



Originally imported by the Pilgrims at Plymouth Colony in 1623, the Devon cattle breed dwindled to only a few animals. There are now some 500 registered cattle.

America's "First Purebred Cattle" Making a Comeback

Shortly after arriving in the New World in about 1623, the Pilgrims at Plymouth Colony imported several Devon cattle from England. Their plan was to use them both as work animals and also as a source of milk, butter and meat.

According to most reports, they chose the medium-sized breed because it's very docile and had long served the people of Devonshire as oxen. They were also thought to be more intelligent than most of the other English breeds at the time.

John Wheelock, a Colchester, Vermont, dairy farmer, says the cattle that descended from that small herd eventually populated much of New England.

New Englanders depended heavily on their cattle, and, he says, for some 200 years, nearly all of their cattle were red. "The predominant breed was the Devon in the early years. Later, the colonists brought over Durhams (known in the U.S. as Milking Shorthorns). Not only did Devon cattle help clear and work the land, they later pulled carts and wagons as the settlers moved West," he adds.

The relative importance of Devon cattle to the Northeast is one reason Wheelock and other Devon enthusiasts organized the American Milking Devon Association in 1978. "The breed as it used to exist had dwindled to only a few animals," Wheelock says.

Part of the reason for that was that English breeders began selecting for beef. "Modern Devon bulls look more like big red locomotives," says Wheelock. "We felt we needed a breed association for our multipurpose cattle."

Most of the Milking Devon herds in the U.S. are small. Wheelock mingles his herd of 12 Devons with his better-milking Holsteins. Although the herds are small, there are now some 500 registered cattle in the herd book.

An American Milking Devon bull will top the scale at 1,600 to 1,800 lbs. Cows typically

weigh 950 to 1,200 lbs. Birth weight for a calf is 75 to 100 lbs. "There are several distinct herd families in the U.S., so there is some variation in size, but for the most part these cattle are still about the same size, conformation and temperament as the ones that arrived here in 1623," he says.

Devon cattle are still being trained and used as oxen. "Nearly every county or community fair in this area has an oxen pull, and the favored breed for this is Devon," Wheelock says.

"They're far superior to horses for working in the woods or for doing field work. If you're out plowing and hit a rock, oxen stop and wait for you to decide what to do. Horses have been known to spook. Sometimes, people get hurt. Other times, the animals break their traces and run off. Oxen can be just as fast as horses at fieldwork, too."

As oxen, they're fast and sturdy, but fine boned. "Because their bones are smaller than those of similar sized breeds, muscle as a percentage of total weight is higher. They're slower growing than beef breeds today, so it takes longer to get them to market weight. Marbling of the meat is good, but the percentage of fat tends to be lower with Devons," Wheelock says.

He artificially inseminates his Devon cows using semen drawn mostly from his own bulls. "I only sell semen in special cases and rarely sell calves," he says.

"As a breed, Milking Devons in the modern world don't make a lot of economic sense," he says. "Still, they're good cattle to have around."

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Wearing a T-shirt can keep a dog calm and collected during violent storms, says Beth Szilagyi, Petersburg, Ill.

T-Shirt Quiets Storm-Scared Dogs

It's not clear where the idea started but wearing a T-shirt reportedly quiets dogs that are afraid of thunder and lightning.

Readers of the State Journal Register in central Illinois have been sending in letters to the paper about the idea. Beth Szilagyi, Petersburg, Ill., had great results. Her dog was unusually calm and collected during a violent storm when wearing a T-shirt.

"Normally, during a storm, the dog tries to get behind immovable furniture while panting, drooling, and scurrying from room to room. As soon as I put the T-shirt on her, for whatever bizarre reason, she was like a different dog. She even sat with us while we watched the storm out the back door.

"Amazing, hysterical, ridiculous, but it works."

Turbine-Powered Tractor Rolled Out Of Mothballs

Judging from the sloped hood on this IH HT-340 tractor, you might think the experimental tractor was built within the past few years. But you'd be wrong.

Displayed at Red Power Days in Penfield, Illinois last summer, the tractor dates back to 1961 when it was built by IH as part of a research project to develop a hydrostatic turbine-powered tractor.

The tractor incorporated hydrostatic drive and a gas-powered turbine engine, built by Solar Aircraft Company, an IH subsidiary at that time. Since it had many parts in common with the IH 340 being produced at the time, the tractor became the HT-340.

The Solar Aircraft engine mounted in the HT-340 produced 80 hp, but weighed a measly 60 lbs. According to legend, the engine was similar to a helicopter engine and ran at a constant speed of 57,000 rpm's. Substantial gear reduction was required to couple it to the hydrostatic pump, but that added only another 30 lbs. to the weight.



This IH HT-340 tractor was built in 1961 as part of a research project to develop a hydrostatic turbine-powered tractor.

In 1957, Ford Tractor also produced a turbine-powered experimental tractor called the Typhoon. While IH's 340 was a success with respect to its hydrostatic drive, both IH and Ford deemed turbine engines too noisy and inefficient for farm use.

The HT-340 is now the property of the Smithsonian Institution.