

# Limousin - it's the breed of the future



By Patsy Hunter

**BREEDING the best in any type of livestock whether it be pedigree or commercial, sheep or cattle, requires a huge amount of determination, dedication and drive - key features that come naturally to Laurencekirk-based Limousin breeder, Andrew Gammie and his wife, Kathryn.**

Passionate about the commercial, near dual purpose attributes of this beefy bovine, Andrew believes the Limousin is the breed for the future, when it can be finished in quicker period of time and to the desired weights demanded by the supermarkets with some of the highest killing out percentages.

Add to that the growing demand for young Limousin bull beef and he said producers are onto a winner when finishing such cattle not only bolsters end margins but also reduces greenhouse gas emissions.

"Limousins are a great long-term option for the future because the females are so easy to keep and they produce fast growing calves that can either be sold for breeding or finishing," Andrew said.

"An increasing number of butchers are now also looking for young bull beef too which is great for the

breed as it adds another outlet. I can sell 13-14-month-old young bulls for £1400 at Carlisle and they're all going for beef."

It was Andrew's grandfather George and father Jim Gammie, who established the Westpit pedigree Limousin herd at Drumforber in the early 1970s. At that time, the 480-acre unit was mostly home to 200 commercial cows, with an additional 1000 head of finishing cattle bought in every year for finishing off home-grown feeds.

It wasn't until Andrew returned home to farm in 2000 that he looked take the Limousin herd further.

"Limousins had always appealed to me because we were brought up with them and because of their ease of management - it doesn't cost anymore to keep a pedigree Limousin than a commercial cow, and breed the right ones, and the progeny can be worth so much more," he said.

It's a philosophy which is working a treat for team Gammie, too, as since Jim and Andrew bought 16 maiden heifers privately from Ian Nattress' Greenwell herd, in 2009, the Westpit herd has gone from strength to strength.

Most of these purchases were daughters of the French sires, Tanin and Vagabond, with one of the first bulls born, Westpit Fendt, selling for 15,500gns at Carlisle. He was bred from Greenwell Delight, which was served

to Vagabond as a luckpenny before heading north to Drumforber.

It has been the purchase of the 5800gns Brockhurst Holy, a Wilodge Vantastic daughter bought at Newark, in 2015, that has bred the best to date for the herd.

A daughter of the Grahams Samson show cow, Brockhurst Bolshoi, Holy has bred in excess of £100,000 worth of bull sales. Those include the 18,000gns Westpit Lowry, sold at Carlisle to the Maraiscote herd; Westpit Nando, which was purchased privately by the Ronick herd for an undisclosed five-figure price; and Westpit Omaha, sold to Haltcliffe herd at last year's Royal Highland Show, again for an undisclosed sum.

Other notable bull sales from this top show winning female line include the two full brothers, Westpit Nevada and Westpit Nashville - Dinmore Immense sons that sold at Carlisle in February 2019, for 14,000gns and 13,000gns. This year's event also saw, Westpit Orlando, by Goldies Jackpot, sell for 12,000gns.

"I've always looked to breed big powerful easy fleshed square females," said Andrew, who travelled down to Newark with his father specifically to buy Holy when she was bred from the show winning Brockhurst Bolshoi.

"I do like muscle but I'm not a fan of double muscled females. I prefer to breed good big cows and then find a bull to suit them."

While foundation females



ANDREW AND Kathryn with son Finlay (3) Ref:RH300920361

from the Greenwell, Dinmore and Brockhurst herds have undoubtedly made their mark, home-bred females now coming through are also making their presence felt, with Westpit Landlord, the first son of Jalex Itsallgood, a bull bought privately at the Highland Show, out of Westpit Finella, making 17,000gns in 2016.

Two years later, Westpit Macgregor, an AI son of Ampertaine Gigolo, bred from Westpit Florence realised 15,000gns and, at Carlisle, in February, this year, Westpit Oklahoma, another by Itsallgood, out of Westpit Julie, made 13,000gns.

Other top breeding bulls include Netherhall Double O Seven, purchased for 20,000gns, which in turn has bred sons and daughters to 13,000gns and 10,000gns respectively.

Andrew has also exploited the herd's genetic potential by introducing In-Vitro embryo Production (IVP), a cost effective and welfare friendly service from AB Europe.

This process produces embryos from collected

## FARMfacts

- **Farm business:** Jim and Kate Gammie, son Andrew and his wife Kathryn
- **Livestock:** 35 cow pedigree Westpit herd and 65 commercial breeding cows
- **Breeding policy:** In-Vitro embryo Production (IVP) which has increased the genetic gain of the herd while also maximising potential sale returns.
- **Herd goal:** Increase pedigree cow numbers at expense of commercial females with the introduction of Fleckviehs and Simmentals as recipient heifers.
- **Acreage:** 100 acres grass and 380 acres spring barley

oocytes (unfertilised eggs) which are fertilised within a petri dish by selected semen, and subsequently cultured for seven days until fully developed embryos can be transferred, or frozen.

A relatively new technique within the UK for producing embryos, it outcompetes MOET for its flexibility and multiple benefits to breeders and their donor animals, according to AB Europe's vet, Gavin Tait.

"AB Europe currently offers two distinct IVP donor programmes dependent on the individual animal requirement and/or farmers preference," said Gavin.

"The first programme is our non-stimulated system, where IVP donors are not subjected to any hormonal drugs or synchronisation prior to the collection of oocytes, which accordingly makes it the simpler, cheaper and less labour-intensive option.

"The second is our stimulated system, which requires four injections prior to collection. Stimulation leads to a boost in oocyte quality on a given week - sometimes it can improve number of oocytes too, however collection can only be done every fortnight and requires additional handling of the donor animal."



WESTPIT JULIE, one of the top breeding females in the herd



WESTPIT LIONESS full of femininity with length, depth and a backend



WESTPIT FIONA - typical big long deep framed cow at Drumforber



WESTPIT HERD based at Drumforber, Laurencekirk



TYPICAL WESTPIT cows and calves

Jim and Andrew have seen huge success with the breeding system. "I could have continued to naturally expand the herd, however I became aware of In-Vitro embryo Production (IVP) as an alternative to MOET and it has, in fact, put Westpit on the map," said Andrew.

"IVP was preferred to MOET because no stimulation is required and the AB Europe team arrive on the farm to collect, whereas MOET requires multiple injections along with accompanying time, effort and cost.

"Brockhurst Holy was the first female to undergo IVP, primarily as an insurance policy. We achieved 20 calves, including 18 bulls of which 16 sold to pedigree herds. They've also collected the silverware at both society shows and sales."

One of Holy's IVP collections gave one heifer and four bulls which sold to average 12,000gns and they have secured both champion and reserve championships at 2019 Stars of the Future.

"Last year, AB Europe introduced IVP coasting featuring a programme with minimal stimulation. We achieved a better response in terms of embryos per collection, and it was much less invasive than MOET."

Andrew added: "IVP and

**ONTHEspot**

- **Biggest achievement?** Establishing the Westpit herd, building it up to where it is today and selling bulls in to pedigree herds.
- **Best investment?** Brockhurst Holy – a once in a lifetime cow
- **Where do you want to be in 2030?** Hopefully building a successful business for the future generation and out of lockdown!
- **Best advice?** Never stop learning and don't be afraid to ask questions
- **Biggest gripe?** Kathryn says spending money!

IVP coasting are enabling me to buy the best genetics I can. I select semen, anything from £50 to £1000 per straw to improve the herd's genetic base selected for certain EBVs, according to accuracy, proven damline, breeding and showing success. One straw of semen can cover up to five donors too."

AB Europe lined up an annual IVP programme with up to 10 cows - 2020 featured five cows. Following collection, embryos are stored and implanted in commercial recipient cows and scheduled spring and autumn calving.

This year's programme also featured three, 12-month-old heifers. "As long as they are cycling, the process makes for a quicker turn around, speeding up genetic progress as well as spreading semen costs.

This year, we collected from one of Holy's 12-month-old daughters, again as an insurance policy and a Sarkley heifer purchased from the Red Ladies sale of a similar age.

"Earlier this year, we collected from 11 cows over two on-farm collections which resulted in 47 embryos. These fresh embryos went on to hold at around 70%," Andrew said.

"If I have just one or two cows for collection, then I'm finding it's more cost effective to introduce them to AB Europe's livery run by the company's vet, Gavin, on his farm in the Borders. It offers a safe and convenient environment. Communication is key for us and the team keeps us informed as to what's going on."

It's just as well, too, as with young Finlay - fast approaching four years of age - and Kathryn about to give birth to twins, Andrew is going to have his hands fuller than normal pretty soon. Add to that being elected on to the British Limousin Cattle Society Council as Scottish representative, and he's going to be busier than ever.

He does, though, have every confidence in the Limousin and the breed's potential to increase market share. "We have a fantastic product in the Limousin. What we need now is to get back to basics and create a level playing field for all members with increased communication to all members.

"With more promotion and support for all members, I am convinced the Limousin is the breed of the future," concluded Andrew.



NEW TO the herd are heifers Sarkley Polly and Plumtree Opal

L



LIMOUSIN



The Smart Way to Search Your Limousin Sale Catalogue  
**DOWNLOAD THE APP TODAY!**

**THE BREED WITH THE PREMIUM BUILT IN**



- Ideal weights for the market
- Excellent growth rates, fast finishing
- Consistent top carcass grades
- High maternal traits, low heifer replacement costs

**CARLISLE**  
Saturday 17th October  
149 Bulls  
Online Preview Parade Friday 6pm  
Sale Saturday 10.30am

**STIRLING**  
Monday 19th October  
68 Bulls  
Sale Monday 10.30am

For full details please visit: [www.limousin.co.uk](http://www.limousin.co.uk)