



As part of a new series, **Helen Aurelius-Haddock** takes a closer look at the culinary classics that should be adorning every cook's bookshelf...

LONG SHELF LIFE...

TBC

I can say with some level of confidence that everyone has at one time or another put a call into home to ask Mum how long a Sunday joint will take to cook. "Oh a couple of hours until it's done" is a popular reply. After all, without the said joint in view, how else can one answer?

Levity to one side, meat has always fallen into the serious cooking league unless it comprises of the ubiquitous chicken breast fillets from the local supermarket. We all seem to be able to throw fajitas and a chicken curry together. However, it is when we explore the full range of cuts available to us that we tend to lose our nerve. The cost of the meat combined with the prospect of making a culinary faux pas in front of our in-laws seems to send our confidence into free fall.

Most cookery works deal with meat as a large part of their text, but few write about it in detail with a definitive 'how to' approach that is so often needed. Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall clearly saw a gap in the market when he penned his impressive River Cottage Meat Book back in 2004, as this is exactly what he does. It is a comprehensive guide to meat cookery par excellence.

The book is divided into two main sections. The first is entitled "Understanding Meat", and it is within these chapters that the principal animals for food consumption are written about. As a passionate food campaigner, his aim here is to ensure that purchase our meat in full possession of the facts. He objectively discerns between supermarket and locally supplied, free range and organic meat.

Ironically he does not moralise, but instead allows his extensive knowledge to deliver the facts to the reader, empowering them to be aware of the whys and wherefores of meat production, leaving the ultimate moral choice up to the individual. If Buy-One Get-One-Free pork chops are what you can afford, then so be it – Hugh provides the recipes and techniques for you to cook them.

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Section Two is the essence of meat cookery broken down into its principal areas: roasting, slow cooking, fast cooking, barbecuing, preserving and processing. He breaks down each methods at the start of each chapter and explains some of the processes that occur during cooking such as sealing, caramelising and resting.

I tested the slow cooking section by trying to up my game with my beef in stout, which has long been the butt of endless family complaints, including the toughness of the beef cubes (you've left the saddle on again Mum) and the insipid taste of the gravy.

Following one or two of Hugh's simple extra

steps had me a first class result with a modest purchase of stewing beef from my weekly shop at the supermarket.

I was impressed, and saw why the extra stages in the cooking process were a necessary adjunct to the recipe. They were, as he duly explained, not "cheffy" touches, but necessary to the overall flavour and taste of the meat. How right he was.

It may sound like a statement of the obvious here, but knowing how something cooks is the key to ensuring a tasty dish on the table every time, and this is the book to explain it. Moreover, if you have taken a bit of time and thought over sourcing your meat before you cook it, the odds are that the flavour and eating experience be greatly enhanced too.

Simple principles that have been employed for centuries brought to you by Mr. Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall in this must have book for the kitchen shelf. ■