

28th March 2019

**Adam Henson at the Bath & West Show**

Television presenter Adam Henson will be visiting the Royal Bath & West Show on Thursday, 30 May – we catch up with him to find out why the Show holds a special place in his heart, and to get his thoughts on the future of farming.

Adam Henson has become something of a household name since he was chosen as the new Countryfile presenter in 2001. Watched by between five million and seven million people every week, the programme brings rural life into the heart of peoples’ homes. But he wasn’t always this famous, and he keeps his feet firmly planted on the ground at his tenanted family farm and Farm Park in the Cotswolds.

“My passport occupation says farmer, although it doesn’t feel that way at the moment,” he laughs. “But farming is my passion and true love. I grew up on this farm and my dad and I used to take animals to compete at the Bath & West Show, so I’ve been going since I was a boy.” More recently, he has been invited back as a judge, and this year he will be paying a VIP visit, exploring many other aspects of the Show.

“It’s a fantastic show; the head of shows Alan Lyons has got farming at his heart: My dad set him up with his first Cotswold sheep.”

So what is Adam most looking forward to at the Show? “As a livestock person I love going round the cattle lines - but the great thing about the Show is its diversity,” he says. “Shows are a very accessible face of agriculture to bridge the urban divide and help people to learn about food and farming. But most of all, it’s about having a fun day out.”

**Young farmer celebrations**

Adam’s first port of call at the Show will be a visit to the Young Farmers Club marquee, to celebrate Somerset YFC’s 85th anniversary. “It’s a remarkable organization that welcomes those from inside and outside farming – it’s so much more than a farming club,” he explains. “It’s also about public speaking, events, and building confidence, relationships and communication skills.”

Next on the agenda is a visit to the food and drink area, including the British Cheese and Cider Championships. “Food and drink are a highlight at shows – I love the whole field to fork story and being able to talk to incredible producers and experience their passion,” says Adam. “Most of the food and drink at the Bath & West Show is from the South West region – if you’re buying from someone local then you’re putting money back into the area.”

Having his own farm shop, Adam often comes home from shows with ideas – new cheeses or ciders from award-winning producers. “I love cheese and I do like cider, although it makes my knees go wobbly so I better not drink too much!”

**Protecting rare breeds**

Having sampled a tipple or two, Adam will then be visiting the Great British Dogs feature, which profiles some of the nation’s rarest dog breeds. “I’m a big fan of dogs – they’re my favourite animal, and my new book ‘A farmer and his dog’ tells the story of dogs throughout my life. It’s such a travesty that we have so many vulnerable breeds that are part of our living heritage and are falling by the wayside.”

Adam’s father was the founder of the Rare Breeds Survival Trust, and the Cotswold Farm Park is doing its best to preserve and rejuvenate endangered native breeds. “Because of their genetic diversity they suit different climates, topographies and farming systems – and they also have a place in the future of farming,” he explains. “Also, more people want to know where their food comes from, and there are some very positive stories behind our rare and traditional breeds. But we can’t just preserve them as antiques – they need a market outlet and purpose.”

The farm has recently purchased an in-foal Suffolk Punch mare; one of the rarest horse breeds, so Adam is particularly looking forward to paying a visit to the Heavy Horse section of the Show. “They are just such magnificent animals.

The Safety Zone – next on Adam’s agenda - may not sound exciting, but it’s a critical aspect of rural life, and an important factor in encouraging new entrants into the farming industry, he says. “We need to provide a professional and safe environment for our staff – farming is a dangerous industry and we are striving to do better. It’s also a great opportunity for the general public to learn about the countryside code and staying safe around animals.”

**Tractor Ted**

For younger visitors, Tractor Ted is sure to be a hit, although Adam is a little old for mini tractor rides. “It’s a very good vehicle for educating kids about farming, and we sell Tractor Ted stuff in our shop,” he says. “My children are now 16 and 20, and they help out with lambing and with the farm park, although they’re both looking at careers elsewhere, too.”

For Adam, the pinnacle of the day will be commentating on the Grand Cattle Parade in the main ring. “It’s an honour to be asked, and I will really enjoy doing that, although it’s a bit nerve wracking. I better make sure I know all my breeds,” he jokes. “It’s an amazing sight, to get all those well behaved, huge animals being led by their proud owners and staff.”

Showing cattle is a great way to demonstrate individual breeds, and winning rosettes helps to add value to breeding stock - but it’s also a superb social hobby, explains Adam. “You get to learn from other breeders and compare your stock with others to see how well you’re doing. It’s also a great opportunity to speak to the general public – the agricultural community is getting much better at communicating.”

**Countryfile success**

Countryfile has been part of that success, triggering a spate of other farming and rural programmes on television. Although sometimes farmers criticise it for having a simplistic view, it’s important to remember the target market, he adds. “It could be an eight or 80 year-old, living in a flat in Hackney who’s never been onto farm. There’s a real balancing act, informing the uninformed without insulting the experts!”

And when it comes to his own farm, Adam is anything but simplistic. “We have a joint venture which takes our arable acreage to 4,000 acres. We share machinery and a good team of operators, and have tip-top technology because we can spread the overheads over a wider acreage,” he explains.

He uses GPS and soil mapping to apply variable rate seed and fertiliser, and decent kit means he can be spot on in terms of timeliness and accuracy. “To succeed in anything you’ve got to try and be the best. Attention to detail is essential.”

**Brexit thoughts**

However, with Brexit around the corner, it’s also important to spread the risk and avoid having all your eggs in one basket, adds Adam. “I’m quite concerned that the Government won’t put the checks and measures in place for cheap imported food that could be produced way outside the high standards that our legislation provides in this country. Our farmers won’t be able to compete. We’re going to have to be quick on our feet and able to move with the times.”

As well as the farm park, Adam has recently diversified into camping and hosting horse rides. He also has his jobs in the media, has written three books with one on the way, offers farm consultancy, and adds value to his commodities by processing barley into beer and oilseed rape into cold pressed oil. “Not everyone can add new income streams to their farm, but it’s important to be open-minded.”

**Adam Henson in a minute**

**What’s your favourite moment on TV?**

Probably when they took me back to Australia to muster a huge herd of cattle in helicopters and then on horseback. That was amazing – as I child I always wanted to be a cowboy, so it was very special to do that.

**Favourite moment off-screen?**

Seeing my children born.

**Last book you read?**

I’m really bad at reading books. Does Farmers Weekly count?

**Favourite food?**

I love traditional home-made puddings – after a roast rib of beef.

**Favourite place?**

I love the Cotswolds – there’s no place like home. But I also love the coast – the Western Isles of Scotland are just stunning.

**Tell us something not many people know about you**

I got an A in my ceramics ‘O’ Level and considered a career in pottery. My nephew’s actually a very good potter – Jack Bridges; look him up!

**Box**

The Royal Bath & West Show will be held on 29 May – 1 June. Children - for the first time - can go free during the May half term, with a £5 discount on early adult bookings. Tickets are available from the website: [www.bathandwest.com](http://www.bathandwest.com) or by calling 0844 776 6777.