

STOCKMEN OF OUR TIME:

By Julie Wight

Donald MacNaughton

BORN and bred within a farming background, there is no other life that Donald knows, other than working with livestock.

Always known for being a straight talker, Donald started his own herd at just 18 years of age and between working at shepherd jobs at various farms across the years, before coming home to work on the family farm, there was always time for his Highland cattle.

"I have always had a love for Highlanders. They are a breed all of their own and are a loving breed – there is no badness in them. They have a great temperament," he said.

"But, I also believe they are well suited to the modern-day market, as they produce some of the tastiest beef around. They are just not well promoted in supermarkets due to their high premium," said Donald, who has in recent years whittled numbers down to eight cows, three heifers and three young bull stirks.

Donald was up at 40 cows, but has downsized in recent years due to the expense of keeping the cattle as well as feeding prices fluctuating, not to mention his retirement!

Between fencing and working on the railway, there isn't much Donald won't turn his hand to, but Highland cattle are his first love.

Showing has now been passed onto the next generation, with Donald's two sons, Bryon and Malcolm both working in Highland cattle folds.

WHY IS THE HIGHLAND YOUR CHOSEN BREED?

They are easy to keep and maintain, and are a hardy breed that can be out wintered, so it suits my system well.

If I had to go into another breed, I would have to choose Beef Shorthorns as they are the nearest you will get to the Highland, temperament wise.

WHAT GOT YOU INVOLVED IN SHOWING?

I caught the competition bug and the banter that goes along with it. It is more of a matter of trying to prove a point to yourself as to how good your cattle are and trying to improve them year on year to try and beat your own. I have a real competitive bone!

WHO INSPIRES YOU?

My parents. They were both involved in farming and I have grown to love it ... it is just in my blood.

ROYAL HIGHLAND SHOW EXPERIENCES?

I only started exhibiting

about 10 years ago and in my first year I was reserve champion with a black heifer. Before that I would just go to local shows.

After catching the Highland bug, I have exhibited every year since and picked up the male championship in 2017 and then was supreme champion in both 2018 and 2019 with the same animal.

It is the show you have to go to. You cannot say you have beaten anyone else, unless you win that one.

BEST ANIMAL THAT YOU HAVE EVER SHOWN?

Skye the 4 of Rannoch. She stood supreme at the breed's national show, but she was just my favourite beast of all time, there was just something about her.

Her mother also won the Glasgow 'International' Show once in 2014, and I am only one of two people to have won that show twice in a lifetime.

BUT WHAT IS THE BEST ANIMAL YOU HAVE EVER SEEN?

Prionnsa Dubh of Craigowmill, the stock bull in HM The Queen's Balmoral herd. To me, he was just a complete bull – perfect in every way.

CHANGES OVER THE YEARS?

Breeders are trying to get too much size into the breed too quick. The bigger animals don't suit the West Coast's hill ground, which is the breed's main purpose.

In the showing circuit, there has been more favouritism in the judging ring for the bigger animals, which makes it even harder to get the younger ones interested and to give them a chance at it.

ABIDING MEMORY?

Winning the charity show at Balnabroich in 2017 for

Next up in the Stockmen of our Times feature spotlight, is the well-respected Donald MacNaughton, of the Rannoch Highland cattle fold, based at Kelty, in Fife.



DONALD (RIGHT) with one of his Highland Show success stories, with breed enthusiast, Angus MacKay



Patches, a palliative care specialist charity. It was a great day, everyone was so friendly and it brought it home to me how this was just a great community to be part of.

Another I will always remember was my first year showing at the Royal Highland Show and taking reserve champion on the debut.

BIGGEST DISAPPOINTMENT?

Not winning the Oban pre-sale show. I have been reserve champion five times and the last sale I went to, in 2017, with Douglas of Rannoch, I thought I had done it ... however, he once

again walked away with the blue and white sash.

But, he went on to sell for 6000gns to Germany, so it wasn't full of bad news that day!

MOST INFLUENTIAL PEOPLE IN YOUR CAREER?

Donald MacGillivray, from Pennygown, on Mull. He was one of the top breeders among the Highlanders, yet he would always help you out and encourage you. If you asked him a question, he could give you a true answer – there would be no bullshit.

Another would have to be Rich Thomson. He was another very helpful candidate when I first started

out showing and gave me good advice along the way that has brought me to where I am today.

FAVOURITE SHOW?

The Glasgow Show. It is no longer, but it always used to be at the end of September. Everything looked a lot better at that time of year and it was just a great all-round show.

BEST STOCKMAN?

For feeding and bringing out Highland cattle, it would have to be Dochy Ormiston. He always has his cattle at their peak when required and knows the exact timing to get it just right. His cattle always look the best when parading in the show ring.

BEST ADVICE?

There is no point in buying a beast that you don't like just because everyone else claims it to be the bee's knees. Everyone has a different opinion at the end of the day.

If you are in Highlanders keep going, don't give up and you will get there.

BIGGEST SHOWING ACHIEVEMENT?

Winning the Royal Highland Show twice.

BEST INVESTMENT?

The black bull, Rannoch of Lochmill. I purchased him privately from an advert in The Scottish Farmer and despite many folk not being keen on him, I bit the bullet and bought him. He is now the grandfather of all of my best stock.

THE FUTURE OF THE SHOWING CIRCUIT?

Shows were going strong, however over the last few years things seemed to have slowed down, with classes getting smaller. The simple answer to this is the expense of bringing out cattle and getting them ready. It is hard to encourage new breeders into the circuit when at the end of the day all you get is a ticket.

The Highland Cattle Society needs to support its members by encouraging the next generation and making prices realistic, as well as promoting the breed more.

I do believe the breed has a place in the modern day market and with the shop window that showing provides, especially for the Highland cattle breed, which stands out, there really is no future without them.

Once Covid-19 calms down, I want others to be able to experience shows the way I have. They have been my life and soul, and I wouldn't have had it any other way.



FROM THE Scottish Farmer archives - Donald leading a heifer at the spring sale in Oban in 1960



SKYE OF Little Rannoch took the top ticket in the Highland section for the MacNaughton and Lawrie team in 2019

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