



STORE CHAROLAIS cross bullocks which are sold at Lanark between 12-15 months of age
Ref/RH210121187



WESTER HASSOCKRIGG team, left to right, Robbie, Laura, Robert and Sophie
Ref/RH210121187

Hardy Luings prove their worth at Wester Hassockrigg



By Julie Wight

Photographs by Rob Haining

THE hardy characteristics of the Luing female are proving key to the success of Robert McCarlie's suckler cow herd at Wester Hassockrigg, Harthill.

"We have a lot of rough ground and with the high rainfall, it doesn't make life easy. Being in such an exposed area and a dreich part of the country, it is challenging but the farm can grow good grass in the summer.

"This is why we depend on the Luing and Sim-Luing

for their hardiness and good temperament- we would struggle to find another maternal breed as good. The Sim-Luing provides the best of both worlds, having the hardiness as well as the power to produce a strong store calf," added Robert, who has run Luings for over 20 years on the farm in between trialling various other breeds.

The family keep 35 pure Luing cows to put to the Simmental sire to breed heifer replacements, of which the best 15 Sim-Luing heifers go to a Salers bull for easy calving when they aim to calve at two years of age. The 150 Sim-Luing cows are bulled to the Charolais for their growth rates which in turn ensures strong store

calves.

Replacement Luing females are bought every year at Castle Douglas, and most years Robert buys in-calf heifers from Roy and Andrew McNee at Woodend, Benhar, or Steven Murray, West Preston Rockcliffe. Last year heifers were bought at Oban from the Cadzow herd sale.

Daughter, Sophie who works full time at Davidsons Animal Feeds, is heavily involved in selecting the heifers to buy at the sale with future breeding potential playing a huge part in her choice. She has also started her own small flock of Kerry Hill sheep.

At present, the farm is home to seven bulls - five Charolais, one Salers and

a Simmental. Bulls are bought mostly at the Stirling Bull Sales, with Charolais either from the Wights at Carwood, John Jeffery of Kersknowe or Robert McNee at Over Finlary. The Salers was recently bought from Darnford, Banchory and the Simmental from Kyleston, Ayth.

Calving starts early January and is split in two batches to ensure all can be housed for calving. The first 30 have already calved, with the remaining 170 due late February till mid-May.

A high percentage of twins are also born among the herd with 8% due this year. Twin-bearing cows are kept separate from the main herd after scanning and are provided with additional

FARMfacts

- Livestock numbers - 35 pure Luing females that run with the Simmental bull, 15 Sim-Luing heifers that go with a Salers bull and 150 Sim-Luing cows that will go to the Charolais sire.
- Farm acreage - Own 230 acres, with a further two farms rented covering 380 acres, with the farm sitting at 880ft above sea level.
- Involvement - Family run business with Robert doing the majority of the work himself, along with his wife, Laura, parents, Roy and Martha, and children, Sophie (19) and Robbie (15).

feeding of up to 4kg per head per day.

"The cows can rear twins and last year we had nine cows that kept their calves right through to weaning. Twins are always handy if

a calf is needed elsewhere, but they're not always a success," said Robert, whose herd is in the hi-health scheme.

Outwith female replacements, the



THE SIM-LUING provides the best of both worlds, having the hardiness as well as the power to produce a strong store calf Ref/RH210121188



THE PURE Luing females are put to the Simmental bull and Sim-Luing cows will then go to a Charolais sire Ref/RH210121211



THE LUING breed is the only answer for the McCarlies because of their easy temperament and hardy nature. Ref:RH210121218



THE COWS feeding on the home grown silage and are housed in the cubicle shed. Ref:RH210121207

remainder of calves are sold as stores.

"If we were to fatten our calves, we wouldn't be able to run as many cattle. We still get a fair price for our calves, so it works fine for us," said Robert, who sells store cattle every Tuesday from late January through to mid-May at Lanark, with most selling for more than £1000 per head at 12-15 months of age.

The team recently sold their first batch of 12 Charolais cross bullocks to average £1126 or 231p per kg. The majority of the Charolais heifers are sold privately to a farmer in Aberdeen for fattening.

Salers cross calves bred from Sim-Luing heifers average around 400kg, whilst the Charolais cross bullock calves will hit 490kg and heifers at 470kg as yearlings.

Calves are crept fed from the start of September and weaned at housing onto straw-bedded courts in October. They are then introduced to a TMR feed comprising of silage and up to 3kg of Davidsons Animal Feeds bespoke concentrate meal per head until they are sold the following year. All calves are weighed at weaning with the Charolais calves coming in at 290kg and Sim Luings at 270kg.

"It is important for us that

we control and measure the weight gain of our calves, we need the calves to be putting on at least 1kg a day to be cost effective," said Robert.

All cattle are in wintered over three farm steadings, with the cows either on cubicles or straw bedding. In all, there are 400 head of cattle housed which takes 2.5 hours to feed and bed.

"I am not a great believer of outside feeding in November when it's wet and cold as we have a good set up for feeding inside. It is also better for the cows to be in wintered and they are easier managed," he added.

Robert also has a silage contracting business. During the summer, work consists of chopping 4000 acres of silage and whole crop and producing up to 12,000 bales.

The business, which hires in five local farmer's sons who are all self-employed, has the full silage kit as well as six John Deere tractors, to ensure they can attend to all types of silage work themselves.

"I believe it is a great way of creating a different avenue for our business and bringing in extra income. It works well for us and the self-employed guys," said Robert, who cuts 200 acres for his own pit silage, late June.

ON THE spot

- Best investment – A Calving camera, it saves me leaving the house on a wet horrible night, when I don't need to.
- Best advice – Keep it simple. If it works stick with it.
- Biggest achievement – My family, and our two children, Sophie and Robbie.
- Where do you see yourself in 2031? – Still calving cows and chopping silage!

Commenting on the future he added: "There are many underlying concerns, but we are always going to need farmers to put food on our plates. As for the future of our farm, it is at full capacity with cow numbers, so unless we get a lot more ground, we will continue to do what we do best.


"We very much do everything the same here year on year, we won't make drastic changes unless there is something not working. Our system works well, and it is financially sound so why change things?" concluded Robert.



AS A different avenue the team also run a contracting business



ALL CALVING takes place inside at Wester Hassockrigg. Ref:RH210121190



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