## Bearly Alpines – *the Next Generation*
### By Kevin W. Kinney


Bearly Alpines of Sheeryville, Virginia is a relatively new herd that is already experiencing much success. Owner Benjamin Rupchis believes that his achievements can be contributed to his use of what one would label historical bloodlines. Ben, the 2001, 2003 and 2006 winner of the Steve Schack Memorial Youth Award, an Alpines International award honoring the Premier Alpine Youth Exhibitor at the annual ADGA National Show, feels that his perspective is skewed by his relatively short involvement in goats and the fact that he rarely has had a chance to see animals from west of the Rockies. He is first to tell you that much of his knowledge is based on LA, DHI, and old photos, herd brochures, and magazines. But after seeing the Bearly herd, one might just be convinced that Ben has a knack for mixing the "old lines" with the "New", making Bearly Alpines a herd to recon with. The following is an interview with Ben in his own words:

**How did you get started in Dairy Goats?**
My first goat, a Nubian/Pygmy wether was companion for a pony. Dairy goats came shortly thereafter. My first doe was a Nubian/Alpine cross. Nora was soon followed by two registered Alpines in 1999.

**What lines did you start with and what are your current lines?**
Fortunately, Alpines have a very strong representation in the mid-Atlantic. My first two does, a kid and a dry yearling, would go on to score EX and place in the top ten of their classes at Nationals. The kid, Dixie-Does Texas-K Hope Chest 1*M, descends from the remnants of the Bayview herd; she's a mixture of Udder-Way, Nodaway, and Evermore lines. The yearling, GCH Skylines El Nino 1*M, was Kathy Price's last Alpine, out of a Walnut-Fork doe line and +*B Sanstorms Superstar. The following year, I purchased a buck and a doe from Diane Kirsch. All but one of the 16 does currently in the herd descend from these four animals. This buck has contributed much to the herd's type and style, dairyness with strong feet and legs. He was out of the Headliner daughter Roxanne and by *B Cherry Glen Radical Hunter. The doe was a double Free Radical granddaughter. More recently, I have brought in genetics from Nodaway, One*Oak*Hill, Sunshine, Sweet-Dreams, and Walnut-Fork. I've used descendents of ++*B SG Nodaway Ayla's Aries, ++*B GCH Nodaway Dragon Slayer, ++*B SGCH Shahena'ko Sumo Tierro, SGCH Sunshine Clare Rehma 3*M, ++*B SG Sunshine Seign Sedric, SGCH Sweet-Dream SB Silver Charm 1*M, GCH Sweet-Dreams Winning Colors 4*M, and several animals from the Walnut-Fork "K" line.

**How are you working to improve these lines?**
I am improving these lines by evaluating the strengths and weaknesses each animal or herd brings to the table and by expanding the possibilities of each by incorporating lines that are different, but not too different. With each breeding I look to reaffirm the strengths of a doe while improving a certain trait. I don't expect or try to fix everything with a single breeding. I think a lot of consistency is lost if you try to go too far with a single step.

**What bucks are you working with? How are they meeting your goals for your herd?**
Currently, I have a One*Oak*Hill buck and several of my own breeding, mostly from AI's. Savoy is out of One*Oak*Hill Sedric Silhlvana (FS92 EEEE) and by +*B Topsy-Does GM Glorious. Through AI, I've used mostly Sunshine and Sweet-Dreams bucks, relatives of Aries, Rehma, Charm, and Colors. I'm drawing on some of the historic lines to breed a style of goat that is correct in general appearance (esp. about the head, front-end, feet, and legs),

open and angular, and productive. Specifically, I am looking at excellent udders along with correctness from the Charm and Rehma sons. Savoy should reinforce the productive and dairy nature of the herd. While at a glance my does appear dissimilar in color and size, when assembled in a herd they are starting to exhibit the structure I want.

**What is your philosophy in selecting a buck?**
First it is depth of pedigree. Rebel, my Cherry Glen buck, was out of a 9*M and seventh generation GCH in a dam line going back to Royal Sorghum and Kiwi Mallow. I want a buck that is similar to his dam and matches the general style of animal I like.  Also, again, I want to use lines that are similar to the ones I have, or minimally, lines that have crossed well in the past for others. The most important tool in improving specific traits is AI. I go through a doe's pedigree and find a buck or doe in the pedigree who exhibits the traits I want to improve in the doe. I then look for semen from a buck that is related to the animals exhibiting strength and history of improving the desired traits.

One of my most successful AI's came from breeding a doe to the full brother of a doe appearing in her dam line. SG Cherry Glen Ideal Echo 1*M, had a superb udder and excellent head and shoulder assembly; however, she was lacking in dairy character and needed tighter toes. As a direct descendent of Winning Colors, a doe who was "very dairy and open-ribbed combined with excellent feet and leg angulation," a relation of Colors' seemed the best place to go. Fortunately, semen is still available from Colors' brother Cadillac Jack and the AI took and Echo kidded in the spring of '04. Fernie has exceeded expectations, placing 14th of 75 in the 2 y.o. class at Nationals, appraising FS89 VEEE as a first-freshener, all with a DHI record of DIM 295 Milk 2480 Fat 92 Prot 78.

**You have used a number of "old" bucks as compared to the current fashionable bucks, how is this working for you and how did you come to that decision?**
In dairy goats, there are very few bucks who are genuinely proven, maybe Sasin, Whintin, and a few others. The size and scale of dairy goat breeding is neither large enough nor extensive enough to prove bucks. The hot buck is only hot in very limited use. I need greater confidence in what he'll do in my herd. For me, the most reliable factor in selecting a buck is his pedigree coupled with multiple levels of progeny. Does he come from a strong dam line? Are certain traits appearing consistently in the animals in his pedigree and in his progeny? I think a lot of my faith in old lines stems from a few initial experiments that proved successful and the fact that some of my first animals came from lines that have been consistently successful dating back to the early '80's. I've had the opportunity to use Cadillac Jack, Tierro, a Royal Risk son, and a Pendragon son, none have disappointed. I focused mostly on American lines up to this point because the majority of my foundation stock comes from American lines. As I incorporate some contemporary purebred genetics, I will begin to use some older purebred bucks. I have ++*B Sunshine Stella's Strike, ++*B Bulgaria Computer, *B Topsy-Does I-M Major, ++*B GCH Nodaway Sorcerer's Avenger, and others in the tank. Trait wise, I think these bucks can contribute a lot to the breed today in dairy character and longevity. The eventual aim is for the herd to reach a level of homogeneity at which I'm comfortable using any buck, purebred or American that I want to.

**Some would argue that we have improved the breed and should not be dipping back into old lines, which this practice will only take the breed backward. How do you see this?**
As a whole, I do think the breed has improved. However, it has only improved as certain old lines have pervaded it to a greater extent. When I use an old or historic buck, I'm not looking to replicate a specific animal from the '70's or '80's; I'm trying to complement the doe I have

now. That said, there are some animals I wouldn't mind replicating. Some of them are on par with today's best, though their strengths and faults may be different.

**What traits do you see as positives for the breed and which traits is a weakness?**
Positives include mammary structure and toplines. Alpines consistently have strong udder attachment and are among the strongest over the back and rump. The improvements in these traits are coupled with a decline in dairy character and production. In addition to the omniscient shoulder assembly issues, I would say that dairy character and, in turn, production are the most pressing issues the breed needs to address. I've attended all National Shows since 2000 with the exception of 2005. With one outlier, it seems the goats exhibited are getting fatter and fatter. The outlier was Pueblo in 2002. The dairy herd class at that show was outstanding. The angularity and production exhibited by the majority of the herds there was exemplary. Dairy goats are supposed open, angular, and DAIRY. If a doe starts to pack a few extra pounds come October or November, that's okay, but not in July. I'm not certain if this is an issue exclusive to the breed in the eastern half of the US, but it is an issue.

**What is your current plan for your herd and your proudest accomplishments?**
I would like to continue pursuing the ideal dairy goat while keeping consistency in mind. The size of the herd is stable at about ten mature does, plus kids and bucks. I plan to continue participating in LA, DHI, and showing.

I have sold a number of promising does to commercial dairies. It thrills me to have animals producing in a commercial environment and doing well in the show ring. That is the ultimate aim of my breeding program. Finally, the consistent quality of my herd is a source of pride. Of my five first-fresheners from last spring, four 2yr olds and a yearling, three scored 89 with E's in udder and two scored 88. Of those, an FS89 VVEE doe and the FS88 VVVV yearling are working at commercial dairies.