

When it comes to your milking parlour functioning at its optimum level, a static check is not enough

A 'test-drive' is essential too, to make sure cows, machinery and operators are working in perfect harmony

As with a car MOT, it is essential to keep equipment in tip-top condition

DYNAMIC TESTING ARE YOU MILKING THE PROCESS TO BEST ADVANTAGE?

THERE IS A GROWING FOCUS ON DYNAMIC TESTING OF MILKING PARLOURS – BUT OFTEN WITH VERY LITTLE DISCUSSION ABOUT WHAT THAT ENTAILS AND WHAT TO EXPECT FROM THE PROCESS. HERE, ADVANCE MILKING'S DAN HUMPHRIES PUTS A BIT MORE FLESH ON THE BONES AND ADDS CONTEXT TO SOME OF THE BIG QUESTIONS ABOUT PARLOUR TESTING

ANIMAL WELFARE

situations. That process will teach us far more than the static MOT alone. But, just like a test drive, a dynamic test can be performed in many ways by many different people. A quick spin round the local housing estate is unlikely to expose any areas for improvement (unless there are severe problems!) when compared to a more comprehensive test that replicates a range of circumstances.

Our ability to test drive a milking parlour has greatly improved with technological advancement, which has also helped in developing our understanding of the milking process. We can now look at the entire milking process in far more detail than before, giving us the information required to make the decisions necessary to improve.

There isn't the scope within this article to explore these things in detail, but it is now possible to look in detail at how well the liners fit, ACR and take-off settings, whether the vacuum level is appropriate, irregular vacuum fluctuations, milk flow rates, biphasic milkings...the list goes on!

Before you sign up for a test, ask the questions – what will you, the tester, be able to tell me? How are you going to generate that information? Is that information reliable? That way you can have a better idea of what you're getting for your money.

Dynamic Test vs Milking Time Evaluation

Of course, a proper parlour test shouldn't be all about the machinery; a successful milking operation relies on the trinity of the cows, the operators and the milking parlour all working to

a similar standard – our results will only be as good as the weakest link of the chain.

Even a dynamic test isn't enough on its own. We should be considering the process as a milking time evaluation rather than just a dynamic test, as there are often improvements to be made in how we work with the parlour, or how the cows are managed. Going back to the car analogy one last time, we can tune the parlour to race-car spec, but if the driver isn't very good the hedge is never far away!

A critical component of a milking time evaluation is the feedback session – in our experience this is the most valuable session for farmers and milking teams as it provides the opportunity to ask all the pressing questions about how it all ties together.

To fully understand how to improve, it is important to understand what influences the metrics we are measuring and then ask the question 'what can we do differently?' The feedback visit is also the time to generate an action list that everyone is on board with – an action list people don't agree on rarely gets done!

In summary, with technological improvement and recent developments in our understanding of the milking process, milking time evaluation that includes a dynamic parlour test can provide significant benefits to dairy farmers in parlour efficiency and milk quality.

There are many variables out there when people talk about dynamic parlour testing. So to get the best value from the process, make sure you know what you're getting for your money!

The most recent revision of the Red Tractor regulations included a recommendation that all milking parlours should undergo a dynamic test annually, over and above the static tests.



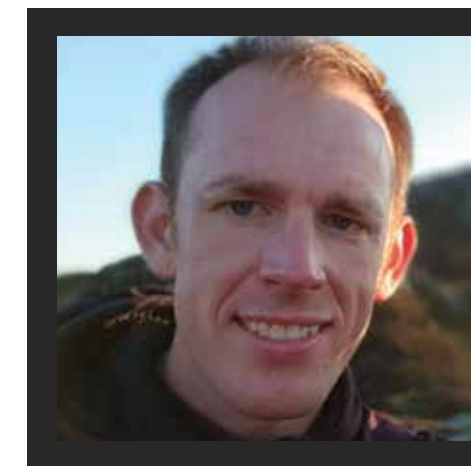
While this is a good idea for many reasons, it's also very vague as there are no definitions as to what a dynamic test is or what it comprises; a dynamic test can mean different things to different people!

Dynamic Vs Static testing

In terms of parlour testing, an analogy we commonly use is comparing the testing process to the testing process for a car. The static tests required by law are the parlour equivalent of the MOT – basic safety tests to ensure that the parlour will run as anticipated and there are no glaring errors.

This is, of course, a vital component of the testing process – but it is not the be-all and end-all.

A dynamic test is testing the parlour while it's actually doing its job milking the cows, and is more equivalent to a test drive; it explores how it handles and how it reacts in particular



Dan Humphries
BVSc (Hons) MRCVS

Dan is a dairy vet and director of Advance Milking, and works with dairy farmers, vets and industry partners to deliver improvements in milk quality, udder health and parlour efficiency across the UK and Europe. Find out more at www.advancemilking.com