



Loosebeare Charollais

Carroll Barber reports on the Quick Family's Livestock enterprises

The Loosebeare name is synonymous with top quality pedigree and commercial livestock. On their four farms near Crediton in Devon, the Quick family of father Bill, brothers Paul, Andrew and Mark and Andrew's son Edward work as a team on the renowned Limousin herd, Texel and Charollais flocks as well as 700 commercial cattle and a 1,200 commercial ewe flock.

Loosebeare Charollais Rams enjoy the Devon sunshine.

It is Paul who has most to do with the pedigree Charollais flock "about ten years ago we felt that the Texel Flock had reached its maximum size. We had been highly successful with the breed but just felt that another string to our bow, would be a wise move. We had looked at different breeds and felt that the Charollais was an improving breed and we should try them."

After a sale of Texel shearling ewes the Quicks visited the Mortimer Charollais Flock of Geoff and John Probert in Herefordshire. "We had seen their consignment of shearling rams at the Built Wells Ram Sale and knew they were the type of sheep we wanted to buy; not over big but fleshy and with meat in all the right places." The Proberts presented their entire group of 60 shearling ewes and let Paul pick out 20 from this group; in the end they bought the whole lot. Since that date they added a few ewes from Eric Sleep's Trevadlock Flock in Cornwall and then have closed the flock. "Buying the majority of females from one flock has enabled us to create a type more rapidly than if we had gone from sale to sale and picked out sheep from a number of breeders."

The aim for the Charollais Flock is to produce 50 shearling rams each year. These are sold locally and at both Built Wells Ram Sales and the NSA Sale at Exeter. "The local demand for Charollais rams is excellent; in fact we can sell more Charollais than Texel in our area." Paul is adamant that Charollais breeders and maybe the Society should think long and hard about the presentation of the breed. "Shearling rams should not be

trimmed for sale, they should be bare clipped 3-4 months prior to sale and just tidied up on the day. The right types will stand out – well-fleshed rams with good top lines, plenty of meat behind the shoulders and natural fleshing qualities. Commercial ram buyers do not want rams that have been messed about, they want to see what they are buying and have confidence in their selections.”

Paul thinks that the pen classes at the big commercial ram sales have far more relevance to the buyers than individual showing and put his efforts into getting a card at Bulth. “A good pen of rams is far more attractive to the buyers than one stand out sheep and selecting an average sheep out of a good pen is much better than the picking a good sheep out of a poor pen.”

Paul considers that trimming should continue for lambs and show sheep. The breed has enjoyed great success in the show ring which has given the breed invaluable publicity, but for the commercial market naturally presented rams is the way forward. “Just maybe if pedigree buyers had more confidence in what they were buying then the price structure for Charollais might go up. I see flocks buying 2 or 3 ram lambs to try them out; without trimming the best would be clear for all to see and could result in stronger bidding.”

But the current price structure for the Charollais breed is something which does not deter Paul. “In comparison with our Texel flock, we don’t get the high prices for rams or shearing ewes but we don’t have to spend tens of thousands on stock tups. At the end of the day we judge the flock from the bottom line and the Charollais are more than



Paul Quick (right) with ? and judge Charles Sercombe winning ??

holding their own on profitability.” Paul is also complimentary on the robustness of the breed “we have far fewer losses with the Charollais who do not seem to have any genetic weaknesses. They are also more even with the bottom end being better quality rams.”

The commercial flock is made up of 1,200 Suffolk x Mule ewes which are all tuppied with Charollais and Texel rams. At the moment the split is 50:50 on the rams but Andrew Quick, who does the commercial lambs prefers the Charollais. “We don’t mollycoddle our sheep, they have to be outside in one or two days and the Charollais cross lambs are quite hardy enough for this treatment. I like them because of their growth rate; they are certainly faster than the Texel cross lambs.”

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Paul adds that this is one aspect of the Charollais breed that has improved greatly over the past 10 years “breeders have put more head cover on the sheep and they are definitely tougher than they used to be; in another few years we should be able to dispel the myth that Charollais cannot cope with cold weather.” The prolificacy within Charollais is also fairly remarkable, the flock scanned at 206% this year, “I might like a few less lambs; singles are so easy to manage!”

With the two breeds on the farm the Quicks have tried a few cross-bred rams for the local market. To date it has mostly been Charollais tups onto Texel ewes, which failed to take the ram early on. “There is no doubt you get a good lamb, with a bit more width and power and certainly there is hybrid vigour. We have killed all the female lambs and just retained a few rams for customers who have asked for this cross. Buyers seem pleased with them, so we supply what the customer wants!”

Paul does see the rise in popularity of the cross-breeding companies as a bit of a threat to pedigree

breeders “they have no registration costs and are free to make their own choices, but at the end of the day you have to come back to pure breeds to make these crosses. An injection of desirable traits can be of advantage to a breed, so we should not close our eyes to this possibility.”

This year the family will be the hosts for the National Sheep Associations South West Sheep event. Paul says that the group of 45 Charollais shearling tups will not disappoint visitors “they outwintered on rape and are looking good - not at all overdone, just naturally well-fleshed tups that will go out and do a top job for commercial lamb producers.” It will certainly be an event well worth a visit.

Bachymbyd Kracker - influential stock sire at Loosebeare (left)

Loosebeare adult ewe, reserve champion Devon County Show 2014

