

2018 ROYAL SHOW – FINAL REPORT

In line with increased national confidence, the 168th Royal Show – in partnership with First National Bank, Coca-Cola and East Coast Radio - opened its gates to the public on 25 May on a positive note.

The ensuing ten days saw good weather throughout, and with meaningful livestock entries, an informative and eclectic mix of exhibits, and a superb entertainment programme, the show appeared to meet the expectations of exhibitors and the public alike.

This also translated into improved attendance with visitor numbers increasing by 4 386, from 124 664 in 2017 to 129 050.

2018 was also the first occasion in many years where the Royal Show received national television coverage; this by way of a Multichoice promo in terms of a trade-exchange arrangement.

Following a break of eight years, the Royal Show hosted 160 visitors from Durban who arrived by train. All-in-all, a pleasing excursion, with much of the journey under traditional steam power.

Excluding livestock, 428 exhibitors participated against 432 in 2017.

Pleasingly, livestock entries were well up, with comparative numbers spanning the years 2016 through 2018, as follows:

	2018	2017	2016
Goats, fat lamb and sheep breeds	*681	558	473
Cattle	662	504	498
Birds	2 287	2 200	2 501
Rabbits	439	432	412
Total	4 069	3 694	3 884

* Inclusive of 160 Indigenous Veld Goats sold on auction on Saturday, 2 June

There were 500 stud cattle on show, with the following breeds being well represented: Angus, Ayrshire, Brahman (red and grey), Braunvieh, Dexters, Hereford, Holstein, Jersey, Limousin, Sussex, Simbra, Simmentaler and Pinzgauer.

As has become the norm, the largest number of entries emanated from Brahman, closely followed by the Simmentaler and Simbra breeds.

Also, with the committed support of the KZN Jersey Club and significant sponsorship from Afgri, 'new life' was breathed into the 2018 Royal Show dairy section.

By way of shared transport, a syndicate of Vryburg farmers participated under the banner of the Vryburg Beef Study Group, and they alone brought 50 steers into the commercial mix.

The heifer classes likewise saw an improvement in numbers, and it is expected that the commercial focus of this competition will find increasing appeal. Indeed, as far as can be ascertained, the Royal is the only South African event where a tailored competition for this class can be showcased.

The Cattle Expo saw informative displays on the part of Braunvieh, Nguni, Dexters, Droughtmaster, Limousin, Beefmaster, Wagyu, and the RPO 'Red Meat Steer' (dressed in a descriptive blanket illustrating various cuts).

Total sheep and goat numbers stood at 681, compared to 558 in 2017.

By way of Ile de France, Dorpers, Dormers, Suffolks and Hampshire Downs, 244 sheep stud entries were received. These were complemented by 144 fat lambs and 293 goats.

The Royal has for the past 15 years hosted the Hampshire Down Nationals, and this small but prestigious event was perpetuated in 2018.

The 2018 Lanbouweekblad Royal Show Carcass Competition held on Tuesday evening, 29 May, saw buyers bidding for the country's top carcasses, in the presence of an audience of 200 plus. Brandon Leer, acknowledged to be one of South Africa's top auctioneers, returned to oversee the event.

170 cattle, 133 lambs and 128 pigs (48 from emerging and 80 from commercial breeders) were entered.

Once again, all three champion carcasses were purchased by The Oyster Box Hotel, the culinary excellence of which is nationally acknowledged.

Viewed against the guaranteed ruling prices of R47 per kg for beef, R71 per kg for lamb and R18 per kg for pork; the auction saw relatively good prices being obtained in the case of lamb and pork, whilst that of beef remained subdued.

The design and choreography of the Sheep and Natural Fibre Expo was subject to a make-over in 2018, whereby strategically positioned wooden pallets replaced the traditional exhibition shell-scheme. The section continues to be a catalyst of interest and information, and with a mix of commercial exhibits, including artisanal food fair, indigenous livestock and interactive demonstrations, the Expo was well received.

Following its successful introduction to the Royal Show in 2017, the KZN leg of the Toyota Young Auctioneers Competition was held in the cattle arena on the Monday evening with Matthew Fyvie and Fiso Hadebe (a scholar from Weston Agricultural College) winning the senior and junior categories respectively.

Aside from traditional displays and activities, the Royal Show is increasingly being used to more formally afford training and disseminate information. In 2018, this took the form of a repeat of the 'Living Land Workshop' seminar introduced last year. The programme was underwritten by the SABC and Land Bank, and the day saw 13 modules being presented by specialists in their respective fields, to 200 emerging farmers.

Also, and sponsored jointly by Plaas Media and the Royal Agricultural Society, Woodrite House was utilised to conduct a full-day course on intensive sheep farming. In excess of 60 delegates, made up of commercial and emerging farmers, attended.

With the participation of all well-known tractor and agricultural equipment brands, and the return of 'blue-chips', Caterpillar, JCB and others, the industrial and construction equipment section was well represented. By all accounts, meaningful enquiries were also received.

With the exception of old Hall 4 and Halls 6, 7 and 8, all remaining internal venues were individually themed.

The largest of these remains The Mercury Food and Festival of Fine Living located in the Olympia Hall in the epicentre of the grounds. Feedback from a number of sources reveals that the ante of the display was well up on 2017; pleasing, as this is possibly the largest single display of any kind in South Africa.

Others were as follows:

Hall 1: 'Out of Africa', incorporating a strong focus on fashionwear from as far afield as Nigeria and the Cameroon.

Hall 2: 'The Daily News Hall of Fine Living', also incorporating fashion attire, but with the emphasis on hair products. The exercise included a full programme of ongoing hair styling demonstrations.

Hall 3: 'The Royal Indian Pavilion', displaying products sourced from the Indian sub-continent.

New Hall 4: The entire facility was made available to Multichoice, which, by way of a vibrant and interactive display, used the opportunity to market the broadcasters product mix.

Hall 5: Otherwise known as the 'Crafts and Home Industries Hall', this remains one of the larger displays of its kind in the country.

Hall 9: Used entirely by Ford for vehicle displays.

Hall 10: Together with the adjacent site, the venue hosted – for the first time - a joint display by the South African National Defence Force and the South African Police Services. Both were of an exceptionally high standard, and it is probable that the location will again be utilised by the respective organisations in 2019.

In an effort to objectively determine participation trends, the opinions of exhibitors were sought; this by way of a simple electronic questionnaire reading as follows: 'In terms of your expectations, how would you rank your participation in the 2018 Royal Show out of 10'.

With a 31% response to date, results are as follows:

Score (out of 10)	Percentage
10	19
9	16
8	20
7	16
6	10
5	6
4	3
3	2
2	5
1	3

These results reflect a largely satisfied exhibitor mix.

The concept of a 'Super Friday' was introduced in 2017 and together with a lower gate charge, evening entertainment, and discounting afforded by caterers, exhibitors and the funfair, the exercise was successfully repeated.

Three social functions of consequence were held. The first – on the opening Saturday morning - the Red Meat Producers Organisation (RPO) sponsored 'Brekfis met Derrich' show under the auspices of Radio Sonder Grense (RSG). Being the second largest SABC radio station, the programme produced by the inimitable Derrich Gardner, saw 120 guests attend a superb breakfast. A number of live interviews took place, with the resultant exposure extending to 200 000 or more national listeners.

This was followed by the jointly sponsored Sanlam and Farmers Weekly Farmers Braai in the Cattle Arena on Monday evening. The occasion included music and a live performance on horseback of Armand 'The Singing Cowboy'.

Wednesday evening saw the Standard Bank Gold Cup Parade, Presentation and Dinner take place. This occasion is viewed by many to be the most prestigious event on the South African Livestock calendar, and with good weather, informative commentary, pleasing choreography and an outstanding meal, 2018 did not disappoint. The guest speaker was Winston Moffett, a retired senior master from Weston Agricultural College and a longstanding friend of the Royal Show.

The Royal Show's varied entertainment programme saw ongoing activities – several of an educational nature – taking place on the River Stage as well as the Cattle and Main Arenas.

These included:

- A full equestrian programme underpinned by Mounted Games, the Boerperd Champion and general Showing Classes.

In the case of Showing, the excellence of the occasion continues to 'rule the day' and backed by an international judge (Lesley Whitehall from the UK), the Royal continues to be acknowledged as South Africa's premier show.

- The ever popular Royal Rock Concert took place on the first Saturday afternoon, with Matt Gardiner, Matthew Mole and Mi Casa.
- The full KZN Symphony Orchestra performed on the Sunday morning, with a two hour concert themed 'The world's most beautiful music'. The event was blessed with good weather, and the occasion exceeded the expectations of an audience approximating 2 000 in number.
- This was followed later in the day by the traditional RSG Concert featuring Armand 'The Singing Cowboy', Elizma Theron, Brendan Peyper and Refentse.

Both the Symphony and the RSG Concerts were sponsored by the Witness.

- To cater for the vast number of school pupils visiting the Royal Show on the Wednesday and Thursday, 'Working on Fire' again arranged well supported lunch hour demonstrations; the purpose being to disseminate information in respect of the benefits, dangers and control of combustion.
- The KZN dog agility championships were hosted in the main arena on the second Friday and Saturday morning.
- Sponsored by Coca-Cola Beverages, the 'Monster Freestyle FMX Night Flight' took place with a crowd-thrilling display of on two occasions during the course of the second weekend. The dexterity of the professional motor-cross performers, together with pyrotechnics, provided a show to remember.
- The second Friday and Saturday evenings saw the 'Royal Demolition Derby', a hybridised version of a traditional stock-car race, where the last vehicle running was deemed to be the winner. A lot of noise and a great deal of excitement.
- In partnership with Hindvani FM, the second Saturday evening saw the hosting of the Royal Extravaganza and Bhangra; a festival of music, dance and comedy. This was the only event that extended into the late evening, but despite the cold, the occasion was well supported.
- The Royal uMgungundlovu Youth Festival (in conjunction with Gagasi FM) wrapped up the Royal Show on the final Sunday afternoon, with a show featuring a number of well-known performers, including L'Vovo. The occasion saw around 1 000 patrons attending, which, whilst being up on last year, remains disappointingly low.

- By way of a special add-on in 2018, the Royal Show saw the inclusion of the Soweto Towers Bungee and Scad Freefall 50 metre jump. Despite the prominence of location, public buy-in (possibly due to cost) failed to meet the expectations of the operators. Going forward, it is possible that it may again be included in 2019, and if so, this could take the form of a combination of entertainment type demonstrations, coupled with paid public participation.
- The River Stage continues to afford the younger generation with an educational and entertaining experience. This included the Fun Science Secret Lab, shark dissections and fitness demonstrations.
- Following the departure of livestock, the Powasol Enduro-X series took place in the Cattle Arena during the course of the final weekend. Whilst access and logistics are complex, the event proves popular. It is likely that this could well become a permanent feature of future Royal Shows.

From a marketing perspective, the 2018 Royal Show social media campaign appears to have largely met expectations. Most notably, website 'traffic' increased from 149 182 to 218 524.

This together with the commendable support of Independent Newspapers, Media 24, East Coast Radio, Farmers Weekly, Landbouweekblad, Veeplaas, Radio Sonder Grense and very especially Multichoice, overall exposure remains successfully broad-based.

A question mark hangs over the efficacy of the biometric access system, which, now in its second year, failed to meet expectations. In the interests of exhibitors and Members, its future warrants re-assessment.

The Royal is indebted to and acknowledges the support of the numerous sponsors – in cash and kind – who contributed to the success of the show, and very especially, First National Bank, Coca-Cola Beverages and East Coast Radio.

*Issued by the CEO
Royal Agricultural Society
4 July 2018*