

INTERNATIONAL JUDGES SURPRISED BY NEW ZEALAND COWS

(The NZDE would like to acknowledge Dianna Malcolm from Mud Media for the articles and results write ups)

Two of the international judges candidly admitted they were surprised when they judged in New Zealand for the first time this week.

Brian Behnke from Wisconsin in the United States has judged at the biggest show in the world – World Dairy Expo – three times, and his expansive judging resume spans many years across multiple countries. Nico Bons, from the Netherlands, said he had followed Australian cattle for years through International Dairy Week (IDW), so he had a good idea about what to expect when he judged the Red & White Holsteins at IDW two weeks ago.

However, they both said they did not know as much about New Zealand cattle, and they were flying blind when they arrived in Feilding to judge the New Zealand Dairy Event (NZDE). Brian judged the Ayrshires and Nico adjudicated over the Holsteins.

“I expected the kind of cows that are generally promoted out of New Zealand – the smaller New Zealand-type cows,” Brian said. “But that’s not what I found.

“I’ll admit I was blown away. New Zealand has awesome cows with quality and strength, a great spring of rib, with great udders and feet and legs.

“It wasn’t a huge show, but the quality was there. You guys should tell more people that these kinds of cows are here, because they are capable of competing on the world stage.”

Brian did have a piece of advice for the exhibitors. “One thing they could do better is to break their animals to lead. There were some nice cows that I struggled to get a good look at,” he said.

HOLSTEIN JUDGE ALSO IMPRESSED

Nico was on the same page when it came to his choices.

“I was impressed with the heifer show because there was quality all the way through – it wasn’t only the top two or three,” Nico said. “The first five or six in every class made quite a competition for all of them.

“What I liked was that they were ready. They had the right body condition, and they had the body depth. I’m looking a little bit for heifers who have enough chest width. I think the heifer show is made to find out which one is going to be the best cow in the future to milk.

“My champion was quite special. It was not the toughest decision to make her champion because she had more capacity and more spring of rib. She showed a naturally straight topline. That’s what I like to see on these heifers.”

Both judges were joined by associate judges from New Zealand. The associate Ayrshire judge, Neko McDonald, from Kaitaia, in Northland said the experience

working alongside Brian was a once in a lifetime opportunity. “Brian’s awesome, and the cows were wicked,” Neko said. “I learned a heap from him, and it was just an incredible experience being out here, getting to know him and getting to know the kind of cows he likes.”

SUPREMES DOMINATED BY THE HOLSTEINS IN 2024

This year, the Holsteins dominated the Supreme Champions awards.

The Supremes are chosen from the breed Champions in the junior, intermediate, and senior sections. They were pointed by the entire judging panel, which included Brian (Ayrshire judge), Nico (Holstein) Jamie Taylor (Taranaki, Combined Breeds), Simon Tognola (Australia, Jerseys), and Kate Cummings (Southland, Youth Show). The Supreme Champion and Supreme Intermediate Champion both came out of the Fullerton and Dreadon team. It was a satisfying finish for the Hamilton family who had a week that initially challenged their decision to show.

Their cattle fitter slept through and missed multiple flights – almost turning Alex Fullerton into a travel agent. Their four-year-old Grand Champion Holstein and Supreme Champion of the show, Tahora Mogul Paris, didn’t handle the 360km journey to the show well, and took some time to settle. Reflecting after judging, Alex said the overriding feeling was relief.

They bought Paris for \$28,000 in a solid buy from Tahora Holsteins’ Party at the Pub sale in Canterbury in 2022. In her most recent herd test, Paris produced 2.8kg Milk Solids (MS) a day. She had finished her first season at her new Ngāhinapōuri home with more than 10,000 litres and 700kg of Milk Solids.

The Fullerton family also snaffled Intermediate Supreme Champion with their three-year-old, Waipiri CR Freaky Girl-ET, sired by Oh-River-Syc Crushabull-ET. Alex said she was their surprise package in terms of the team’s results, and they were thrilled with her performance.

Alex added that one of the special moments for the family was when the Holstein judge Nico Bons remembered seeing their seven-year-old entry, Waipiri Mogul Kristy in a photo three years earlier. The 2023 Senior Holstein Champion had an eye removed a month ago because of eye cancer, and she bounced back to win Reserve Champion Holstein this year in another broad ribbon effort for the cow who has been a constant in the Fullerton show team over several years. Kristy was Best Udder of the 2021 NZDE, and in 2023 she won Supreme Champion at Stratford and Senior Holstein Champion and Senior All Breeds Champion at the 2023 Waikato Show. She was also the 2021 Semex On-Farm four-year-old Champion.

“Having those top herdsman see your animals and recognise them is the whole incentive to bring them out,” Alex said. “Not only did Nico judge her this year, he had

seen her before and remembered her. “I think it’s important for New Zealand breeders that people around the world do see our animals.”

SWEET STORY FOR 14-YEAR-OLD

The Supreme Junior Champion came with a great story for her 14-year-old owner, Toby Whytock.

Eighteen months ago, Toby and his parents, Newlands Whytock and Lee Morris (an equine vet who specialises in equine embryos through her business, EquibreedArt) decided to shift their focus on their 40-hectare (100-acre) farm from horses to cows. They not only won Holstein Junior Champion and Supreme Junior Champion with Glenidol Lambda Cookie – they had two animals finish in the top-two of the six Holstein classes that peaked at 26-head in one class. It was a punchy start in the registered industry at the country’s premier show for this tightknit family which supplies Open Country Dairy. “We’ve got a small farm, and we thought if we can have only a small number of cows we’ll have 50 really nice cows,” Lee said. Lee said they had secured foundation cows from the Barclay family (Okawa Holsteins) and later from Tahora Holsteins’ Party at the Pub sale in Canterbury in April 2022. One of the those cows, sired by High Octane – Tahora Octane Cookie – bred them Cookie. It’s worth noting that Tahora Holsteins had a quiet hand in two of the three Supreme Champions of the show.

“We bought seven amazing animals, and her mother was one of them,” Lee said. Newlands said he had always followed the production awards in the Dairy Exporter and had always been impressed by Tahora’s results. “Now we’re buying some of their animals,” he smiled.

They both said – as Toby rushed straight from the win to join his team in the youth challenge – that it was an incredible feeling not just to show cattle – but to show cattle together. “Because it’s such a family thing...kind of ‘united we stand’,” Lee said.

AYRSHIRE ACTION

Brian Behnke had some big decisions to make in the Ayrshire show because the 2023 Supreme Champion had re-calved and returned this year as a third calved four-year-old. Raetea Rubicom Debbie, owned by Joanna Fowlie, from Matamata, made history in 2023 when she became the first Ayrshire Intermediate Champion and only the second Intermediate Champion to win Supreme Champion of the show. This year Debbie moved into the senior show where she met the cow who would push her into second place and out of contention for Champion, Stenvale Burs Jem. Owned by Jamie Baxter, of Tirau. Jem was judge Behnke’s choice not only for the class, but for Best Udder, Senior Champion, and Grand Champion of the Ayrshire show.

Brian said the choice was clear for him once Jem got alongside the other cows in the class. He did pull Debbie first and Jem second on the first line-up, but he elevated Jem to first in his final decision. Brian appeared to take some time to make the call, but he said he was never in any doubt about what he was going to do. He said Jem's extreme balance was deceptive on the first look, but there was no denying her when he broke her down. Jem's breeder and owner, Jamie, 33, who milks 180 cows, said the class "aged him 10 years". Jem had finished fourth in her class last year, but she had continued to develop, and they had high hopes for the cow, whose dam they bought from Brookview Ayrshires.

"She's so easy to work with and she just does what you want her to do at a show," Jamie said. "She's a very cool cow, and a lot of fun."

Jamie's partner, Caitlyn Rawlings, who works on a 400-cow herd, led Jem in only her second show with dairy cows.

SALE ANIMALS RETURNING THE FAVOUR

There were a number of young people exceling with animals they had bought. Arguably the best deal on the showgrounds may have been the Junior Champion Ayrshire, Larkspur Alfie Chipotle. She was bought by the Powell family, of Rongotea for \$1900 from the Fusion Genetics' Spring Fling Coloured Breeds *Dispersal* in October 2023.

Speaking for the family, Chipotle's excited and tearful owner, Holly Powell, 20, said the investment looked pretty inexpensive now. Holly is a herd manager for a 450-cow herd. While Holly is well-known in the Holstein world, she is pushing into other breeds – also winning Reserve Junior Champion in the Combined Breeds show. "She caught my eye, and I just couldn't leave her behind," Holly said. "I think a lot of people thought because she was an autumn calf that she was an awkward age, but I loved her."

So did the US judge, Brian Behnke. He noted that the four animals pulled out for the Ayrshire Junior championship all had quality bone, dairyness, and openness of rib. "She didn't have a lot of competition in her class, but she puts it all together and she can stand a lot of competition," Brian said. "She's balanced, clean-cut, and dairy with exceptional legs and feet. She's just a beautifully balanced calf."

Argyll Lot Alfie sired the Junior, Reserve, and Honourable Mention Junior Ayrshire Champions, while Burdette sired the Senior and Grand Champion, and the Reserve Senior Champion.

The Powell family was also active in the Holsteins, winning Honourable Mention Senior Champion and Best Udder of the Holstein show with Radly Meridian Ana-ET, and in the

Combined Breeds, winning Reserve Junior Champion with Westell Mont Sandie SOS.

JERSEY SHOW HAD THE GOODS

The Jersey show gave Australian judge Simon Tognola the cows he wanted to work with. His four-year-old Senior Champion came out of the Ferdon Genetics team, from Otorohanga. Tbone Veneer is sired by Richies Jace Tbone.

Ferdon Genetics has now won Champion Jersey eight times, and Supreme Champion All Breeds at the NZDE four times.

Simon has been coming to the NZDE for more than a decade. Everyone is more used to seeing him in work clothes preparing cows, but this year he was suited up for an important judging assignment in a strong Jersey show.

“Since I first came to the show the quality of the mammary systems on these cows have certainly improved,” Simon said. “There is so much more width and texture and height to those mammary systems, and they can certainly hold a lot of milk. I think in general the cows are more dairy now. They are thinner in their hide, and maybe a little nicer in their rumps as well

“I think – and I don’t mind saying this – for a country that might not grow the nicest hay they do a helluva good job of developing the rib in their cows.”

He was impressed with how youthful his choices were.

“There wasn’t too many cows that looked like they would get old really quickly,” Simon said. “For me, the Junior Champion was a pretty easy champion. The intermediate is built right to mature well. She’s not deep in her udder, she’s wide through her chest, with a beautiful openness to her fore and rear rib. She’s hard of her loin, and she is rump down.”

Simon said he and his associate judge, Susanna Booth, from Kerikeri (Northland) saw cows the same.

Simon said, “Susanna appreciates dairy cows that have strength and good mammary systems. I don’t think we were looking for animals that were too flashy. I think we were just looking for the ones that were balanced, and looked like they could pay bills.”

Simon closed by congratulating the exhibitors. “It takes an army to get the animals to a show. It takes a lot of long nights, a lot of money, and a lot of thoughts when no-one else is looking. They did a tremendous job,” Simon said.

AGING WELL

The Combined Breeds came down to a rising 12-year-old Milking Shorthorn, Northbrook Wok, showed by Northbrook Enterprises Ltd, just 10 minutes from Palmerston North at Bunnythorpe. The Treeton Pingerly daughter took the show all in her stride and she never missed a beat.

Wok has had an extensive career, winning Best Udder at the NZDE in 2018 which propelled her into the All-World Red Cow photographic competition that year.

YOUTH SHOW

The Youth Show was judged by Southlander Kate Cummings. She said the results give her significant confidence in the direction of the industry

“The quality of the stock were so good they made my job harder as a judge, which means the breeders are doing the right thing,” she said. “There were great numbers, given that the milk price is flatter this year and there have been seasonal challenges in a number of areas. It’s really nice to see the passion in the show community, and it’s a great excuse to get off the farm to come to the NZDE, even if they bring their cows with them.

“My champion was a whole lot of heifer but when you break her down there was a whole lot to like. No matter what angle you looked at her there was so much dairyness and it made me fall in love with her. She was just so balanced from side-to-side and from top to tail. All the exhibitors should be really proud.”

Written by Dianna Malcolm, Mud Media