

# BEST OF BRITISH CATTLE

Our traditional breeds of cattle have lively support from passionate breeders who take enormous care to ensure they survive and thrive

WORDS KATE GATACRE



Clifford with his Gloucester

## GLOUCESTERS

An ancient breed, the Gloucester was originally tri-purpose, being used as oxen as well as for dairy and beef. A striking-looking animal, it has a dark mahogany body and a black head and legs, a white stripe passing from the small of the back, over the tail and udder and covering its underline and mid-length horns that are white and tipped with black, sweeping upwards. In 1972, just one herd remained, despite the fact that this had once been an incredibly popular breed. Today, single Gloucester cheese is protected, while Double Gloucester isn't – the former was the cheese usually consumed on the farm, while the latter was exported all over the world in the 18th century, including to the US. Clifford Freeman, who farms in Gloucestershire, near Redmarley, says the breed is exceptionally

quiet: "They are very docile and easy to deal with. The breed calves easily and has a very steady level of lactation, meaning they will have a long period of milking after calving. My father bought his first Gloucesters in 1971 and he had a cow that milked for two years despite not calving. The beef is fantastic – beautifully marbled and with a lot of flavour. Today they are more of a dual-purpose breed than a dairy one, as they haven't been improved by cross-breeding with Holsteins, unlike many others, so just don't produce the volume." Clifford's cattle are grass fed, but he says, "They don't stay out all winter, more because they poach the ground than because they can't deal with the cold. Having said that, the breed was originally farmed on river meadows, so aren't hardy to tougher conditions."