

DRAWN TO SALERS AFTER SUCCESS IN CROSS SUCKLER HERD

By Lynsey Clark, photographs by MacGregor Photography

With the aim of maximising the value of his cattle, new breeder Ben Roughton was drawn to Salers after having success with the breed in his family's cross suckler herd, based on their mainly arable farm, Gidding Grove, in Huntingdon, Cambridgeshire.

Ben farms 600-acres in partnership with his parents David and Cherry, growing wheat, barley, beans, linseed and oilseed rape. The family – including Ben's wife Harriet, a rural surveyor, and their baby girl Willa – also run boarding kennels and a cattery on-farm and undertake arable contracting, within their busy business.

It's on 75 acres of permanent pasture that the cattle have their place and until 2020, the Roughtons kept a herd of 40 continental cross sucklers, with replacements bought in when needed. Crossed with the Limousin bull, the calves were sold as 12-month-old stores, either privately or through Melton Mowbray or Thrapston Marts.



Ben explains: *"A few years ago, I was buying replacement heifers from Melton Mowbray and bought four or five Salers crosses. I knew very little about them, but I liked the look of them and I was really impressed with how they performed. They were very quiet; they calved easily, with really good calves."*



As with much of the population, the first lockdown in 2020, gave the family time to reflect on their business and they were able to determine what they wanted to achieve from the cattle.

"It makes sense for us to have cattle here; we have buildings for them and grass and we grow our own feed and straw. We're situated close to the Fens, so we have an abundant supply of waste veg too", says Ben.

"We decided we wanted to focus on quality rather than quantity with the cattle and because we'd been so impressed with the Salers crosses, we decided to buy some bulling heifers, which we got from Charles Benson at Green's Park. I was really impressed with his set-up and the quality of the cattle. We've also had a lot of help from our area representative Carolyn Fox, who has introduced us to other breeders too".

Ben's next step was to buy a Salers bull, Approach Farm Ouzo, which he got from Angus Gowthorpe,





“We’re heavily involved in stewardship schemes and are restricted with fertiliser use on the permanent pasture. The Salers are well suited to this system, as they graze very well.

“When we’re busy with the arable work, we don’t have time to sit up all night at calving and often it’s just me or Dad working on our own, so cattle that are easily managed and calve easily are what we need. The Salers have ticked those boxes, plus they are good on their feet, with plenty milk and they seem to hold their condition through the winter, with less concentrates than the cross cows”, adds Ben.

who he says has been a great source of advice. This summer, the Roughtons have also bought another 10 heifers from Green’s Park. The cows are set to calve in February and the bulling heifers in April.

“We were looking for a uniform batch, with quiet temperaments and high-health status. We’re delighted with Approach Farm Ouzo too and he’s so quiet and easy to handle. The long-term plan is to go entirely pedigree Salers, so we’re gradually building up the numbers, aiming to get to 40 cows, while gradually cutting back the cross cows. Breeding our own replacements will give us greater control of the health of the cattle too”, says Ben.

“This year, we’re keeping eight heifer calves and we’ve kept the bulls entire, to see how they turn out. In the future, any females or bulls that we can sell for breeding will be a bonus”, he adds.

The family all pull together at Gidding Grove, with Ben’s agronomist sister Emma, also on hand for fertiliser and agronomy advice. The objective is to make the best possible use of the resources they have and Ben feels the Salers are perfect for this type of system.

