

To all my Generous Sponsors!

Before I begin my story of adventure to England in March, I would be remiss if I didn't thank all of you again for the wonderful opportunity you gave me to take part in the National Stars Competition . My original sponsorship request letter to you explained how I got to be there but once again must thank the Royal Agricultural Winter Fair and 4H Canada for giving me the opportunity to compete to even attend! I would also make special mention of my grandparents, Robert and Carolyn Ridler of Maple Stone Farm, here in East Garafraxa Ontario. I couldn't have done it without them.

I promised to send you this report when I got back. However, sometimes promises meant cannot always be promises kept (on time at least!) and life lessons sometimes interfere. About 10 days or so after I returned, I developed a "virus" so to speak and as the days passed it looked more like chicken pox! Of course, as I had been out of the country, the health system took control and I had to be tested. It all worked out o.k. but I was, at the time, being "tested" at the University of Guelph for finals in the completion of my third year studies. Fortunately, I could do two of my three exams online at home but the 3rd one had to be personally attended. I was given permission to go and could not believe it when my results were posted, I was once again named on the Dean's List! One more year to go.

The trip itself was an experience that came with a lot of learning. We stayed at Melview Farms, an operation primarily running Angus cattle, settled in the countryside of Dymock, Gloucestershire. The Westaway family offered incredible hospitality to Team Canada, allowing us to stay in their home, and welcome us as if we were their family. The two heifers we were assigned were two black Angus breeding heifers, to which we got to work on right away to prepare for the show in the middle of the week. While all three of us had never worked together before, we soon figured out what our skillsets allowed us to achieve for preparation, and who was to do what in the ring....a lot different than what is done in the ring in Canada! The National Show Stars competition is something that's different for all involved, and not just the Canadian team. It involves showing two animals per three individual handlers, two of which lead the heifers, and the third contributes to the performance by giving answers in a ringside interview while also acting as ringman themselves for their team. The competition also included a stock judging component on the day of set up, with one individual giving reasons to the judge. On show day, teams are allotted certain time frames to prepare their animals, from washing and drying to clipping and fitting before the show actually begins. Judges and stewards walk the barns and mark each team not only on their handling of their cattle, but the presentation of the tie pack, the displays, and how the team works together. In the ring, keeping with the U.K. tradition, we showed in ties and white lab coats. In the ring, in this competition, the cattle were expected to walk two abreast, only stopping and setting up as the judge sees fit while the interviews of the third member are given at the side of the ring. Overall, Team Canada placed 13th. However, the scores were incredibly close and any small number of points could have changed the placings drastically.

While the competition was the focal point of the trip, to enlighten us of what showing in an English cattle show is like, (quite different from Canada!) we did have the opportunity to spend some time on our own. We visited many different cattle operations all over the Midlands of England, including Daylesford Organic, Dinmoore Limousines and Shorthorns, and Sterling Simmentals. Also, we visited Weston's Cider, Cadbury World, and spent a day touring London like tourists do....shopping at Harrod's (we could only afford to look!), Buckingham Palace, went up on the EYE which was the opportunity of a lifetime.

In terms of British cattle, it was a learning experience from the way cattle are shown to life as a general whole. We learned that what they value in the show ring is an animal that is going to produce high quality beef. Their cattle are bred to be larger, with a focus on deep muscling from the top of the chine in a diagonal line down to the hock and that top half of the animal is focused on for the most important cuts of meat. Reflected in the show ring, the animals are bred for such purposes, creating tall and large cattle that are clean through the gut, and do not grow half as much hair as we do. In fact, when clipping for the cattle ring, it is custom to shave the bottom portion of their bellies clean off. While there were rather prominent differences between Canadian and British cattle, there were some similarities regarding the views of the farmers desiring to continue to better their cattle and do well for themselves in the show ring. Overall, the exchange to England has been a once in a lifetime opportunity that I was all too excited to be a part of, one of three chosen to represent Canada and the skills 4H has taught me over the years. There have been friendships made that will last a lifetime, as well as gaining important international connections in the cattle industry.

Thank you again, to all of you for helping to provide me this amazing trip and to show cattle across the world.

*"Alexa Avelar"*