

Hustle

Kyle Lemmon's work ethic helped him earn the 2023 Hereford Herdsman of the Year award.

by *Katie Maupin Miller*

Kyle Lemmon's foray into the cattle industry started by happenstance with a single, bred cow mixed into a truckload of bull calves. Kendall Lemmon, Kyle's father and first-generation farmer, constantly worked to diversify his farming operation in Manchester, Md. And, when he ordered a truckload of bulls to cut and feed out, that surprise cow sparked a passion in Kyle, the 2023 Hereford Herdsman of the Year. Kyle bought her crossbred heifer calf for \$50. She was his first show heifer and recip cow.

With the know-how that lone heifer calf generated, Kyle selected his first purebred Hereford heifer when he was 9 years old, buying it from Denny Stockdale at the Maryland Hereford Association Sale. You could say the rest is history, but young Kyle had a good eye. That first Hereford heifer he purchased won her class at the Junior National Hereford Expo, and her first calf out of Purple Tonic topped the Eastern National.

Kyle's dad taught him to hustle with the family juggling hay, straw, trucking, raising turkeys and row crops. This relentless work ethic cemented Kyle's successful junior show career and a state wrestling championship. And this tenacious never-say-never mentality pushed Kyle deeper into the cattle industry after graduation, continuing to build his Hereford herd, then called KL Lemmon Cattle Co., while traveling across the nation to prepare and fit cattle. Kyle spent a formative stint with Schaeffer Show Cattle in Hagerstown, Ind. But it was his time

on the West Coast that proved life-changing when he met his future wife and California girl, Nicole, while helping her family fit cattle.

Their coast-to-coast love story and many cheap Spirit Air flights culminated in the couple's wedding on Aug. 25, 2018. Today, the pair is literally raising their children — Blakely, 3, and Kashton, 1 — in the barn. They work on the family's businesses from sunrise to sunset — raising quality cattle, trucking straw, marketing beef and running an IVF satellite — before discussing at the dinner table which cows to flush.

Kyle considers his family to be his greatest achievement. He jokes that Nicole is the operation's secretary, and admittedly, she keeps the books. But he grabbed her hand to drag her to the middle of the ring when he was honored as Herdsman because he couldn't do it without her.

Time and toil

The time the couple puts into Lemmon Cattle Co. is reflected in their stock. Anyone standing ringside can see that Lemmon cattle are well presented, but it is also clear Kyle has a type. He likes his cattle cowy, stout and productive, and when that big-middled heifer has a beautiful front end, it is icing on the cake.

"I like my cows a little bit more shapely," Kyle says. "I like them stouter; I like them rubbing the chute sides."

Kyle's commitment to productive, profitable cows drives some of the operation's leading cow families,

such as D32 and 111F. Both have not only left their mark in Manchester but also with heifer and flush buyers around the country. His production-centric selection for stout, maternal cattle also explains why Kyle loves hauling pairs, even if they're sometimes challenging to take down the road. He also enjoys highlighting some of the operation's bulls in the showing, like KLL KLD Triumph 4J ET and RW KLD Ruger 109 7029 ET. Whether he's holding the halter of a show heifer or herd sire, Kyle strives to make sure they're well-presented.



Kyle Lemmon, of Lemmon Cattle Co., was named the 2023 Hereford Herdsman of the Year during Cattlemen's Congress. Pictured (l-r): Chad Breeding, American Hereford Association (AHA) Board, National Hereford Queen Madison Katzenberger, Kyle Lemmon, Nicole Lemmon and AHA executive vice president Jack Ward.

He jokes that during his time in the cattle industry, the only thing that has changed more than his hairline is the immaculate attention to detail it takes to show cattle at the highest level. Where once only legs were fitted, today, the entire calf is sculpted to put its best foot forward. And that level of presentation takes a lot of extras, as Kyle calls them.

“I think it’s those little extras that really help you get there to the winner’s circle, whether it’s an extra bucket, an extra pan of feed or an extra hour spent blowing to straighten out that Hereford hair,” he says.

And, as you can imagine, those extras take a lot of time. Time is Kyle’s biggest challenge.

“Time away from home and your family. Time spent not having enough time to get everything done in a day. The amount of time it takes for a cow to have a calf after you get her bred. The time spent getting that calf to saleable age or getting a heifer into production,” he explains. “It just seems like we’re always fighting the time aspect of things.”

As hard as time may be to come by, hard times are the bittersweet rewards that keep Kyle pushing forward.

“I think one of the most rewarding things is getting through the hard times as a family. You know, getting through those times where the money’s a little tight, or you lose a calf. Those kinds of times build you up and help you get stronger. You know, iron sharpens iron,” Kyle says. “Getting through those hard times, I think, makes you a better person, and everything seems a little bit more rewarding.”

Kyle is quick to admit that whether you’re playing sports, showing cattle or simply existing, you will likely have more losses than wins. Loss, failures and mess-ups tend to be a messy part of life. But they’re necessary for growth, and a certain amount of persistence is essential to success.

“Whether it’s with the cow herd or in the showring or whatever it might be, you will have some losses. You’re going to lose some calves. You’re going to have some cows not take AI, or you’re not going to win a certain show. Never give up, stay true to yourself and keep moving forward,” Kyle says.



“I appreciate how the Hereford industry has shaped my life,” says Kyle Lemmon (r) pictured with his family (l to r), Blakely, Nicole and Kashton. “It’s full of my closest friends. It’s helping me raise my family.”

Thankful and humble

Looking forward, Kyle can’t think of a better place to raise their children. The people in the Hereford business have served as friends, mentors, supporters and steep competition throughout his time in the business. Now, Kyle and Nicole can surround their kids with this network of amazing people. While the couple certainly hopes Blakely and Kashton have a passion for cattle, they undoubtedly want to instill the same work ethic and hustle into the next generation. They started Blakely’s Beef, a farm-raised beef business, to beef up their daughter’s college fund and provide her the opportunity to take the reins of a mature business if it interests her when she’s older. The couple is already searching for an enterprise for young Kashton, too.

When Kyle thinks of young people in the industry, he hopes they have the grit to never give up on their dream. Not long ago, Kyle was in the middle of his junior showman career, watching the Hereford Herdsman being selected in Denver, and dreaming that one day he would be worthy of such an honor. Now, having been named the 2023 Hereford Herdsman of the Year, he is humbled.

“You’re voted upon by your peers. I think that that’s a very humbling and very honoring experience. I feel very blessed. It’s always been a goal and a dream of mine since I was little. I think that it is probably my biggest accomplishment in the Hereford business to date,” Kyle says.

But, most of all, he is grateful for this crazy, wonderful ride.

“I have a deep appreciation for the Hereford industry,” Kyle says. “I think it’s made me a better man, and it has allowed me to do what I love every day.” **HW**