

INTRODUCING THE SHORTLIST FOR THE

A panel of judges chaired by Chris Impey has reviewed all the entries, and we now have the six finalists representing three different classes, Conservation, New Breeder and Pedigree Pork Producers. The winners of each class will be invited as finalists to the Awards Ceremony in London in November, where the overall winner of the Pedigree Pig Breeder of the Year will be announced.

NEW PEDIGREE BREEDER OF THE YEAR FINALISTS

Seb Carr Silverbirch Herd



In 2018, we gave our 13-year-old son, Seb, four British Saddleback pigs for Christmas. His passion for these pigs has grown over the years, and the whole family now shares an interest in promoting and breeding the breed. Seb's dedication to genetics and showing has earned him two Supreme Championships and qualifiers at Nationals, while his younger brother, Hugo (6), has also embraced showing and joined him in winning teams at the BPA Junior All Stars competition in September 2022. As a family, we prioritise sourcing top-quality pigs from reputable breeders. Our journey started with gilts from the Casterbridge herd in Dorchester and a young boar from Puff Pigs in Wales. Seb owns five sow lines and two boar lines, prompting us to embark on road trips across various regions to find the best pigs. My wife, Lissy, who teaches agriculture,

actively contributes to the British Saddleback Breeder's Club committee, enjoying the educational aspects of showing pigs and promoting rare breeds. We have become regulars on the show circuit and attend shows not only to compete but also to exhibit pigs and engage with the public. Seb takes pleasure in talking about pigs, husbandry, and the importance of food provenance and supporting rare breeds. Advocates for BPA membership and registered pigs, we have assisted and encouraged five new British Saddleback breeders to join or restart their BPA membership in the past year. We continue to extend invitations to others to meet our pigs and explore pedigree pig ownership. Constant communication with experienced breeders allows us to gather invaluable knowledge and advice to improve Seb's herd. Seb's dad, Nick, has constructed purpose-built facilities for the pigs, including a 'maternity' unit with wi-fi and cameras, along with a six-bay yard equipped with bespoke gates to facilitate pig handling and promote high-welfare husbandry. Our

pigs are fed with locally produced food, ensuring peak condition for customers and the show ring. To share Seb's herd's story, we use Facebook and Instagram, leading to widespread recognition in various media outlets. The coverage has made our herd locally renowned, attracting inquiries through word of mouth. We offer a service to pick up pigs bought as meat weaners and deliver them to the local abattoir. Although Seb's primary goal is breeding show stock and improving pig characteristics, we also produce pork throughout the year. Our farm's 5-star registration with Trading Standards enables us to advertise meat sales through social media and sell from the 'farm gate.' Seb's famous huge sausage rolls are a favourite among his schoolmates and teachers, often enjoyed during class breakfasts and picnics. As a family, we are genuinely passionate about British Saddlebacks and promoting their heritage, food provenance, and the pursuit of breeding better pigs. Our love for these pigs has us all deeply invested in their well-being and continued recognition.

Stephen and Sue Dudley – Black Orchard Herd



Stephen and Sue of Black Orchard Large Blacks in Carmarthenshire began their mission to support and preserve the Large Black after acquiring their first pigs, two Large Black sows, in July 2019. Dedicated to safeguarding the breed's rarest lines, they expanded their herd with Queen and Bess sows from North

Yorkshire and Wiltshire, joining a Fashion sow and Majestic Eagle boar. Bess and Queen are two of the rarest sow lines, and already Stephen and Sue have increased the number of registered Besses from six to seven, with the newly registered gilt, hopefully by then in-pig, due to go to a good breeding home later this year. Although the Queen line is less rare, with 11 registered sows, they are geographically concentrated in North Yorkshire, so bringing the first Queen to Wales was important in spreading the distribution of the line to keep it safe.

Stephen and Sue's commitment extends to educating new pig keepers

through courses and offering friendly, well-socialised weaners, along with support packages to first-time pig owners. They have spread awareness of the breed across Wales and beyond, and their courses emphasise the importance of traditional native pedigree breeds, and students are encouraged to join the BPA and the relevant breed society.

Their blog has become a platform where the pigs' antics advertise themselves, drawing course attendees who often then choose Large Blacks as their first pigs. The demand for weaners and pork has led to waiting lists, and their pork has garnered positive feedback, even securing a contract with an

artisan Scotch egg producer. Their environmentally conscious approach includes raising pigs on British, soy-free food, local barley, and farm-made wildflower meadow haylage. Recycled plastic arks house the pigs, reducing their environmental impact and adding unique selling points to the pork. As advocates for the Nature Friendly Farming Network and the Wholesome Food Association, Stephen and Sue believe traditional breeds play a crucial role in sustainable, biodiversity-focused livestock systems.

With specialist pig vet Claire Scott they have written a book, [i]Keeping Pigs, a Practical Guide for Smallholders[i].

PEDIGREE PIG BREEDER OF THE YEAR



Isabel Soar – Scholebrook Herd

I have a herd of approximately 150 pigs and come from a family with a history of commercial and rare-breed pig farming. Five years ago, I returned to my mother's farm and took over the herd when my stepfather fell ill. Since then, I've ventured into pedigree pigs, explored new markets, and never looked back. The quality and productivity of the pigs have increased tenfold.

When I sourced my initial pigs, I liaised with my breed

rep to ensure they were as genetically diverse as possible. After expressing an interest in AI to extend my gene pool, I have arranged some AI training using semen from Deepark this autumn. I currently have 10 Mangalitza sows and three Mangalitza boars.

I process around 10 pigs per month for the charcuterie/meat industry, with plans to increase this to 15 per month by year-end and double it next year. Recently, I acquired a boar from a very rare bloodline, nursing him back to health, and I am looking forward to the results from his coverage of two sows.

I also have a couple of Berkshire sows and unregistered Berkshires, which I cross with my Pietrain for hybrid vigour. These

pedigree cross pigs are proving very popular with butchers. I currently have a litter of purebred Berkshires on the ground for registration. Using last year's Champion of Champions Berkshire boar 'Spring Namatjira3,' I'm excited about showing and breeding with the gilts. Around 70% of my litters are purebred Mangalitza, while the rest are Berkshire crosses, with an average farrowing interval of 5-6 months. Mangalitza litters typically have around eight piglets, and Berkshire crosses have around 11. All piglets are birth notified and I make notes of promising individuals for potential showing or breeding purposes. While my primary focus is the meat industry, I'm willing to sell breeding stock if needed for

conservation efforts. I maintain a predominantly closed herd with a government-approved on-farm isolation facility. Although I'm new to showing, my Mangalitza won at a show last September, and I recently became the first person to win a Breed Champion rosette with a Mangalitza at Newark and Notts.

Last year, I supplied a Mangalitza for Marcus Wareing's show, scheduled to air this summer. I also provided three Mangalitzas to Doddington Hall for their rewilding project, which made the national news. In 2021, I served on Farmison's Charter Committee, representing and advising them on the pig/pork side of their business and attending meetings at their headquarters.

CONSERVATION BREEDER OF THE YEAR FINALISTS

Wayne Hayward – Puff Herd

Puff Pigs is a family-run enterprise in South Wales, built on the benefits of home-grown, locally-sourced pedigree pork. We are well-known locally for our high-quality, ethically-reared produce from our British Saddlebacks. We are passionate about the survival of the traditional breeds and consider this the 'moral compass' of our business. We are fully committed to the conservation programme for the long term, and a key objective is to convert new or casual pig keepers into breeders dedicated to protecting traditional breeds.

In 2022, we scaled down our pig numbers to survive escalating costs and a downturn in sales. However, this allowed us to investigate the bloodlines most in need of assistance and actively contribute to the conservation programme. We settled on the Spot, which in terms of pure figures, wasn't considered a priority due to the number registered in Northern Ireland, but the numbers in

mainland Britain were dangerously low. In 2022, just one registered sow, nearing the end of her breeding life, and three birth-notified gilts comprised the whole lineage, and the breeder was giving up. In January 2023, we relocated the gilts from North Wales to our farm. By June 2023, one had her first litter, a robust 11 piglets. Unfortunately, the sow contracted MMA, leaving our conservation project hanging by a thread. As her milk supply dried up, we resorted to feeding the piglets from a bowl every few hours. As the number slowly dwindled, we were convinced we would lose them all, but thankfully we managed to save seven.

The past year has highlighted the dwindling number of pig breeders and the importance of converting and assisting new entrants. One way we do this is to have a presence at the smaller agricultural shows, a great way to meet the public and help educate them on the importance of traditional breeds. We are always amazed at how surprised people are

Lisa Hodgson – Otterburn Herd

I have been a BPA member and bred Mangalitza pigs for 11 years, and am in my second term as breed rep. I travelled the whole of the UK to source my herd, I wanted every bloodline available. During my research, I realised some bloodlines had been lost and others were pocketed in certain areas making them vulnerable in the case of a disease outbreak. Living in a secluded area I felt my herd would be safe and if required I could aid in the replacement of lost herds.

Over the years I have built a successful meat and black pudding business. I birth notify my litters so I can prove I produce pedigree pork and I encourage my breeders to do the same. I have often promoted Mangalitza on TV, which has helped with meat sales and increased interest in the breed.



I planned the Great Manga Move 2020, in the middle of lockdown. My team of breeders and I successfully achieved the first genetic pig exchange. It not only spread the bloodlines to five farms, it sealed our working relationship as a team and we formed the Mangalitza Conservation Society. We have worked together since then building up funds for the haulier costs of an import hopefully in the near future.

I sourced a starter herd for our only Scottish breeder Mathew, who wanted gilts and a boar ready to breed. Mangalitza breeders all castrate unless a boar piglet is pre-ordered and we all hang on to good boars their entire working lives. I wanted to get some diverse genetics and a rare boar line

PEDIGREE PORK PRODUCER OF THE YEAR FINALISTS

Katie Cooper – South Paddocks Herd



Our smallholding business pork sales have really grown in the past 18 months! We started with two pedigree Oxford Sandy and Black Longash Cynthia gilts from Mrs Maureen Case in May 2021. We grew the girls on and then returned them to Mrs Case to be

paired with one of her Jack Boars. In February 2022, we had our first successful farrowing from both girls and kept half the litter back to rear ourselves. The initial pork sales from our first three boars exceeded our expectations. Some pork was sold at our farm gate, while the rest was offered through our mobile catering unit at the Great Dorset Steam Fair. It was a huge hit, and everyone raved about our pork. The sense of pride we got was unbelievable.

It has been the same since those first three boars, and we have a constantly growing waiting list for our pork. We received a Highly Commended award from Love Local Trust Local Awards that celebrate food and drink producers in Dorset for our pork and goat meat from our farm.

Receiving the award was the confidence boost we needed to start expanding and increasing our pedigree pork and rearing more of our meat weaners ourselves. We applied to some local farmers' markets, but as there's such a pre-order waiting list for our

pork, when it came to the first market, we only had a little stock to take, and I didn't want to go with a half-empty table. My dad came up with the idea of taking my sausage rolls and quiches to sell. They were a hit, selling out at nearly every market I attend. I vary the flavours and choices, and I'm constantly tweaking recipes. We now have people waiting when we are setting up; Marmite cheddar with our pedigree pork sausagemeat is our best seller. We have spread the word about the rare Oxford Sandy and Black pigs and the importance of eating pedigree pork to help keep these rare native breeds in existence. The flavour speaks for itself, and once customers try it, they always comment on how good it is.

We have had deli and farm shop reps contact us, but we are very happy keeping them all handmade by us, on our farm, from our rare breed pedigree pork, born, reared and finished by us!

People are starting to taste the difference in pedigree pork, and pork reared the old-fashioned way, slowly outdoors.

Robbie Neill – Stonebridge Herd

We began in 2017 with Martha, an in-pig Oxford Sandy and Black pedigree sow. From our first litter, we sold various cuts to family members and realised the demand for traceable pork in Northern Ireland. We established Stonebridge Cottage Farm, a small family-run business managed by myself, Robbie, my wife, Louise, and our three young children. Our herd has now grown to over 100 pigs, comprising mainly pedigree Oxford Sandy and Blacks, Saddlebacks, and recently, a valuable addition of Gloucestershire Old Spots from the Earl of Plymouth.

Our system is unique in the way we feed and house our pigs, and it has earned them the nickname 'Eco Pigs'. We have developed good working partnerships with Northern Ireland's farm, artisan food, and drinks industries and feed a diet primarily consisting of spent grain from breweries and distilleries, whey from local cheesemakers, and vegetables

from local farmers, mixed with a mineral meal. This strategy reduces waste and gives us the flexibility to adapt to fluctuating feed costs amid challenges like the pandemic and the war in Ukraine. We still feel the pressures from inflated meal costs, but we have built resilience into our system that allows us to weather the storm. This system is only possible due to our choice of pedigree pigs, which respond well to a varied diet and can be reared outdoors in spring and summer.

We are constantly looking for new avenues to sell and promote pork products, centred around our farm shop. We continue to sell products to NI restaurants and have been actively working with Lisdergen Butchery, which has seen our pork sold in Northern Ireland's best eateries. Our products are proudly labelled as 'pedigree' and 'rare breed' pork, emphasising the premium quality and enhanced traceability we offer. Collaborations with local butcheries and celebrity endorsements have



considerably expanded our customer base. We are always monitoring our customers' preferences and purchasing trends and try to ensure we have plenty of stock and are selling the entire pig. We offer all traditional butchery cuts, semi-prepared roasting joints, dry-cured bacon, and a range of sausages and burgers.

Promoting pedigree pig breeds is our passion, and we actively sell and showcase our stock. We have a steady market for the sale of weaners

and breeding stock, guiding new breeders to bolster the promotion of native pig breeds. We are active ambassadors of the BPA, RBST and NFFN and are passionate about pigs and producing good quality pork.

We have embraced social media and use it to promote our pork and pedigree breeds. With a lot of hard work, we now have a sustainable pedigree pork enterprise, which Northern Ireland was missing.