

REPORT BY **ALEXRENTON**
PHOTOGRAPHS BY **MURDO MACLEOD**


This is one happy cow

No smacking, no prodding, no shouting. Britain's most enlightened farms are revolutionising the way meat is reared. And the reason? Contented cattle make great steaks

The boggy fields around Bill Cassells' bungalow are dotted with great humps of ginger hair, like an invasion of alien fungus. Venture a little closer and you find that these move. Behind curtain-sized fringes are huge brown eyes and above them a spread of horns a good three feet wide. These are Highland cattle and, for all that they look like half a ton of fright wig on legs, they're the epitome of mellow. They wander over to inspect us at Bill's call, and are hardly put out even when Murdo, *OFM*'s photographer, starts planting lighting reflectors and flash guns around them. Anna, the five-year-old matriarch of this 75-strong herd, slouches forward to pose for the picture with all the

cool of a catwalk veteran. These are happy cattle, these Highlanders. They live outside on the hills above Scotland's River Spey, eating heather and the moorland grass, supplemented in winter with draff, the malty remains of the grain used in the nearby whisky distilleries.

The cattle grow at a natural pace and, perhaps most importantly of all, they've never been frightened. Bill's farm is quarantined and dogs are not permitted. The herd is small enough for Bill to know each animal – 'If I see a calf being picked on, or bullied, I can separate them. Each one is looked after according to its character.' When the animals are moved there's no shouting, and no prodding. 'A blue water pipe for a smack across their arses is the favourite way of moving animals along,' says Bill. »



Bill Cassells with Anna, the matriarch of his Highland he.