

## Usk Show - through the eyes of a chief livestock steward.

6.45 am – I arrive on the show field, hotly pursued by our hardworking section secretary Caroline and together we set up the Agricultural marquee ready for action. I look across to the cattle lines and see some early arrivals already sprucing up their animals – go across to wish them well, and then proceed to General Secretary's marquee to see Nia (who's been there since dawn) and collect catalogues and radio. Back to Ag section, where more cattle and the first of the sheep are arriving.



7.00-10.00 a.m. Caroline and I manage to grab a cup of tea, and eventually the longed for bacon rolls arrive with Gerry on the buggy. The wonderful band of livestock stewards arrive one by one, report in to confirm which classes they are responsible for, I persuade them to read the steward's guidelines I have prepared, give them a badge and dispatch them to help with penning, sorting out the lorries and trailers (always one going the wrong way and blocking the system) and make sure exhibitors hand in cattle passports and sheep licences.

Fellow Chief Steward Glyn and deputy Pete take control and restore calm to the sheep section, sorting those extra pens needed, and Caroline keeps everything running smoothly (on the surface at least!) JPL Sound arrives to rig up PA system in marquee and announcers' caravan.



Judges begin to arrive, and as always Elsie is on hand to offer them refreshments. Ann and Rhys are busy checking passports and sheep movement licences. Before long the marquee is full of stewards, exhibitors, judges and miscellaneous members of the public and chaos reigns – 'have you got my numbers?' 'I've brought an extra ewe is that ok?' – 'I need more space for my bull "has my judge arrived yet'. Caroline asks announcers Paul and Gareth to give a 10 minute warning for commencement of judging, we match up judges with their stewards and lo and behold – peace reigns!



10.00—11.00 a.m. All the judges have arrived, stewards have collected rosettes and judging books and judging has commenced. Results recorders Cathryn and Jeff arrive and set up camp, ready for the first results to be delivered by young enthusiastic runner Will. Soon the dulcet tones of Paul and Gareth can be heard giving out results, interjected by judges giving their reasons. We are honoured by visits from the Patron and President and their wives. (The Chairman has popped in earlier, making his tour round all sections before starting his main ring duties.)



11.00 -12.00 midday I nip out of the marquee and take a quick tour round the cattle , sheep and pig judging rings, taking photos as I go. I meet many friends on route - the rings are now surrounded by large numbers of visitors, enjoying the wonderful spectacle of the best of Monmouthshire's livestock on show. Back to the marquee – the first of the judging books are being returned, and need checking before handing to the recorders



Judging of some sections has finished and stewards return with their judges, who are offered more refreshments, thanked profusely and given their complimentary lunch tickets. They say how much they have enjoyed judging, comment on the high standard of the stock (all from within the county) and hope they will be asked again in the future.



12.00– 1.00 p.m.

Glyn and Pete sort out the complex task of judging the Sheep Championships, of which there are many –Glyn’s blood pressure rises to an alarming level, but as always under his excellent management the task is eventually successfully completed. Meanwhile the judging of the young handlers competitions, pig, sheep and cattle, draw big crowds - the highest placed are awarded with red, blue and yellow rosettes and each and every competitors is rewarded with a rosette and sweets – so important to encourage these showmen of the future. With immense pleasure I present my cup to the best calf handler under 10 years old.



1.00-2.00 pm. I return to my car for a quick tidy up before temporarily deserting my post for the President’s lunch in the Members’ marquee - during which the main ring attraction – at the 175<sup>th</sup> show this is Camel Racing - takes place. The best part is definitely seeing Chairman Keith in his famous red bowler, and chief horse steward Ray, each astride of one of these extraordinary beasts!!



2.00-4.00 p.m.

I return to the livestock lines and take up the microphone to remind exhibitors that the Grand Parade will commence at 3.00 p.m. sharp, and that all prize winners are expected to parade. Of course at this point most exhibitors away from their stock, having a beer, lunch or visiting another section. I repeat my announcement periodically, and give the running order of the parade, each section to be headed by the champion. The wonderful band of stewards arrive to erect the barriers which allows the passage of the stock from the lines to the main ring. Public are instructed to leave the livestock lines and encouraged to go to the main ring to watch the parade – surely the highlight of the Show. The cattle, sheep and goats are assembling ready to go when the message comes informing us that the pony club mounted games are running 5 minutes late – so hold fire!

We get the ok to go – I lead the exhibitors and their charges into the ring and send this spectacular parade of Monmouthshire's finest livestock on its way round the outside of the ring, and then stand on the precise spot as directed by Grand Parade Steward, Chairman Keith, ready to line the exhibits up in front of the members area. Phew – for the first time, this year I get it right and the stock are lined up exactly as requested by the boss!





The Dairy, Beef, Sheep and Goat champions are brought forward in front of the member's enclosure, and presented with champion sashes by Patron David and President Gwyn. Auctioneer Lyndon's informed and clearly delivered commentary pays due tribute to the prize winners, and as the cattle, sheep and goats leave the ring, the horses enter and I listen to the horse section commentary as I follow the livestock out, pausing to take a photo of 3 key players, Lyndon, Keith and Glyn.



My duties for the day over, I embark on a walk round the rest of the show – but my tired legs won't carry me far – I look round the homecraft marquee , never ceasing to be amazed at the quality and range of entries, check the success( or otherwise) of my photographic entry, visit the horticultural section and one or two stands and before long it is time for the final event of the day – the ascent of the hot air balloon. I have a quick drink ( lemonade of course!) in the members, visit a weary but happy Nia in the Secretary's marquee , and then join the queue of departing vehicles , happily reflecting on the completion of another wonderful Usk Show – oh how I shall miss it this year, but look forward with optimism to another bumper show in 2021.

