

Kitson & Sons Butchers poised to beef up Valentine's Day

Kitson & Sons Butchers is set to beef up this year's Valentine's celebrations by serving up meat from some of the best prime cattle in the country at its three shops in North Yorkshire and Cleveland.

Owner Anthony Kitson created history late last year when buying the overall supreme champion beef cattle at all three of the country's principal Christmas primestock shows – the English Winter Fair, the Royal Welsh Winter Fair and LiveScot.

For good measure, he had earlier also secured the champion bullock from the high profile 2016 East of England Smithfield Festival in Peterborough. It is believed to be the first time that an independent family-run retail butchers has achieved this unique four-timer.

Mr Kitson explained: "Having bought a total of 116 prime cattle from across the country for our customers' 2016 Christmas tables, we decided to retain the four principals until the New Year for our Valentine's trade."

They have been further improved by regular customers, the Atkinson family, from Beck Hill Farm, Scorton, who look after cattle for Kitsons and from whom the business also sources prime lambs on a weekly basis.

When viewed together on the hoof, Mr Kitson said he favoured the Welsh champion, but that all changed when it came to the cutting edge of the ground-breaking initiative.

Mr Kitson hosted a visit from LiveScot champion Wilson Peters, from Cuilt in Perthshire, and English Winter Fair champion James May, of Bromsgrove, joined by officials from both organisations. (Thursday, Jan 12)

Following a tour of Kitson & Sons Butchers' Northallerton shop, the party enjoyed lunch at Thirsk Auction Mart, before journeying to JA Jewitt Meats' abattoir at Middlestone Moor, Spenymoor, where the four carcasses were hanging for inspection.

Armed with butcher's knife, Mr Kitson then cut into all the carcasses and everyone present agreed that they were first-rate. The group, joined by Jewitt's Michael Jewitt, then compared notes to choose their own personal overall "Great British Beef" champion, awarding the crown to the LiveScot victor, closely followed by the Smithfield, English and Welsh champions.

"To be fair, there wasn't a lot in it, but when I put the knife through them we all concurred that the Scottish title winner just got the nod because of the colour, lushness and richness of the flesh, coupled with the flecking of the fat, and desirability and saleability of the meat, which is the single most important factor as far as we are concerned.. It just makes you want to eat it," explained Mr Kitson.

All four champions are now being fully matured to ensure the meat – roasts, steaks and all the other popular cuts – is in perfect eating condition, ahead of going on sale for the Valentine's trade at Kitson & Sons Butchers' shops in High Street, Northallerton, Stephenson Way, Stockton-on-Tees, and North End, Hutton Rudby.

Mr Kitson added: "It has been a memorable journey and one thing's for sure. Our customers can now look forward to savouring some of the best meat that money can buy – and at our normal prices. Let's call it our Valentine's treat to lovers – young and not so young – out there!"

Further information on title-winning cattle bought by Kitsons:

English Winter Fair in Staffordshire – supreme champion Limousin-sired heifer from Worcestershire breeder James May, of Bromsgrove. Liveweight 670kg, carcass 465kg, KO% 69.5%, grade E2

Scottish Winter Fair at LiveScot in Lanark - supreme champion Charolais-cross heifer from Perthshire's Wilson Peters, of Cuilt, near Crieff. Live 620kg, carcass 435kg, KO% 70, grade E4L.

Royal Welsh Fair in Builth Wells - supreme champion Limousin-sired steer from Scottish breeders Blair Duffton and Rebecca Stewart, from Huntly in Aberdeenshire. Live 640kg, carcass 439kg, KO% 68.6%, grade E3.

East of England Smithfield Festival – champion Limousin-sired steer from Dickie Wright, of Bowers Hill, Somerset. Live 588kg, carcass 391kg, KO% 66.5%, grade E3