



By WIKUS VAN DER MERWE

Phenomenal! That is the word myself and Harry Schuiling kept on using during and especially after the 2017 KZN De Heus On Farm Challenge. We were the privileged ones to be invited to judge the 2017 On Farm Challenge and to say we had an exceptional time of it is a bit of an understatement! The event that took place from 21-26 August this year comprised 23 farm visits from the Midlands, Underberg, Ixopo and Highflats areas. This initiative sponsored by De Heus has been going on for a decade in Kwazulu-Natal now and it was expertly organized by Craig and Julia Rees and their team. The event was very enjoyable for all concerned and a wonderful social event where all industry people can share their passion for Holstein cattle talking cows on the farms, on the road between visits and during the social events in the evenings. The organization is great, the sponsorship from various industry companies is involved and generous and the interest and participation throughout the event proof that what is currently the largest Holstein event in South Africa will continue to be popular for a long time to come.

I was extremely excited after being invited to judge with Harry Schuiling who is Semex Sales Manager for Western Europe, Asia and South Africa. Harry has judged several national Holstein shows around the world including Belgium, Luxembourg, Portugal, Korea and Japan and has been on the USA qualified Judges list since 2015. Definitely the experience of my life and a great honour! A great initiative that both of us enjoyed very much was having two junior judges for the week. Shaun Ainsworth, genetic consultant for Semex in KZN joined us for the first two days as junior judge and Mark Willment, technical advisor for De Heus in KZN joined us for the final two days of judging. These two guys have a real passion for Holstein cattle and we enjoyed sharing the time in the ring with them very much. This is a great initiative by the KZN Holstein Club to develop younger judges for the future and the region definitely has two young guys with good knowledge and they are only going to get better! We applaud you Mark and Shaun!

We decided to allocate a score to every cow presented to us and used our classification background to rate every cow considering a body score, rump and loin, feet and legs and mammary score. Our scores ranged from 75-93 for the individuals presented and it definitely made it a lot easier and logical for us to place the cows the way we

saw fit. The average across the competition as very high with great quality across all the herds. This made the final placings very close and clear in the results where most of the herds that took part were represented in the top 5 of every class. Cows are judged in different age groups where every farm enters a cow aged 2-3 years, 3-4 years, 4-6 years, 6-10 years and 10 years and older. There is also a progeny group class where 4 daughters and more of a sire are entered together. The 109 individual entries and 20 progeny groups that were presented to us across the 23 herds represent a total of 16000 milking cows! Thus we only saw the top 1.5% of these herds and it was very clear throughout the week that we were dealing with the best! To be able to present a good animal on the day of judging is not a quick fix thing, we realize that for a cow to look good on the day of judging she has to be kept well every day of the year, and here is where we would like to congratulate all the breeders that entered as the standard of the cows presented to us was very high and it was clear to see that we were dealing with able breeders and stockmen who manage their herds well and have a passion for their cattle. On every farm we were also expected to appoint a Junior Champion from the 2-3 and 3-4 year old classes and a Senior Champion from the 4-6, 6-10 and 10+ classes and a Grand Champion on farm. This was a great opportunity for interaction with the large groups of people that travelled around from farm to farm.

The event was very well attended throughout the 4 days of judging and also the three evening functions, where we were treated to a talk by Dr Tod Collins at the Underberg Country Club. This talk by Dr Collins was a great reminder of how blessed we are to be able to work with cattle every day and also allowed for some time to think about where we find ourselves greatly privileged to work in this industry! Dr Gareth Miles talking at the evening function in Ixopo and Dr Andy Lund for the final prize giving at Fern Hill Hotel in the Midlands, who both represent Howick Vets, each gave very interesting and to the point talks about how to improve herd reproduction. We all know cows need to calve for everything else to happen and so the enjoyment of good quality cows during the days were rounded off well with some practical advice on how to manage them better in the evening functions. We can give many compliments to this event but I think one of the greatest compliments was the attendance of

the prize giving function at Fern Hill Hotel. More than 70 people packed the venue and some tables even had to be added to accommodate everyone! As judges we also have to mention Key Delta in Pietermaritzburg and Chris Raman who sponsored a vehicle for the week for the judges and also made a vehicle available for the winning herd for a whole month! Also Louis Zwiegers and Martin Hanika of SA Premix treated everyone to lunch on the farms throughout the 4 days of judging and again all the other sponsors of this great event. Up to now this article has been about the people involved in organizing and sponsoring this event and that is where its success lies! Now, on to cows!

In judging the animals we were set on looking for cows that are good functional dairy cows, cows with dairy strength, good capacity, a sound rump structure, very good feet and legs and of course a good mammary system with good udder texture as well. The type of cow that fits the needs of the modern dairy farmer, one that is able to produce profitably and consistently. I can easily say that we found such cows on every farm! The 2-3 year old class was a very strong one throughout the week and was eventually topped by an extremely good Jackson daughter exhibited by the partners of Struan Farm in the Underberg region. She had great length of body, very good dairyness, a very good set of feet and legs and a mammary system that makes you look again and again! In second place was another Jackson daughter exhibited by Mike Black that blew our socks off early on the second day and in third a very well balanced Numero Uno daughter exhibited by Fairfield Dairy. These three cows in that order also ended up as our Overall Junior Champions for the week. In the 3-4 year old class there was some stiff competition and here it was won by a beaut of a dairy cow sired by Keswick, owned by the Goble family of Triandra Farm. In second was a super dairy cow sired by Mascalese and exhibited by Kevin Lang's Fairfield Dairy and in third a very well put together Taranaki daughter of the Shewan family's Keate Farm. Across the junior classes we saw cows with great potential to develop further in their herds and with a group of young cows like that KZN Holsteins definitely have a bright future! On to the senior classes and here we were impressed by cows from over 4 to 13 years old! The 4-6 year old class was topped by wonderfully balanced, super dairy cow with a great udder, sired by Elias and exhibited by the MacKenzie family. She placed above an ultra balanced Tape daughter exhibited by Viv Turner and family. Third in this class was a real dairy machine of a cow exhibited by Greg Carter-Brown of Clover Farm. We loved the power and dairyness shown by the cows in this class throughout the week! The 6-10 year old class was a class where we could sense things were hotting up in terms of the competition! Here we saw cows with lots of strength, capacity and dairyness, super udders and great overall balance. It was a strong class that was won by a stunning Nokia daughter exhibited by the Shewan Family's Keate Farm, this cow also won eventual Grand Champion of the event. A real powerhouse dairy cow, moderate in stature, wide throughout, great spring of rib and depth of centerpiece, a great mammary system and anchored well on an exceptional set of feet and legs. The cow you dream of having! In second place in this class was another "dairy machine" of a cow sired by Pacific and exhibited by the Bonsma family of Underberg. A cow that exemplifies dairyness by the book, and some more! In third was a really strong, dairy cow sired by Jinx and exhibited by Cotswold Farm. The 10+ cow class was a really special one, cows that stood the test of time, stayed productive over many years and a great joy to see so many cows that have lead such long productive lives and

continue to do so! This was won by a 12 year old Durham daughter of Fairfield Dairy that seemed to have taken the first 12 years of her life in a real easy stride, strong, dairy, great feet and legs and a very well attached udder made her an easy choice as winner of this class! In second was a very impressive Ito daughter exhibited by first-time participants Rockfontein Farm, she was an easy winner as Grand Champion on the farm for us and an incredible cow that we will remember for a long time. In third was a Tabasco daughter exhibited by Broad Acre Farm of the Acutt Family in Underberg. Our senior Champion was the Nokia cow from Keate Farm, an incredible cow and a champion we are very proud of. Her reserve was the incredible Elias daughter of the MacKenzie family, long bodied, super dairy and balanced and honorable mention in the senior cows the Tape daughter of the Turners of Hlogoma Farm.

The progeny group classes were very interesting to judge and we used the same criteria to judge these groups with the added factor of uniformity across the group very important in our final assessment. This class was easily won by a really outstanding group of Tape daughters exhibited by Viv Turner and family of Hlogoma Farm. As a group they were really well balanced, super dairy cows with great udders and exceptional rump structure, moderate in size and rear udders that deserve a second look, a third, a fourth, and more! In second place was a group of Nokia daughters exhibited by Keate Farm that we admired for their strength, dairyness and super udders. In third was a group of 7 Keswick daughters of Tegwan Farm. This group was very uniform with outstanding dairyness, very good feet and legs and great rear udders, they made quite a picture!

Eventually as a judge you have the honour of awarding a Grand Champion of the event. For Harry and myself it was easy with a final score of 93 to award 11258 Nokia of Keate Farm the Grand Champion of the event. This cow has it all, everything you need in a great dairy cow, everything you like to see in a great dairy cow, and seemed to put it all together with so much comfort and ease! Reserve Grand Champion was awarded to 15050 Jackson of Struan Farm, this 2 year-old cow stunned us and we believe she has a great future! We awarded Honorable mention to the cow Elias 11146 of Mackenzie Farms. These three individuals are of outstanding quality and a great advert for the quality that the Holstein breed can offer a dairyman!

Between us judges we discussed early in the week the possibility of awarding a premier breeder prize, this was not an official thing discussed before the competition but we felt that we wanted to reward the breeders that performed the most consistently throughout the event. Points were awarded as follows in every class: 1-20 points, 2-16 points, 3-12 points, 4-8 points and 5-4 points. In first was the Shewan family's Keate Farm with a total of 52, second was Fairfield Dairy with 48, third was the Turner family's Ringstead Farm with a total of 36 and tied fourth was the Bonsma and MacKenzie families both on 28 points. This was a surprise even for the organizers! We are glad to say that this was received very well and even though there was no physical prize for this we felt that this one was all about the bragging rights!

And here is where I conclude, thank you to all the great people involved, congratulations on cows of outstanding quality, thanks for arranging to have a competition with the awesome Drakensberg mountains as backdrop! KZN Holstein breeders can be proud of an event that is phenomenal on every level!

FINAL RESULTS



Grand Champion

KEATE FARM: Shewan
Sire: Nokia



Res Grand Champ

**STRUAN FARM: Willment /
Robertson** *Sire: Jackson*



**2-3 YEAR OLD
STRUAN FARM**
Willment / Robertson
Sire: Jackson



**3-4 YEAR OLD
TRIANDRA FARM**
Goble
Sire: Keswick



**4-6 YEAR OLD
HAWKSTONE FARM**
MacKenzie
Sire: Elias



**6-10 YEAR OLD
KEATE FARM**
Shewan
Sire: Nokia



**10+ YEAR OLD
FAIRFIELD FARM**
Lang
Sire: Durham



**PROGENY CLASS
RINGSTEAD FARM**
Turner, V
Sire: Tape