



Brian Reynolds and a 1943 Anzani

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Steward Les Davies

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Stone wall judge Tina Bath and Philpin

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Mendip Ploughing Society chairman Peter Sherborne

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Judges Bill Isaac, aged 80, and David Bowyer, aged 77

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The rival ploughs get stuck straight in

Tractors, horses and broad-shouldered men lined up – quite literally – at a historic ploughing match. The Mendip Ploughing Society has pitted men, machines and animals against each other for 143 annual events – apart from world war years – in a contest of straight and tidy lines. He, she or it who carved the neatest, razor straight furrow into the earth in any of the 13 classes got the judges’ handshake, trophy cup and cash reward. All of this was punctuated with the occasional sharp crack from the Yoxter Firing Range opposite, under a slate grey sky balanced atop the Mendip Hills between Priddy and Charterhouse on Wednesday morning last week. Entrants, be they driving vintage or modern tractors in a rainbow of

By Ian Mat
cheddarvalley@midsonnews.co.uk
01749 832337
Twitter: @cheddarvgazette

colours and shapes, giant horses or stout, straight-backed men, had five-and-a-half hours to carve their plots up neatly. Eighty-seven tried their luck, coming from Cornwall, Devon, Dorset, Gloucestershire, Sussex, Hereford or just locally. Jim King, secretary of the 154-year-old society, confirmed numbers were up on last year and shared the origin of the Mendip Ploughing Society. “The story,” he said, “is that the local farmers used to make their own ploughs. A firm from the north began to mass produce ploughs in a factory and so came down here to

sell them. To decide which was best, man-made or mass produced, a contest was held. However, we don’t know who won as the record is lost.” The sign of a good furrow is its straightness, but also its “cover” where the dividing turf between the two channels has folded over like soft pastry. A huge expanse of land was marked up into quadrants for each competitor and spectators from the farming world, or on school trips, paused at each plot to cast their critical eye over the turf. There was those who favoured the semi-digger plough, others liked the four furrows draggers or the classic exhaust-spouted tractors, novices using any type of plough they could, and, of course, the thick-muscled horses who made it look effortless, even if their stop-start motion threw

a farmer off balance from tweaking a plough joint with a spanner. Farmers set out on their red, green or yellow tractors, occasionally turning around to pull a lever or twist one of the many handles sprouting from the increasingly complicated ploughs trailing behind them. Most drivers did not bother to turn back around to see where their tractor was headed, focused as they were on their furrows. The love of straightness was not reserved wholly for the ground. Hedging plots were laid with meticulousness accuracy for judges’ inspection and the hunt was on for the best 20lbs of wheat, oats and barley, among others. If none of that appealed to you, there was a great big bar to put your wellies up and escape from the mud for a short while.



A 1937 Mike Brockway and his 1963 Doe Triple D

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Stone waller Sam Wedmore of Emborough

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Martin Kerswell with Buster and Prince get a starring role

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