UK's leading beef breed for age at slaughter. This is coupled with Simmental sired progeny being fast growing with terrific weight for age, hitting industry specs, and producing high quality carcasses with a high retail beef yield.

These are the natural attributes and efficiencies of the modern British Simmental, adding value, giving you more, forging a profitable commercial future, and meeting the challenges of reducing the carbon footprint of beef production. There's more to a Simmental.

Keep up to date with all the Simmental news, information, upcoming Open Days, and sales at www.britishsimmental.co.uk. We hope that you enjoy this first issue of Simmental Commercial.

LOW INPUT, HIGH OUTPUT SIMMENTALS DELIVERING EFFICIENCY AND PROFITABILITY AT SPRING FARM, BALLYMENA

Meet James McKane, of Spring Farm, Ballymena, where the performance efficiency of the Simmental breed is the backbone of the farm's commercial suckler herd. Spring Farm will host a NI Simmental Breeders Club Open Day, in conjunction with the British Simmental Cattle Society, on Saturday 20th May 2023.

FARM FACTS

- 100 acres grassland
- 55 cow commercial Simmental herd
- 6 pedigree Simmental cows
- 15 months, 400-450kg age and weight at first breeding
- 24 month age at first calving
- 100% herd calving within three months
- 100% calves reared
- 380kg dwt in 14 months, weight and age of finished bulls, majority grading U bracket, remainder R3



James McKane



Six-week-old
Simmental
calves

Suckler producers searching for an efficient and profitable cow need look no further than the Simmental, says James McKane who has a lifetime's experience working with the breed. "Simmentals are future fit; we've adopted a relatively low input high output system and they tick all the boxes. They're fertile, have ample milk, great growth rates from forage-based diets, and equally important, they're docile." Add together the herd's performance efficiency and it has the hallmarks of contributing to reduced emissions.

"We've a 55-cow herd of predominantly Simmental genetics run with two Simmental stock bulls, and usually end up averaging 100% calves reared. We're achieving our target for the entire herd to calve from mid-February within a 12-week block. Cows and calves are turned out as soon as the weather permits, and they look after themselves eating nothing but grass, supplemented with magnesium licks, throughout the season which we like to extend to at least seven months," explains James who farms at Laymore, near Ballymena in partnership with his wife, Laura and with help from brother, Bill.



The commercial Simmental herd thrives on a forage diet throughout the housing period

"The cows and heifers milk like trains right through to the bitter end without any meal and they keep themselves in body condition score 3 to 4 right round the year. Furthermore, we've never fed creep to the calves; it's another expense, results in poaching and what's more, we don't need to, their mothers have plenty of milk." Following weaning, the herd is housed and thrives on pure silage diets, without any supplementary feed, until turn out.

James explains replacement heifers are sufficiently well grown to serve at 400-450kg and calve at two years. "They're bred to the Angus and we synchronise. Since we strive to be more and more efficient, there's no way we would think about keeping them on for another year grazing valuable grass."

While a few of the later born male calves are steered and sold as stores, most are kept entire and are currently finishing within an average 14 months at 380kg and sold deadweight on to a rising late spring market. The majority are grading within the U bracket, the remainder R3. "On housing, these bulls are introduced to a diet of first cut grass silage and meal, and after a settling down period, by the turn of the year we finding they're averaging 1.7kg DLWG.

“ In fact, we've just started to weigh the bulls on a monthly basis – it was something the NI Simmental Club has encouraged us to do, and its proved to be an eye opener finding out how they're really performing. I would never have picked out some of those bulls that are doing up to 2.0kg DLWG.”

James's Simmental journey began in 1971 when he saw the breed for the first time pictured in Farming Life accompanying an article marking one of the initial Simmental importations to the province made by W David Perry, Killane. "David was a friend of the family, so I asked my Dad if we could visit and ended up bringing home a Simmental heifer; she was my 13th birthday present. She cost £40 which was a lot of money at the time, however she turned out to be an investment for life."

Since then, James says it's been a slow road to success. "I'm a first-generation farmer and made sacrifices to save up pocket money sufficient to buy one pedigree heifer from Killane in 1978, before growing the herd to stocking capacity on our 100-acre grassland unit. We've now got six pedigree cows registered under the Springfarm prefix and are presently hoping to introduce ET to help expand the herd. It's a development that's been inspired by daughter, Megan's love of the breed and interest in showing at local agricultural shows.

"I've also got a contracting business so I'm away from the farm a lot, particularly during spring and summer. Again, that's where Simmentals score, they're so quiet and easy to handle, and we've always been confident our cattle are safe for our two daughters, Megan and Ruth to work amongst."

He adds: "For this unit to have a future, then we've to keep costs down, be as efficient as possible and only keep low input high performance cattle. Our Simmentals are ticking all the boxes."

- For further details and information on the Spring Farm Open Day on Saturday 20th May, please keep an eye on the NI Simmental Breeders Club, and British Simmental Cattle Society's Facebook pages; and also www.britishsimmental.co.uk

MODERN, EFFICIENT SIMMENTALS 'HARD TO BEAT' ON PERFORMANCE AND MATERNAL TRAITS

Pedigree Simmental cattle are providing a winning formula for the Baileys at Mixbury Hall Farm, Brackley, Northants, who will host a British Simmental Cattle Society Open Day on Thursday, 1st June. With an association to the breed over some 34 years, the family are firm believers that Simmental is a stand out breed, offering high growth rates, plenty of milk, and good temperament. Here in their own words, father and son, Vernon and Jon Bailey give an outline of the breeding strategy at Mixbury Hall Farm and how the modern Simmental breed continues to add value and efficiency.

Simmental remains unbeaten in terms of performance and maternal traits – that's what we concluded back in 1989 when we initially introduced the breed to our commercial suckler herd and soon witnessed the benefits. The Simmental's temperament was another big attraction for us, the cows are so docile and easy to work with. Fast forward more than 30 years, and those same values continue.

We've since established the Mixbury Hall pedigree herd which has grown to 70 breeding cows; we aim to breed a hardworking, medium sized quality female, a modern Simmental that we believe meets with market demand.

That's the type of animal we as a family also like to farm; one that's efficient, breeding each year and producing adequate milk to rear one high performance calf that is subsequently enabling us to remain both sustainable and profitable.

For example, we calve our cows at two years of age and have done for over 25 years; there are a lot of benefits



The Bailey family: Jon, Harriet, James, Alison and Vernon

- Each cow will have an extra calf in her lifetime over one calving at three years of age, making for a more profitable business.

- That extra calf makes her more efficient, and there's an argument that is more green and better for our carbon footprint.

- While calving at two years does mean slightly smaller cows, we find a hard-working medium size cow can produce big quality calves and eat less than a much bigger cow, again making her a lot more efficient.

FARM FACTS

- 530 acres, inc 250 acres cereals
- 70 pedigree Simmental cows plus followers
- 550 Lleyn ewes

Mixbury Hall herd KPIs

- 8 month weaning wt: 400-500kg bulls and 375-400kg heifers
- 15 months, 580 - 620kg age and weight at first breeding
- 24 months age at first calving
- 700 - 750kg mature cow weight
- 98.5% scan (Aug 2022)
- 100% target born Feb/Mar within first 3 cycles
- 99% calves reared
- 7.5 ave calf crops
- Slaughter bulls: recent 16, 16-month-olds ave 404kg dwt, graded U and within the R bracket

Our Simmentals thrive on forage, maintaining themselves throughout in body condition score 3.5. During the summer months we mix and match paddock grazing with strip grazing, whilst they are easily kept over the winter on forage diets - protein rich silage and surplus hay, while youngstock are supplemented with homegrown cereals.

We are continually seeking to cut costs including fertiliser, and in future, we plan to introduce more herbal leys which are also better at mitigating our hot summers, we



already have field of GS4 and our cattle are doing very well on the protein rich silage. We may also use a feeder wagon in future to make better use of our home produced silage and straw, which in turn will improve the cows' productivity.

The Mixbury Hall breeding strategy

The Mixbury Hall pedigree Simmental herd was established in 1989 with a Norwood bred bull, shortly followed by investing in Sacombe Felicity-Parine and Marlborough Telli 8, both of whom paved the way; the majority of the herd stretches back to these first females.

We always try to breed our cattle to a certain stamp - type of quality and style; heifers with feminine sweet heads, plenty of length, deep bodied, good loins and back end and upstanding. We believe in weighing the youngstock at every opportunity they go through the crush. If you don't measure, you can't manage.

We select for the following traits

- Fertility, must breed every 12 months, Feb/Mar
- Milk
- Docility
- Conformation, style, quality
- Growth rate
- Good udders and teat placements
- Locomotion



Each female has to produce a quality calf every spring or else she is culled – we literally cannot afford to carry any passengers. The herd is averaging seven to eight calf crops with some cows breeding well beyond 10 years – we currently have five in that category.

The herd remains firmly closed as far as females are concerned – we haven't purchased for over 20 years, however we always try to have a blend of both purchased and homebred bulls. It's always nice to use AI and keep a homebred bull of whom we know the full depth and reliability of the dam side of his pedigree.

When we invest a new stock bull, either privately off farm or at Stirling Bull Sales, then he needs to complement our females and give us a wow factor - something a bit special, upstanding, and with good locomotion. They must also be within the breed's top 25% of EBVs for growth rate, milk and calving ease. We AI our heifers and again calving ease is a priority.

Some of the most successful sires we've used include Starline Klassic, Bel Dhu Capercaillie, Clonagh Latin Lover and Ranfurly Confederate.

Maintaining herd health is another priority. It is currently tested free from IBR, routinely vaccinated against BVD and IBR, Johnes' Level 1, and tested TB free. Any purchased bull at auction is quarantined for 60 days and retested.

We annually retain up to a dozen heifers for replacement purposes. Selected bulls along with surplus heifers are sold into pedigree homes, something we'd like to do more of in future.

The remaining male calves are either steered and sold through Thame Farmers Mart at 12 months and 500kg to 600kg. Alternatively, bulls are finished on homegrown forage and cereals; the most recent batch of 16, 16-month-olds averaged 404kg dwt and graded U or within the R bracket.

SIMMENTALS BREEDING QUALITY FEMALE REPLACEMENTS, AND TOP QUALITY STORE CATTLE

FOR THE MANSON FAMILY AT BRODIESHILL

Colin and Robert Manson manage a 140 cow Simmental based suckler herd based at Brodieshill Farm, Alves, Forres. The father and son team will be welcoming visitors on 8th July 2023, when they host a British Simmental Open Day.

Since introducing the Simmental as a dual-purpose sire, the Manson family from Morayshire has been able to produce home-bred, medium sized replacements which can sustain the type of ground on their unit.

Father and son team Colin and Robert Manson have built up a good reputation for selling hi-health commercial bulling heifers and store cattle sold through Aberdeen and Northern Marts' Thainstone Centre. The family has been at the 550-acre Brodieshill unit since 1947 and they now farm a total of 1100 acres which includes 400 acres of spring barley for malting, 25 acres of beans, 200 acres of rotational grazing and the rest permanent pasture, much of which is reclaimed hill ground.

Out with the commercial suckler herd of 140 cows, the family also keeps 500 breeding ewes, 100 of which are Suffolk cross Mules lambed early in February. The main batch lamb in mid-March, with the first lambs away by the end of June when sold direct to Woodhead Bros at Turriff or Dunbia. Robert's wife, Nicola has also diversified and opened a natural play area earlier this year, where she holds sessions for parents and children to explore, play and assist with animal care, and become more familiar with the farming seasons through information boards.

Colin and Robert previously used the Charolais as a terminal sire over Simmental crosses, producing bull beef and finished heifers, and bought in all replacements

from other herds. "The first Simmental cross heifers were purchased 18 years ago from Bill and Garry Patterson, Upper Forgie, and we've never looked back since," said Robert.

"Simmentals are docile and good to work with, and we needed a big, framed female that was fit to handle bigger Charolais calves. The only downside was that we couldn't produce our own replacements with the Charolais, and we were having some difficult calvings so that's why we've now moved to Simmental bulls, with a Salers used over the heifers for easier calving."

The first Simmental bull used was Burghbridge Ricardo, purchased on recommendation from Gibby Scott, and the family now tend to buy top-quality bulls from local herds such as Islavale, Rockytop and Blackford. One of the dearest stock bulls to date is the 11,000gns Blackford

FARM FACTS

- 1,100 acres inc 420 acres arable
- 140 cow Simmental based suckler herd, split calving
- 500 ewes
- 20 months, 600kg ave age and weight at first breeding
- 2.5 years age at first calving
- 800kg ave mature cow weight
- 92% ave heifer scan
- 90% ave cow scan
- 60% born within the first six weeks
- 10 calf crops
- Bulling heifers: 19-month-olds ave £2,368.75 (May 2023)



Robert Manson

Island Warrior, which is leaving more flesh and shape, with the recent Islavale sires doing equally well and bringing size into the breeding herd.

At present, the herd includes 140 suckler cows which are split calving from the end of February onwards and then from the end of July. All heifers have been pelvic measured since 2015 to cull out any not suitable for breeding.



"We like to run a tight calving period, so bulls are out with the cows for 12 weeks and just six weeks with the heifers," commented Robert. "Since moving away from the Charolais, we haven't seen much of a difference in the weights of the calves, and we generally find that the Simmental calves are a good weight for age. The males used to be kept entire, but we soon realised that the stots could stand up to the other breeds in the store ring, so that's the system we are following now."

“ The Simmental is capable of thriving on this type of ground, but it helps that our cows are medium-sized and generally weigh around 800kg.”

The spring cows are kept outside until the end of January, before coming inside and being wormed/fluked and blood tested for the Premium Cattle Health Scheme, which the herd has been a member of since 2016. They are also vaccinated with Rotavec prior to calving at the end of February and are then housed with their calves until May time, before calves are introduced to creep feed from mid-July. These cows and calves spend all summer on the reclaimed hill ground which Robert said is old grass and tough going.

"The Simmental is capable of thriving on this type of ground, but it helps that our cows are medium-sized and generally weigh around 800kg," said Robert. "If we were breeding bigger Simmental cows around the 900kg-1000kg mark, I don't think they would cope as well."



Calves are weaned in mid-October and receive the first vaccination and wormer in September when the cows are scanned, and then are brought inside one month later when they receive their second vaccination. They thrive on a mix of home-grown barley, silage, beans, and cattle 35 pellet from Harbro, before being sold in February at Thainstone, where last year's batch averaged 502kg at £1,451.92 and 325 days.

More recently, autumn-born bullock calves have been weaned and kept inside for six weeks before being sold privately. The autumn calving cows calve outside next to the steading and they're housed from the end of November. Only the cows and heifer calves head outside in May, with heifer calf outfits weaned from their mothers and kept inside on feed until being sold six weeks later.

With the Simmental being the only terminal sire amongst the cows, the females at Brodieshill are almost pure. Around 15 are kept for each herd, with the remainder sold to returned buyers through Thainstone in May, at 18 to 19-months-old.

A consignment of 19 month old heifers in May 2023 averaged £2,368.75 (+ £743.75 on the year) and with a new top price of £2,600. "We still have a fattening pen on the farm for any heifers that we don't think would make the grade for breeding," commented Robert. "We only sell what we would be happy to breed from ourselves."

Robert is finding the Salers to be a successful cross over the heifers, producing hybrid vigour and females with good udders and feet.

"I think it's important that breeders keep focus from a commercial point of view and focus on maternal traits," concluded Robert. "When buying stock bulls, it's important that they can produce replacements. As such we look for long, deep bulls with a bit of shape that will pass through onto our females."

*Look out on the Society's Facebook page for details of the 2023 British Simmental Cattle Society Open Day at Brodieshill Farm on Saturday 8th July.





SIMMENTAL BULL BUYERS' SURVEY

94%

OF BULL BUYERS CONFIRM THEY WILL PURCHASE FURTHER SIMMENTAL BULLS!

A fantastic 94% of Simmental bull buyers have confirmed that they will purchase further Simmental bulls at future Society sales. That's the strong endorsement of the Simmental breed following a snapshot survey of bull buyers at Society sales held between 2017 and 2019.



The survey saw buyers through these years being sent a detailed questionnaire covering the initial reasons for purchasing a Simmental, and thereafter how satisfied they have been with the abilities and the performance of their bulls to date. A broad range of questions invited respondents to score and comment on the performance of bulls bought and including: calving ease; temperament of the bulls and their progeny; fertility and serving capacity; longevity and physical condition of the bull; and performance of progeny, including growth rates and perceived food conversion. Further questions asked buyers about the most important traits when buying a Simmental; the principle purpose of the bull; use on heifers; and the importance of herd health information, pre-sale inspections, performance figures, and pre-sale fertility testing.

Unsurprisingly maternal traits featured highly in the characteristics of the Simmental breed most attractive to buyers, and including mothering ability and easy calving; milk; producing replacement heifers; and fast-growing progeny. The top characteristic for buyers was temperament and this was emphasised later in the survey with 97.18% saying that the temperament of their bulls was good (88.73%), or average (8.45%), and with 92.53% saying that the temperament of the progeny was very good or good. Across these two categories less than 5% of purchasers responded that the bulls or their progeny had been below average for temperament.



TEMPERAMENT OF BULLS

■ Good (88.73%)
■ Average (8.45%)
■ Below Average (2.82%)



STANDARD OF BULLS PROGENY

■ As expected (81.03%)
■ Better than expected (8.62%)
■ Average (10.34%)
■ Below Average (0%)



Just over 70% of buyers indicated that performance figures and EBVs were a 'quite' or 'very' important aid when purchasing a bull. Of the traits, EBVs for calving ease were ranked the most important and with Maternal (Milk), a close second.

The Simmental breed has taken a lead in many aspects of herd health at sales over the years and the importance of this is shown in the survey with 98.59% of respondents saying that it was 'very important' (83.10%), or 'important' (15.49%), for them to purchase bulls from herds with a high health status. Over 90% of buyers placed importance on bulls having passed through a pre-sale inspection with 57.34% saying it was 'very' important.

Interestingly, and perhaps indicative of some strong Simmental sales, 36.23% of buyers said that they had changed from a different breed of bull in the previous five years, and predominantly from other continental breeds. 53.62% of buyers run over five Simmental bulls with a further 40.58% indicating that they had one to five Simmental bulls. The makeup of buyers' farms shows that 60% of the bulls have gone to hill farms, and with 40% to lowland. The bulls are used on mainly suckler herds (93.25%), and with the dominant breed of suckler cows being Simmental/Simmental X, followed by Limousin/Limousin X; Angus/Angus X; and Luining/Luining X. The largest percentage of buyers run 31 to 100 cows (41.43%); with 37.14% having 101 to 200; and just over 21% having over 200.

The working abilities of the breed are again highlighted with 94.12% of buyers saying that they were happy with the physical and structural condition of the bulls bought, and with over 85% of the bulls still working in purchasers' herds. In an anticipated strength of the breed, just over 92% of buyers said that they retained heifer calves as herd replacements. 42.86% of buyers said that they used bulls on heifers, and of those, 44.12%, aim to calve the heifers at 28 months and under.

In another strong endorsement of the performance and commercial attributes of the Simmental breed, a remarkable 89.65% of those surveyed said the progeny of their bulls had been of the standard they expected (81.03%), or better than expected (8.62%), and with 10.34% saying that the progeny had been average. No respondents replied that progeny from their bulls had been below expectations.

At the conclusion of the survey buyers were asked for 'any other comments', and again these were a combination of extremely

positive, constructive, honest, and insightful points. A number of comments remarked on what they saw as the 'big strides' in ongoing improvement in the Simmental breed over the last ten years. A further similar sentiment was that if the breed maintains and improves its strengths in milk, easy calving, docility, and good locomotion, 'Simmental bulls will sell themselves' in the forward industry. Breeders were given some 'signals' for forward sales to not overfeed bulls, and the importance of feet, good legs and mobility. Herd health, the versatility of Simmentals on all breeds, the importance of good growth rates, and food conversion from grass were all noted. Producing 'bulls that make good cows' was also a sentiment, with a clear overall emphasis on the desire for Simmentals many recognised maternal strengths.

Commenting on the survey BSCS general manager, Iain Kerr said: "It's really important for the Society to engage with Simmental buyers to find out how satisfied they have been with their purchases, and to outline their thoughts and feedback to breeders. The Simmental breed is renowned for breeding quality heifer replacements and for being first class suckler cows with plenty of milk, good fertility, easily calved and crossing to advantage with any other breed.

“ We also see Simmental progeny being easy fleshing, with good growth rates, top weights for age, and being the industry leader for age at slaughter. To have these qualities recognised and endorsed by the breeds buyers, with an approval/repeat customer rate of 94%, is really encouraging.”

"A massive well done is extended to pedigree Simmental breeders for these results and for consistently bringing forward a high standard of bulls. There is an ongoing commitment from the breeders and Society, in the sum of all its parts, to keep working hard to consistently produce the choice and quality of bulls that commercial beef producers and pedigree breeders require."



SIMMENTAL

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PROFIT THROUGH
EFFICIENCY

***SIMMENTAL =
THE UK'S NO. 1
CONTINENTAL
BREED FOR AGE
AT SLAUGHTER**

* NATIONAL BEEF EVALUATION
DECEMBER 2022

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SIMMENTAL BULL SALE**

AT UNITED AUCTIONS, STIRLING

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