

This year the weather was exceptional for the Ploughing Championships and, with record crowds, it seems to have piqued the interest of many.

Every day since, I've been asked how I got on at the Ploughing and what it was like? For the most part, the question was posed by my non-farming colleagues. My answer to them has been that the Ploughing is about the people you meet. That got me focusing on some of the interesting people I met.

Early on the third day, there was a thick haze resting over the site at Ratheniska. There was a rippling of mud on the steel rails from the light rain that had fallen overnight. It made Sharon Foley's outfit just right for the Ploughing. She had won Most-Appropriately Dressed lady the previous day. You can still be beautiful while being appropriate. Sharon had lovely red wellington boots that nicely complemented her red umbrella, scarf, bracelet and hat. She wore sandy-coloured jeans with a striped jacket.

Coincidentally, her Dad, John Tracey, had been runner-up seven times at the World Ploughing Championships and her brother, Eamonn, was runner-up in the World Championships in Canada last year.

It's no wonder Sharon was appropriately dressed for the Ploughing. Her prize was a weekend at the wonderful Wineport Lodge Hotel in Athlone.

One of the best descriptions I heard of the Ploughing Champi-



grandfather's footsteps.

According to Gerard: "He told the school he was taking four days off because he was sick. And what do you think happened? When the six 'clock news came on, wasn't he caught here doing up his heifer."

It is people like Gerard who make the Ploughing Championships special.

### MEETING STUDENTS

In complete contrast, my friend Johnny Butterly enticed me in to meet his son, Daniel, who was on a stand in the education tent. Daniel was there with his classmates, Juliette Crosbie and Glen Gilmore, to promote Dundalk Grammar School.

They were accompanied by their French teacher, Valerie Herve, who is originally from Brittany. Asking them why they were chosen to represent the school, Daniel quipped: "Because we're that smart."

The school will be 275 years old in 2014. It is both a boarding and a day school, with approximately 550 boys and girls. Asking why a student would want to be a boarder brought a twinkle from Daniel. I gather it might have something to do with study. Some students have trouble disengaging from the hustle and bustle of family life to knuckle down to the books. Boarding school can help to focus the mind.

The three students on the stand were convinced of the school's merits, mentioning extra-curricular activities and the wonderful new campus that has been co-funded by public and pri-

# Ploughing adventures

onships was that "you could get lost anywhere for half an hour", and that can be a welcome respite from a busy stand. So, on one such break, I headed for the livestock area. On my way I dashed into the Dairymaster stand where I tried my hand at The Udder Race, which entailed putting up four clusters on makeshift udders against the clock.

The competition, which drew crowds and added fun, was being run in aid of Pieta House, the suicide and self-harm crisis centre. To my dismay, I scored the equivalent of cupping 293 cows in the hour. The winning contestant scored a whopping 1,100 cows, making my effort look quite pathetic. According to Dairymaster, it was: "An udderly brilliant result."

The smell of cooking burgers enticed me towards the Irish Angus stand. There I found



As the sun shone for the National Ploughing Championships, a walk around reveals plenty to offer and talk about, writes **Katherine O'Leary**



Pupils from Dundalk Grammar School with their teacher at the Ploughing

Cloonecarne Jenny who had a better hairdo than me. She was All-Ireland Senior Irish Female

"to stand behind her and look up her back and see her good, smooth blades, the good wide top

Champion at the Strokestown Show this summer and is owned by Tom Mulligan from Co Leitrim. His father, Gerard, who will be 92 in February, told me that "she was terribly quiet".

Taking me by the arm, Gerard encouraged me

on her and four great legs".

Chatting to Gerard, he told me that they had a "good stretch" of land. He retained 51 acres himself and has 56/57 stock on it to keep him exercised. He said that, in his living memory, this summer had been one of the best for growth. I could happily have talked to him all day, listening to his wisdom and memories.

His love of life, family, cattle and Leitrim was just perfect. He reckons that very few of the 82 previous Ploughing Championships were held without him. His grandson, Gearóid, aged 15, obviously intends to follow in his

private partnership. In other words, the school community has had to raise a lot of money. The motto of Dundalk Grammar School is *Sapere Aude*, which translates as dare to be wise. It represents the courage required to stand away from the crowd and be wise in the pursuit of knowledge.

Not to be outdone, the pupils from Cistercian Roscrea, who were at the stand next door, stepped forward to tell me about their college, which is a boys-only boarding school. Tom Berkery and Tommy Devine were the students here. They were accompanied by the Dean of the college, Seamus Hennessey, who described the college as: "A home away from home."

There are all sorts of reasons why people attend the Ploughing, but, at the end of the day, it is about meeting people and pressing the flesh. **KL**