

CONTINENTAL CROSS BREEDS

Summary

Obtained from crossing Continental cattle with British native breeds, the Continental Cross retains many characteristics useful to conservation grazing. Fairly hardy, yet placid and easy to handle, the Continental Cross is a good maintenance grazer. It is widely available throughout the UK and has an established and widespread commercial market.

Hardiness – fairly hardy, although not suitable for most year-round grazing systems.

- *Hardiness* - generally not so hardy as British native breeds, thus most herds are wintered under cover.
- *Supplementary feeding* – generally necessary for animals that are outwintered.

Physical Attributes & Husbandry – a placid, easy to handle breed.

- *Size* – generally larger and heavier than British native breeds, owing to the Continental influence. Charolais and Blonde d'Aquitaine cows average 700-900kgs; Limousin and Belgian Blue pure breeds weigh 650–800kgs. The crosses are a little lighter according to the other breeds in its genetic make up.
- *Handling* – Generally quiet, placid and easy to handle. On many of the sites listed overleaf, stock were given a small daily ration of nuts to keep them tame and facilitate inspection.
- *Fencing* – single strand electric fencing usually sufficient, provided the animals are not hungry.
- *Flies and ticks* – no particular concerns expressed by graziers.

Grazing Characteristics – a good maintenance grazer, most suitable for drier sites.

- *Browsing ability* – no noticeable impact on scrub. On contacts overleaf, mainly young stock in use; older stock, if available, may browse a little more.
- *Grazing ability* – see table overleaf for site-specific information. In general seem most likely to graze coarser vegetation whilst it is young and still tender.
- *Poaching impact* – likely to be substantial on wet or soft ground, due to the heavier weight of these breeds. Unlikely to be suitable for wintering outdoors for the same reason.



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Interaction with the Public – generally placid, although stock which are fed supplements may unwittingly intimidate visitors.

- *Reaction to people* – may approach visitors at speed if used to supplementary feed, although then generally moves away and ignores.
- *Reaction to dogs* – not disturbed by dogs unless has young calves at foot.
- *Bulls* – most continental bulls are placid in a herd situation.

Marketability – fast growth rates and good conformation make Continental cross breeds commercially viable and thus widely available.

- *Commercial viability* – the majority of suckler herds and young animals available from weaning to fattening (10-20 month period) are Continental cross breeds, which are favoured due to their good conformation (in terms of meat production) and fast growth rates which facilitates fattening within the 30 month period allowable.
- *Fattening* – No records amongst contacts listed overleaf of animals fattening off conservation sites. Young stock readily put on weight on pasture of high nutrient status or with supplementary feed.

Sites where Continental Cross cattle are in use & contacts

| SITE NAME | HABITAT | DETAILS AVAILABLE | CONTACT |
|--|--|---|----------------------------------|
| North Warren Suffolk RSPB | Lowland coastal grassland. 100 ha | Mixed variety of cross breeds used across the site. Grazing mid May – end Oct. Stock are all young and are finished off site. Good at maintenance grazing. Eat young growth on Soft Rush after it has been topped but will not make much impression on Saltmarsh Rush which the Red Poll that are on site do eat. | Rob Macklin 01728 688481 |
| Ribble Estuary Lancashire English Nature | Lowland grassland & saltmarsh. 1000 ha | 750 – 800 cattle used across the site April – October. Animals removed to lay back land for high tides. | Dick Lambert 01704 225624 |
| Nene Washes Cambridgeshire RSPB | Inland lowland wet grassland. 287 ha | 200 cows (+ followers) with 200 store cattle of a wide range of continental crosses grazed May–Nov. More cattle in years of high productivity. Tend to avoid old Reed Sweet-grass, clumps of Tufted Hair–grass, Creeping Thistle, sedges and rushes. Common Reed preferentially eaten. | Charlie Kitchin 01733 205140 |
| Aylesbeare & Harpford Common Devon RSPB | Lowland wet heath. 30 ha | Grazing since 1989 with 9 cows (+calves) of various crosses, during May–October. Avoid dead Purple Moor-grass and Black Bog-rush, unlike the Devon cattle which grazed the site the previous year. Will not browse gorse. Trample bracken as they lie up in the drier areas on the heath. | Lesley Kerry 01395 567880 |
| Erewash Meadows, Long Clough, Priestcliffe Lees, Rose End Meadow Derbyshire Derbyshire Wildlife Trust | Semi-improved and upland limestone grassland. | All sites have had a long history of grazing / hay making. Young stock of mixed breeding used for summer grazing. The cattle are not trampling bracken which could be due to low stocking density or browsing scrub. Chemical and mechanical control is therefore being used. On Erewash meadows, the cattle are not eating rushes or Reed Sweet-grass. At Long Clough cattle were put onto the site earlier for the first time in 1999 to see if they would have more of an impact upon bracken. At Priestcliffe Lees, the cattle are used to graze the sward hard to benefit species such as Frog Orchid. | Richard Spowage 01332 756610 |
| Moor Farm, Snipedales, Baston Fen & other sites Lincolnshire Lincolnshire Wildlife Trust | Wide range of sites of varying size including riverside pasture, wet & dry heath, coastal grassland & saltmarsh. | Suckler herd at Sowerdale; elsewhere, young stock. Grazing April – Oct. on most sites. At Moor Farm the cattle are keeping birch regeneration off cut stumps under control. At Snipedales the site had been neglected and clumps of Hair-grass were increasing. The cattle graze the young growth on the clump, thus killing it off and as a result sward diversity has improved since the re-introduction of grazing. | Barrie Wilkinson 01507 526667 |

References