

► Scurry driving, private driving and the Concourse d'Elegance, which looks for the most elegant turnout of horses and carriages, will show, as will the gentle giants of the horse world — the heavy horses. Native UK breeds including rare Exmoor and Dartmoor ponies will be on display.

Dogs and hamsters

Being the biggest open show in the South West, Devon County Show is an important date for dog enthusiasts. Successful dogs are also able to accumulate points for championship shows later in the season.

A massive operation, the dog show includes 293 classes and three junior and three adult handling classes. Over three days, 29 judges from all over the country will have over 1,000 dogs to rate.

There are six rings running each day, monitored by two volunteer stewards. Rita Morgan is secretary of the dog show and helps to organise it each year.

"We have a lot of volunteers who are very dedicated and come year after year to help," she said. "I have been doing this for more than 30 years and it is such a lovely show."

Each day, different pedigree dog groups are shown and judged and a best in group winner is chosen. The best in group winners then go on to compete in the grand finale on Saturday, for the highly prestigious Best in Show cup.

In addition to top-level competitions, dog lovers and prospective owners can get up close and personal with the breeds and receive expert guidance from handlers.

They may be small, but the cavies section can be just as entertaining as dogs and horses. The section hosts an adorable array of guinea pigs, hamsters, rabbits and chinchillas. Breeders, such as Margaret Rogers, of the Southern Hamster Club, will be on hand to answer questions and offer advice.

"We display a variety of hamsters, such as Syrian, Russian Campbell, Russian Winter White and Russian Roborovski," she said. "At the show we can show people first hand how to use different techniques and solve problems. We also let people stroke them. They make lovely pets!"

Food and drink

Packed with delicious Devon delicacies, the food and drink area is one of the most popular show marquees, and this year the exhibit has been upgraded to pavilion status.



Marilyn Johnson, of Norsworthy Goats Cheese, near Crediton. Their handmade unpasteurised cheese won them gold in the 2006 British and world cheese awards



'We are really looking forward to it — I just hope I've got enough cheese,' says Dave Johnson



'The Contented Cow is a great platform for Devon to showcase its best breweries and is a very popular part of the show. It reflects the ethos of the show, which is the local community working together,' says Patrick McCaigh of Otter Brewery

"We hope that the exhibit will benefit from this new coverage, it is very smart!" said chief steward David Scoble. "We do find that there is a lot of interest in food and where it comes from. We like to have a nice balance and I feel that we have some of the best butchers in Devon including Lloyd Maunder, Stillmans and Gerald and David and Family Ltd.

"They show a beautifully presented array of meat and there are not many places you can go to see things like that."

Fresh fruit and vegetables, venison, cheese, beer, wine, honey, ice cream, cider, seafood, and three separate bread stands will feature in the pavilion, and as one of seven pit-stops for the children's Show Trail, the marquee is also involved in the Year of Food and Farming.

"We are trying to encompass the Year of Food and Farming within the exhibition," said David. "It is all about educating children

and showing them the products of the land and how they are made into food.

"There will be a cider-making demonstration and cheese-maker Robert Kitchen, from Lancashire, is back and will be showing audiences how one gallon of milk can be turned into cheese, which visitors can then try for themselves.

"We will supply a questionnaire for the schoolchildren and they will find the answers around the marquee."

While lots of old favourites have returned this year, the food and drink pavilion is for the first time featuring a small producers' area, enabling six less-known local producers to showcase their goods.

Dave and Marilyn Johnson, of Norsworthy Goats Cheese, near Crediton, are one of the six. Their handmade unpasteurised cheese won them gold in the 2006 British and world cheese awards.

"Rachel Stephens of Curworthy Cheese

really pushed to have a small producers' tent," said Dave. "Last year she sent tickets for us to have a look around and see what we thought and we thought if we could make the pitch smaller it would be better so they agreed to do a smaller one for us.

"We have got our own goat herd of Saanen, Toggenbur and Alpine goats. We make hard and soft unpasteurised goats' cheese and we do some with added ingredients, such as our Posbury, which has garlic, onion, horseradish and paprika, and a blue cheese called Nanny Bloo which leaves a tingle on your tongue.

"I think we are the only goat producer in Devon that produces unpasteurised cheese from start to finish, handmade on the farm.

"We are hoping to make people aware of us, to let them know that we are here. We hope one or two shop keepers will come around and we'll get trade from it. We are really looking forward to it — I just hope I

have got enough cheese!" Common Loaf bakers at Stintwood farm, Dunkeswell, are one of three bread exhibitors this year. In business for eight years now, the bakery makes a range of sweet and savoury wheat-free breads, pizzas, pastries, cookies and other bits and pieces using spelt and rye flour.

"We saw there was a need for a wheat-free bread so we decided to go that way and it has been good for us," said baker Christopher Pollen.

"We have a large variety of bread with and without yeast, which is good for people with allergies.

"This will be our sixth year at the show and we will be selling our whole line, including our cheese and onion swirls which have been really popular. We'll probably feature carob and walnut brownies, American-style granola with honey and an olive and walnut sourdough.

"As part of the Year of Food and Farming we will have a sign on our stand describing what the food is made from for the children."

Meanwhile, talented chefs will be lining up at the cookery demonstration tent for a chance to show off their culinary skills. Mark Street, from Dart Marina Hotel in Dartmouth, and Dez Turland, chief executive chef of the Brent Hotel Group, will be heating up the tent along with other local chefs.

"The chefs use as much local produce as possible, and this year, we will be showing how to be more economical while cooking and how to turn cheaper bits of food into delicious meals," said home economist Celia Hyland, who is in charge of the cookery demonstrations. "There are quite a few pieces of meat which with careful cooking can be delicious, such as mutton, shin of beef, breast of lamb and pork belly!

"We want people to know that cooking is not scary and local food is not for the elite — everyone can cook and use local food.

"And it is easy. To me, a compliment is when someone comes up to me and says, 'thank you, that was easy and interesting — even I could do that!' And that's what it's all about."

At the Contented Cow beer tent, 12 of Devon's finest brewers will be showcasing selections from each of their breweries.

"We pool all our beers and a similar number of Devon ciders," said show steward Guy Shepard of Exe Valley Brewery. "Our feature beer this year is Devon Source, from Otter Brewery, and it ties in with what the show is all about, getting it back to basics and telling people where food comes from.

"Westpoint is a lovely venue and this is a much visited part of the show. We are here to support each other: it's all about local and all about Devon."

Otter Source is unlike any other ale at Otter Brewery, a family-run business which opened in 1990.

"It is a cask ale and it's the first beer that we have ever brewed at four per cent," said sales director Patrick McCaigh. "It is made using spring water from our own source and malt which is locally sourced, tying in with the Year of Food and Farming. It will taste well-rounded and bitter, and if it proves popular we might continue with it after the show!

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