David Deaville is being quite realistic when he says the Hereford breed has a bright future. “Huge strides have been made to modernise the breed by carefully selecting genetics to increase growth rate and volume, backed up by Breedplan data, to the extent we now have a terminal sire that can match if not exceed the performance of Continental sired cattle reared on forage based diets. Furthermore, breeders have managed to retain the Hereford’s native characteristics, its docility, longevity and meat eating quality which is truly synonymous with the Hereford brand. “In fact come 2013, when the current payment system ceases, the Hereford should be well positioned to compete with any other beef breed in the market place,” he says. “In the meantime, I believe we as breeders continue to face plenty of challenges; we need to continue to improve the breed’s total muscle volume which in turn will contribute towards increasing it’s retail beef yield. David is among those progressive breeders who are responding to the marketplace and subsequently reaping the rewards. “We have continued to modernise our cattle and come to the view that the Hereford is the right breed. We are breeding Herefords which leave progeny with faster growth rates, and they’re leaner resulting in a carcase with reduced overall fat whilst retaining intramuscular marbling which give Hereford meat its eating quality. “Furthermore, we’re now able to back up all our visual selection decisions with Breedplan. The data is very useful, it gives a really good indication of an animal’s potential and what’s more I’m very surprised at just how accurate, effective and reliable it is. In fact it’s a tool that others cannot ignore, in particular since demand for the data both by pedigree breeders and commercial men is now market led,” he says. “The type of market is also continuing to evolve. The pick of the annual crop of bulls used to be sold in the national ring at Hereford. Nowadays, our prime target continues to be pedigree breeders, however as the breed gains ground, we are selling an increasing number of bulls at the farmgate to commercial farmers, both repeat and new customers. Equally important, that renewed demand goes hand in hand with higher prices. Breeding higher performance bulls introduces more profit for everyone in the chain, the breeders, calf rearers and finishers.” For David, it’s the resurgence in the breed among the commercial sector which he regards as significant to its future development. “After almost 40 years, commercial farmers are once again taking the Hereford seriously. Apart from realising our efforts to modernise the breed, escalating cereal prices have led them to seriously consider Hereford cross cattle simply because of their low maintenance requirements and feed efficiency. In fact, Canadian researchers have concluded that the Hereford has the lowest net food intake of all British native breeds. “We also acknowledge that branding initiatives, in particular the scheme managed by Dovecote Park for Waitrose, has injected a new and real demand for cattle by a registered Hereford bull.” David is the second generation of the family to manage the Alderville herd, currently amounting to 35 cows and based at Model Home Farm, Alderwasley, Belper, Derbyshire. His late mother, Florence, noted for her natural instinct for selecting cattle, founded the herd back in 1969 with four foundation cows from Firlands. Additional females were introduced from Rowington and Wenlock and subsequently those families were established which continue to remain synonymous with Alderville - Dowager, Countess, L, Lady Lynda, Pansy and Dorothy.
Firlands Acquit and his progeny were among the first to put the Deavilles well and truly on the map. They enjoyed tremendous showring success throughout the 1970s including red tickets at the national sale and the supreme championship with Alderville Poldark who was sold for export to Zambia.

The Deavilles responded to market demand in the 1980s and began breeding poll cattle. They looked to the top and chose two Royal Champions, Louada Sensation and Louada Voyageur to introduce into the herd by AI. Both were Canadian bred and selected for growth rate, muscling and colour. Voyager was used more heavily because he was considered to be one of the leading poll sires in the breed. He has been line bred into the herd over the following 20 years.

Canadian genetics have been used within the Alderville horned and Aldersley poll herds for more than 30 years to introduce those improved growth rates. However, he attributes the latest improvements to SNS Generator's genetics who combined both performance and quality. “He was outstanding. He offered volume, very good conformation, and a lot of muscle. We used several straws of his semen, however we wanted him to have a bigger impact, and we were very fortunate to have the opportunity to buy one of his best sons, Clipston Krespian. We paid £1,200 for him at the Badlingham sale. In fact if I had £1 for everyone who has said they should have bought him, then I could have raised that much!”

Krespian who is within the breed’s top 1% with a TI of 37, combined that excellent performance data with conformation which led to him to being awarded the Supreme Championship title at Tenbury. What’s more, Krespian has left his mark across the herd with a crop of females that combine volume and growth rate with muscle and plenty of milk.

“One of the best Krespian sons was Alderville Dwight TI 30, who has tremendous size and length. We used him across the herd for several years and he left cattle with good muscle and electric growth rate.” David eventually sold him in a private deal in 2007 to join Jack Henry’s Blakelaw herd and within months he was enjoying the limelight when he secured the Great Yorkshire Show Supreme Championship and was presented to HM The Queen.

Where next? David has turned to Australian genetics in his quest to continue to progress the herd, and in particular increase muscling especially down the back. Alderville’s two senior sires, Dazzler and Edgar are by Doonbiddle Hustler who is within the breed’s top 1% with a Terminal Index of 33, and they’re leaving strings of young bulls all within the breed’s top 10% on TI.

There’s also every chance David Deaville will have a greater presence in the showring. “Lack of time and resources have forced us in recent years to take a bit of a back seat, however come 2012 when I plan to close down our 300 sow finishing enterprise, then I’d like to be back, after all the showring is our shop window.”

He adds: “During the last 30 years we have made great strides forward in breed improvement, in particular growth rate. I firmly believe that if we can continue that momentum, and in particular focus on improving muscle and killing out percentage, then there’s every reason to believe we’ll once again see Hereford calves as first choice in our markets.”
Every dairy farmer should run a Hereford bull with their commercial herd according to Derbyshire producer, Cecil Shirt. Why? “Because Herefords are quiet and easy to handle, the majority calve easily, the calves are lively and soon up and sucking, and at two week olds are now commanding a solid trade,” he says speaking from experience.

“We’re marketing all our Hereford cross calves at two weeks old through Bakewell mart, each calf is accompanied by a copy of its sire’s pedigree and some weeks they’ve been fetching prices higher than Continental crosses. We’ve sold at up to £248 a head. “In fact, our Hereford cross calves are the icing on the cake.”

Cecil is among a fast growing number of commercial farmers who are returning to the Hereford having witnessed the breed’s genetic progress and the fact Hereford cross calves are meeting an insatiable demand from finishers supplying branded schemes.

“We bought our first Hereford bull in Hereford market back in 1974, we liked him and he did the job. However at the time, a plethora of Continental breeds were just beginning to emerge in the UK and eventually we decided to go with the flow,” says Cecil who farms in partnership with his wife Ruth and sons, Chris and James, 330 commercial Holstein Friesian cows split in two herds based at Holmelacy Farm, Tideswell, near Buxton.

“We like to keep an eye on the market place and I’d seen Hereford cross calves were bringing prices that were matching Continental crosses. We decided we wanted a slice of the action too, so a couple of years ago we agreed to invest in another Hereford.”

First port of call was David Deaville’s nearby herd, and Cecil returned home with Aldersley 1 Lara, a paternal grandson of Clipston Krespian and son of Aldersley 1 Dwight. “Height, stretch, good tops, back end and locomotion, coupled with a rich dark colour are among my main selection criteria, and this bull had it all. We also backed up the decision with his Breedplan data,” he explained “Lara worked well until suffering a fatal accident and we replaced him with one of Lara’s full brothers, Alderville 1 Lazareth. We’re aware the breed is noted for its longevity, and fingers crossed, we expect him to work for eight years.”