

KEEPING IT IN THE FAMILY

The Supreme Dairy Exhibit at the New Zealand Dairy Event (NZDE) has a close family link to a cow who has won the same title three times.

Ferdon Genetics, from Otorohanga, from the heart of New Zealand's Waikato knew they wouldn't be flying under the radar when they returned to the NZDE this year with the show's 2024 Jersey Grand Champion, Ferdon Tbone Veneer EX. But pressure is something they are used to absorbing, because Veneer comes from a family line laden with superstars.

One of them is Ferdon Comerica Viyella (who won NZDE Supreme Champion in 2012, 2015 and 2016 – in amongst a swag of Grand Champion Jersey titles and Reserves during her heavily decorated career). Veneer and Viyella's dams are maternal sisters, and there were other "V" family members who showed in the Ferdon string.

Ferdon Genetics is owned and operated by Warren and Michelle, together with their son, Corey, milking 200-210-head on 75 effective hectares. They showed 18 in-milk and six dry heifers in two breeds.

For the Ferdon crew, winning never gets old. They have now won Grand Champion Jersey nine times, Supreme Dairy Cow five times, and Premier Jersey Exhibitor nine successive years.

Veneer came out of the five-to-six year-old in-milk class. And, while Ferdon is known for its Jerseys (which take up 75% of the herd) they also run 25% Holsteins and some registered Ayrshires. One of those Holsteins, Waipiri CR Freaky Girl-ET, won Senior Champion Holstein this year. She was held out of contention for the Supreme (all breeds) race by the Intermediate Champion Holstein (and Supreme Intermediate Champion), who travelled from Tahora Farms in the South Island, Tahora Sidekick Legacy2, who qualified to compete for Supreme Exhibit by winning Grand Champion Holstein.

"We did feel the pressure this time," Michelle acknowledged. "It was a relief when we won the Jersey championship, but then we had to wait for the Supreme. We feel like she [Veneer] really earned it this year. She's matured, and she was on-form."

They also knew at least one other name that was coming for them. This year's Grand Champion Ayrshire, Pukekaraka Elle Delilah, was Supreme Dairy Exhibit herself in 2021.

The 10-year-old returned, ready to show for Glenalla and Snowfed Farms, from Ashburton in Mid- Canterbury. Her home address means she had one of the toughest transits to get to the show.

The winding and undulating drive to Picton, followed by the Cook Strait ferry crossing is hard enough on young cows – let alone a 10-year-old contender. Delilah appeared to sail through it all, impressing the UK Ayrshire judge Blaise Tomlinson. He was quick to say that New Zealand's best Ayrshires are competitive globally.

The 2023 Supreme Champion Exhibit (and another Ayrshire entry) – Raetea Rubicom Debbie, owned by the Fowlie family (Matamata) – also returned this year in the five to six-year-old class. She was put out of title contention when she didn't win her age class.

Jersey and Ayrshires had the numbers

The Jersey and Ayrshire shows had the biggest class numbers, and it was another Jersey – the Junior Champion – who went on to win Supreme Junior Exhibit. It gave the Jersey show two of the three biggest awards.

Thomas Jeyes (Te Kuiti) was typically lowkey about his winning Jersey junior entry, Manor Black Apple Tess (sired by Rapid Bay Black Apple).

The Jeyes family immigrated from the United Kingdom to New Zealand 11 years ago and started dairying from a modest start. Today, the family is sharemilking 650 cows with no staff outside of Thomas, 19.

The herd is made up of crossbred cows and 160 registered Jerseys. Thomas is responsible for the show programme, in between working fulltime on the farm, with the support of the rest of the family and their farm owner, Sir David Fagan (New Zealand's former champion shearer, who has won the New Zealand Golden Shears a record 16 times).

Thomas started showing and breeding with his prefix, Manor Jerseys, in 2017. Before last year, the best the family had done at the NZ DairyEvent was second in class. In 2024, they started to make their move – winning Junior Champion Jersey (and Reserve Supreme Junior Champion) with Manor Cocochip Alaska. They also won another heifer class. This year, they came to play.

They won Junior and Reserve Junior Champion Jersey with Manor Black Apple Tess (sired by Rapid Bay Black Apple) and Manor Victorious Classy (sired by River Valley Victorious-ET and led by Thomas's 17-year-old sister, Annabel) respectively...before Tess went on to trump the entire junior show.

Thomas is known for understating things. He didn't disappoint, saying it was "nice" to win, adding that Tess wasn't initially a strong favourite when he chose the team, but she kept catching his eye. And, once she got on the programme, she kept coming. Her dam was the first cow he'd broken to halter and shown.

Judge Terri Packard was impressed from the moment the Autumn heifer calf hit the ring.

"She was tremendous," Terri said. "I said to Annie [Gill, the associate Jersey judge], 'it's going to take a heck of a heifer to get around her'.

"When we saw her out here again for Junior Champion, she really had no faults. She was so correct, she blends so beautifully from her neck, into her shoulder, she's full in her crops, she's hard over her topline, she's really level from her hooks to her pins, and she's got a great combination of dairy style and strength, which is what I like to see.

“Jerseys are a feminine breed, but they still need that width of chest and strength.

“I saw a lot of heifers that had good width through the chest and the front end, and that is maybe an advantage over what you see in the United States.

“Maybe what you didn’t see as much of out there was the flat rump from hooks to pins, and that pretty tail setting. And, it’s hard in the Jersey breed to find a bull that will make level rumps or even that slight slope to the rump.

“The breed as a whole needs to pay attention to that.”

NZ has the cows

The US Jersey judge Terri Packard has bred, owned, led, and judged some of the finest Jerseys in the world throughout her career. She said she wasn’t surprised to find quality in the Jersey show.

“I was happy to see the dairy character, because I know the cows are managed differently than a lot of our cows at home [in North America],” Terri said. “So, the flat bone, the good legs, the clean hocks and the way they moved around the ring were consistent and that made my job a lot more comfortable.

“When you look at the Junior, Intermediate and Senior champion out here I think all three of those individuals could compete anywhere that I’ve shown. There were some of the older cows out for Senior Champion that I’d say the same about. There was tremendous quality, and I really enjoyed it.”

Intermediate Holstein scores Grand

Senior Champions generally have the edge running into the race for Senior Champion and Supreme titles, because of their maturity and development. However, this year a young Holstein who had never been shown before – and, who had to cross Cook Strait – shook up the results.

The Intermediate Champion Holstein (and Supreme Intermediate Champion of all breeds), Tahora Sidekick Legacy2-ET, was also chosen for Grand Champion Holstein. With her owners Tahora Farms (Canterbury) now turning their attention to the lead up to a their “Party at the Polo Sale” (because they are also selling a profile polo pony) on March 28, they said there is now a chance Legacy2 may be included.

Tahora also showed the Reserve Champion Holstein, Tahora Pharo Abriana (sired by Sandy-Valley J Pharo), who will sell.

The Senior Champion Holstein came from the Ferdon camp. In 2024 Waipiri CR Freaky Girl-ET (sired by -River-Syc Crushabull-ET) was shown by the Dreadon/Fullerton, partnership when she won Supreme Intermediate. Ferdon bought her for \$21,000 in April 2024 when she was

offered as a guest consignment in the 75 years of Ferdon sale. While she was pipped at the post for Grand Champion Holstein by Tahora's Legacy², her Senior Champion title gave Ferdon a strong presence in two breeds.

Michelle was quick to thank all the Ferdon team and the unsung heroes holding the home farm together while they were gone.

"Everyone gives you your congratulations, and you love all that, but we can't do it without the people who come and help us at the show, and our team who run home," Michelle said.

Junior heifer shows

Anyone who needs more proof that great cows come from great cow families got it in spaces in the Holstein junior show.

The Junior Champion Holstein, Charbelle Hero Popcorn, was not only one of two family members to make the pull in the Junior Champion line-up under Western Australian judge Lachlan Fry.

Hero Popcorn is the daughter of a cow at the most recent epicentre of this family, Charbelle Tatoo Pix. Pix is the reigning Stratford and Waikato Champion. She was herself Supreme Junior Champion four years ago, and Supreme Intermediate Champion (and Best Intermediate Udder) a year later.

It's worth noting that the winning heifer in the youngest class of the Holstein junior show, Charbelle Tatoo Promise, is Charbelle Tatoo Pix's full sister, and that their dam, Charbelle MWB Prancer S3F, was herself a class winner at this show.

Their owners, Stephen and Annabelle Scherer, of Charbelle, took on bigger herd numbers this season on a new farm in the Waikato region. They consolidated two sharemilking farms into one – and added 100 cows and one staff member – at their new base at Tahuna, just north of Morrinsville. They are sharemilking 300 Holsteins and 100 Jerseys and crossbreds on 160 hectares in a blended business model with Annabelle's parents, Wayne, and Dyanne Osborne.

The increased workload meant that the show preparation became more of a deal, and they tapped into Annabelle's brother-in-law and sister, Luke and Charlotte Gilbert, at Showcase Boarding, to help prepare three out of seven of their team.

Four of the Junior Holstein Championship contenders came from Showcase Boarding's string – including Junior and Reserve Junior for Charbelle – Honourable Mention for Te Hau Genetics, and the winning junior heifer Holstein calf [who was acknowledged in the first pull for Junior Champion for Charbelle].

Annabelle said she had a blast watching her children on the halter, on what goes down as one of the family's most successful early campaigns. Four of their junior entries won their class across two breeds.

“I was so pleased for the kids because they pretty much gave up summer to care and prepare for each of their animals every day.

“Because of the new farm, in general we just haven’t had the time. We could have not come, but it means a lot to our family and here we are.”

Judge Lachlan Fry said while the numbers weren’t massive the quality was right there at the pointy end of the business.

“We certainly had the winners and there was some good quality throughout the line, and we [associate judge Sarah Leech] were very happy with the four Junior Champion contenders,” Lachlan said.

“With the Junior Champion, I just loved the balance of the heifer. She had very few faults and she wasn’t by any means too extreme in any part. She was hard to fault, and they are the ones you generally want, aren’t they?

“She went over the Reserve because she was a little more heifer, she was wider in the chest, deeper in the forerib, and being that bit older she was a little more developed.”

The Junior Champion Holstein finished the day with Reserve Supreme Junior Champion to the Jersey.

Ayrshires firing

The biggest junior heifer showing was without question the Ayrshires and the UK judge Blaise Tomlinson was ready.

“The calves were very, very strong,” he said. “I wasn’t surprised because I’d talked to a previous judge, and they told me how good the quality was in this country. The top end could compete anywhere in the world, certainly.”

Blaise and his wife, Deborah, milk 250-head (200 Holstein with 50 Ayrshires) under Sandyford Ayrshires at Charnwood Forest, at Loughborough (21 minutes from Leicester in the East Midlands of England). Sandyford is of the most highly regarded Ayrshire breeders in the UK and the greater global industry – and he is at the forefront of modern examples of the breed, including Ayrshire breed icon Sandyford Clover 10 EX97.

He said he was looking for the cleaner boned calves, with good rib, and good legs and feet.

“And, I managed to find them. When the Junior Champion came into the class I thought she’d take a bit of beating. She went on to win fairly handily really, and she was able to easily compete in the interbreed.”

“Best Juniors made it through”

Blaise was the first of the four judges to judge the heifer classes, and he spent the rest of the day watching his counterparts work through their choices until they all came together to decide the Supreme Junior Champion. It gave him a unique perspective.

“The four calves at the end were the four best examples of every breed, in my opinion,” Blaise said.

“Every judge found the best calves and got them to the top of the line, and I thought it was a very good interbreed line-up. It was a good show of really high quality. They can’t miss having a good in-milk show if that’s what they turn out for the juniors.”

In the Intermediate Ayrshire show, Premier Amarula A Sharon (sired by Ruisseau Clair Amarula) to up to win. She is owned by Joanna Fowlie and Richard Waugh (Matamata) and she cost the pair an Australasian record price of \$31,000 when they bought her at the Premier Sale in September 2024.

At the other end of the price spectrum, the Senior and Grand Champion Ayrshire Pukekaraka Elle Delilah, who was the 2021 Supreme Champion of the show, cost her owners just \$2500 in 2019 when they bought her as a dry cow **in a group of five cows from the Robinson family’s dispersal at Atiamuri.**

She lives at Glenalla & Snowfed Farms in Mid-Canterbury, and she doesn’t owe her owners a cent. She has crossed the Cook Strait to compete in shows five times and the 10-year-old made the judge a happy man when she hit the ring.

Combined breeds strong

The Combined Breeds also included the acknowledgement of the Brown Swiss individual champions within its results this year (*see results for more details*).

Grand Champion and Best Udder Combined Breeds and Grand Champion Milking Shorthorn was won by Westell Jedi Rollie (sired by Glencliffe JP Jedi) and owned by Josh Sneddon, Tokoroa. The UK judge Wendy Young moved decisively through her choices and pulled no punches as she crowned her standouts.

The Junior Champion from the Combined Breeds, Lakeview Jiath Plum, is owned by the Lakeview Partnership (Dannevirke). Lakeview is operated by Isaac and Emma Kelsen. They also had a hand in the Intermediate Champion. They bought the Junior Champion’s dam privately from Fusion Genetics because they were so impressed with her production and style. They said they wanted to breed a stylish Milking Shorthorn.

“From day one, the calf caught our eye, and we think she has a bright future,” Isaac Kelsen said.

Lakeview bred and had sold the Intermediate Champion Lakeview A Joy to Aleesha Shaw (Ohaupo) through the Fusion Genetics sale in October 2023 as a yearling after she won her age calf class at the NZ DairyEvent that year for Lakeview.

Emma said, “We get regular updates about Joy from Aleesha, and that’s when Isaac saw potential for her to do well this year. She joined us in Dannevirke on the show programme, and we’re thrilled for Aleesha that she’s done so well”.

Handled with care

The handlers’ judge was Blaise’s daughter, Evie. Evie had the biggest juggle because she was part of the media team for the event. She relished the opportunity to momentarily put down her camera and look at the show through a different lens. Her focus was on the young people leading.

“The handlers in the younger classes were extremely impressive for their age,” Evie said. “I think they are definitely learning from the mature handlers. I also really do think that the people who attended Terri’s [Terri Packard hosted a youth discussion around showmanship before the show got underway] had picked up on – and applied – some of the things that Terri had pointed out.

“I think that was an important opportunity to take part in that demonstration if they wanted to get to the top of the class, because it’s about those fine details.

“I definitely put the handlers through their paces because when you get to those older classes, you have to be prepared to work for it.”

She said she often advises young handlers in the UK to either watch online 4-H videos in Canada or alternatively the UK Holstein Society’s leading demonstrations to refine their technique.

For more results, stories and photos see the “NZ Dairy Event” on Facebook.