

The Iron Rod Style

By Kevin W. Kinney

It is not often that one doe can create a national style, but in 1993 one doe did just that by winning the ADGA Sr. Alpine National Champion title. GCH Iron Rod Rev Sutra *M had all the components of the score card, the exciting life story and the “Iron Rod color” thrust her breeder’s herd into overnight stardom. However, as everyone knows it takes at least 15 years for over night success. The following conversation with Leslie Sidwell, breeder and owner of the Iron Rod herd, is her testament to a life devoted to bettering the alpine breed and to the creation of the recognizable Iron Rod Style.

Your involvement in Dairy Goats:

When and how did you start in dairy goats?

I have loved animals from my early childhood. The child of a military officer, with the constant moving, I was given little opportunity to care for animals, and it probably grew to a resolve that when I was older I would have animals in my life. As with so many young girls, I dreamed of owning a beautiful horse and all the fun that promised to go with it.

We lived for a time in Belgium and our trips would take us to the mountains of Austria and Switzerland, where I saw picture perfect hillsides of sleek, shiny Oberhasli colored Alpines. These left me with a European attitude—more favorable toward goats.

After my marriage I had the opportunity to raise animals. I first bought two beautiful show collies, but soon became disenchanted with the shallowness of it all, as well as the expense, so I discontinued that pursuit. I still had hopes of owning a horse, but after rupturing two discs in my lower back my doctor told me I should never own an animal as large as a horse, since one tug in the wrong direction might paralyze me. I have had my struggles with my back. The tensions of a national show can leave me in severe back pain, even without the tug in the wrong direction.

One year in the mid-1980’s I attended the Puyallup Fair in Washington State and visited with teenager Lisa Gardner who was caring for a gorgeous cou blanc kid. I was fascinated. To me, this beautiful, graceful goat looked very horse-like. I had new direction for my dream! The following year I looked for her again and instead met Bernita Tagan, a lovely blind lady. Her milking doe had just won its class, and she had babies for sale out of that doe. After some discussion with my husband, I earned the money for my first kid by selling loaves of bread. She was an Alderwood Haiku granddaughter, STARVIEW’S INDIAN PUDDING, whom I named Clara.

We pretty much lived in the city on only one-third of an acre. I had to go around to all the neighbors and ask their permission to have a goat in our yard. Having obtained that permission, we built a tiny barn and put up fence to contain our little goat. We found a Champion buck two hours south called GCH ++*B REDWOOD HILLS SUNSHINE REVERIE. With the help of Jim and Ellen Herman for this first breeding, I was on my way.

Have you always worked with the Alpine lines?

From the time I was in Europe I loved Alpines. I cannot, for some reason, even see any other breed in my herd. It allows me to be very familiar with the status of this particular breed throughout the nation. I like Alpines because they are hardy, and quirky, with individualistic temperaments. I take to heart that in the breed description the word “graceful” is used. I love the surprise every spring in the kidding pen because of all the many color patterns that is a characteristic of the breed.

What lines were people working with when you started?

As I recall the most popular lines at the time, and the lines which have stood the test of time, are the progeny of NIXON’S JOI HUCKSTER, RAINTREE BF SKY PILOT, QU’APPELLE JOI ACCLAIM, REDWOOD HILLS SUNSHINE REVERIE and PROFECY, BULGARIA COMPUTER, SERENDIPITY’S DESIGNER GENES and BRUISER, TEMPO AQUILA AMOR; AND SODIUM OAKS KIWI.

How have you seen the breed evolve over the years?

When I started in dairy goats, and in my case, in Alpines, the breed was much less uniform. Many animals were rangy and rough looking. Many had what I considered inelegant heads, poor feet, and pendulous udders. Open shoulders were common, and a prevalent defect was “postiness,” or a straight stifle bone. When an animal came along that stood out from others it was easy to put them in your mind to the top of the class. And that is where they usually went. I gravitated to these more beautiful animals and incorporated them into my own breeding program.

In years past you could easily tell what herd an animal probably came from. Each breeder often had a distinct look. This was because breeders were more isolated. They usually bred within their own herds or bred from other bucks who lived at least in that region. Now, with the proliferation of opportunities to breed through artificial insemination, even a novice breeder can draw from the best bucks anywhere in the country. For instance, I now have a RISHONA granddaughter born out of my lovely GOLDEN STYLE on my place this year! I have bred to FREE RADICAL and other bucks to which I would never have had access before. I am enormously grateful for those breeders who have shared their life’s efforts with all of us.

Today, Alpines are longer, 1”-2” taller at the withers, more elegant, and more consistent. Many breeders have nailed the beautiful udder with improved globular shape, stronger medial suspension and well shaped teats perfectly placed. Heads are prettier. Angulation of the stifle is now the norm, with a consequent smoother gait in the ring. Now, in the show ring, there may be as much as half the entries which are so close in quality that judging them seems much more difficult. It certainly is harder to compete!

How do/did you select bucks to use in your breeding program?

I began researching bucks right away when I started my little herd, since I had no bucks of my own and artificial insemination was not an option for me. I stayed in the Northwest area to find bucks for my outside genetics. Thus I found REVERIE, and SERENDIPITY’S BRUISER at the Lyn-D-K Dairy. I was helped greatly by Jane Hunt of Hill’n’Holler, who owned NIXON’S JOI HUCKSTER AND BF SKY PILOT. I also

found the MissDees herd of Charlotte Dershowitz with her large herd of cou blanc RANCHMAN daughters. All the above were Northwest breeders, and I owe much to them. HILL 'N' HOLLER BR .SHANGHAI and my IRON ROD REDWOOD REVERENCE produced my IRON ROD REV SUTRA, who became the foundation of my herd.

After we moved from Washington State I found myself in 1987 in Texas, in unknown territory, with four goats who needed to be bred in the “dead of winter”. I began researching AI, and found a friend in Tamara Taylor, who helped me get them bred. I bought the semen of NEW ERA’S KANE at the National Convention in Texas that year and bred three of them. SUTRA didn’t take AI, so I bred her to AVANTE, a son of CH LYN-D-K HEIDI LYNN, a SERENDIPITY’S BRUISER daughter. I stayed within my comfort zone, as his sire was REDWOOD HILLS SORCERER ANDANTE... PROPHECY lines. These genetics are what I brought with me on entering Virginia.

I select bucks by taking the least risk. I know I am not alone in this. I have not the time nor the funds to speculate. I often use my own bucks, out of superior dams, because I know their strengths and I won’t get surprised. I look at one thing I would like to improve. I try to see in person as many female relatives of a considered buck as possible. I read all the data garnered and talk with other breeders about successes or failures they may have had with the considered buck’s lines. At any given show, one should always listen for the names of bucks that are “tossed about”, remember and research.

What were/are your strongest dam lines?

Most of my years I have had but two dam lines. The first, of course, was IRON ROD REV SUTRA. SUTRA was a happy result of my best effort to breed the kind of goat I liked. She was a beautiful, distinctively marked chamoisee well structured animal with a gorgeous head and a wonderful udder. With only four milking does to my name, SUTRA won the 1993 National Show as best Alpine and Best Udder. I tried to breed every doe to produce animals that looked like her. My does became known for their showiness and elegance. One of the greatest compliments I ever received was from a judge who said my entry was “that typical IRON ROD ‘stick out like a sore thumb’ doe—just magnificent!” Unfortunately SUTRA herself only had three daughters her entire life. I sold the first one long before her national win. I still maintain SUTRA’s maternal line, six generations down through that first breeding to AVANTE.

My second foundation animal was GCH HILL 'N' HOLLER SKY TILIZA, a SKY PILOT daughter, BRUISER granddaughter. She brought strength and size and hardiness to my herd, and significantly contributed to the overall look of my herd. There were two prominent SKY PILOT daughters at the time that were displaying a tall, elegant stretchy look—EIRENE and MERLOT. I wanted that look. It was TILIZA’s son, THUNDERBIRD, that sired GCH ++*B SUPERSONIC. I got the look I sought in SONIC (LA 91 EEE).

The earliest (1985) Iron Rod animals on the ADGA pedigree page are littermates IRON ROD REDWOOD REVELATOR and IRON ROD REDWOOD REVERENCE, how

important were they to the Iron Rod program? How did they come to be? Were these your first registered Iron Rod animals?

IRON ROD REDWOOD REVERENCE was the result of my first breeding of my bread-sales doe Clara to REDWOOD HILLS SUNSHINE REVERIE. She was the first doe I bred and the first doe carrying our herd name. REVERENCE came into heat on Christmas Eve, 1985. Larry and I traveled late that Christmas eve, four hours, to get her bred to Jane Hunt's SHANGHAI (HILL 'N' HOLLER JOI SUZZETT EX ++*B SERENDIPITY'S BRUISER) and returned four hours back to be home in time for Christmas morning with our four children. REVERENCE was the dam of SUTRA. REVELATOR, her litter mate, was a handsome buck, large, level and long. I sold him to Amy O'Reilly.

What lines are you currently working with or would like to use in your breeding program?

++*B SWEET DREAMS GOLDEN BOY During the Springfield, Illinois National Show I took notice of the impressive GOLDEN BOY daughters in the Sunshine herd. Since I was familiar with GOLDEN BOY'S SNOWBIRD lineage I knew he would work with my lines. I presently have used this buck again, breeding his son, WILLOW RUN GB JUAN CARLOS to the most powerfully correct of the RADICAL STRATEGY daughters. Livestock breeders are artistic dreamers and I have drawn these babies in my mind over and over. Spring will tell.

GCH++*B TEMPO AQUILA FREE RADICAL It was because of my long standing admiration of GCH CHERRY GLEN RADICAL GESTURE, that I bred her purebred sire, GCH.++*B TEMPO AQUILA FREE RADICAL, to my best two does. GOLDEN STYLE (LA92 EEEE) gave birth to a single big buck we named RADICAL STRATEGY. He was to be our new, but familiar, direction. At the 2006 National Show his first daughters were second place Junior Get of Sire, and second place Best Three Juniors. They have begun freshening this spring and we are joyful that our hopes were not misplaced.

SGCH WILLOW RUN ARMAND RISHONA*3M Ahhh, don't we all want a piece of Rishona? She may have had faults, but they were few and her strengths far eclipsed them. What was it that made her come together as she did, so surpassing her dam and even paternal granddam? Was it astute judgment or a serendipitously interplay of the gene pool that made her? No one can ignore her impact. Fortunately, she has left us with many sons—fewer daughters. In the coming years, Alpine breeders will be challenged by the selecting of what progeny of hers combines best with what we each are presently breeding. I chose WILLOW RUN AHREN RHETT.

What are your future goals for your herd?

I plan to take the offspring of the three lines I discussed above and breed them back to my own SUPERSONIC and CH IRON ROD BOLD TARTAN. Otherwise my goals are probably not much different from what I have been doing most of my career in goats. I like to breed and show my animals at a highly competitive level, and that is not an easy thing to do this Mid-Atlantic region where quality Alpine herds are so densely

located. I like to show at the National level and continually try to breed animals which can compete successfully there. I much enjoy breeding and selling animals to other breeders. It is incredibly satisfying to watch those breeders take your animals into the ring and into their breeding programs and seeing them succeed in both those areas. I also like to make cheese for local sale as I am doing now. The cheese enterprise takes second place in my energies, though, and I often find conflict in trying to do both.

A number of national level breeders as well as hobbyist breeders have used your lines. What kind of influence are these lines making or have made across the nation?

There have been some breeders who have used my lines and also gained national prominence. The SANDANCE herd is one example. Trisha Dugger bought my SUTRA son, GCH SUNDOWNER and mixed it with Barbara Baise's CRYSTAL CREEK animals and achieved great success in her breeding and showing activities. Geraldine Goodman bought semen of both SUTRA's son GCH SUPERSONIC, and CH BOLD TARTAN from me. One result was that she had a SUPERSONIC daughter become the Western Canadian National Champion, and her sister became Reserve Western Canadian National Champion. One of his granddaughters became the Eastern Canadian National Champion. David Brank bought a TARTAN daughter, NAOMI, a National Champion MISSDEE'S NADIA granddaughter, and helped BRANKTON ALPINES achieve a national stature. I believe that SUPERSONIC's grandsons, QU'APPELLE V EMBER and QU'APPELLE V ETIENNE are being used successfully by Redwood Hills, Shining Moon, Munchin' Hill, Donna Kidd and myself. Presently Frank and Maxine Sutton are very successfully blending CH. IRON ROD THE BOLD TARTAN lines with their RISHONA son, RHETT.

It is certainly difficult for me to essentially brag publicly about what influence I or my animals may have had nationally. However, I have been told that SUTRA's sons have been able to breathe new life into other herds with a better levelness, better blending, good front legs, a strong body structure, and a certain elegance and consistency. I have also been told they have increased milk production significantly.

What have your animals done on the National Show level, DHIR, and Linear Appraisal or other awards?

IRON ROD REV SUTRA was the product of my breeding program that I had poured my heart into in an attempt to create an animal like her. I realized at the time, and acknowledge so now, that everything came together in her, and it did so early in my career. She became the 1993 National Alpine Champion and was judged Best Udder. Since that time I have struggled, with some lesser successes to recreate and surpass that animal. I have had animals which have competed well at the national level. This included THORNBIRD, GOLDEN STYLE, and SIGOURNEY. My website, www.ironrodalpines.com, recounts some of the hard won placings of others of my herd at the national level.

I participated for awhile in DHIR, but the herd owners I participated with dropped out, sold out, and moved away. I became discouraged and have not participated since that time.

What do you feel has been the most significant accomplishment of your breeding program?

A breeder like me takes his/her animals to shows so a judge can tell him how the breeding program is going. I am not used to trying to evaluate my herd in such a public forum. However, I do think I have contributed to the breed through correct front and rear feet and legs, primarily through SUPERSONIC. As hoped, he worked very well with the ACCLAIM granddaughters in the SANSTORM herd. That is a proven cross with at least 4 champion offspring. I have had to wait many years to bring in enough quality genetic diversity to use him again. I have been able to improve my udders, both in the length and smoothness of fore udder, as demonstrated best by GOLDEN STYLE and her daughter PEARL. It is not unusual to have fore udders in my herd appraise from 40 to 50 points.

Though it does not have many points on the scorecard, I also think I have helped to create a prettier head, starting with SUTRA. My love of horses gave importance to this trait. I know you don't milk it, but you sure look at it many times during the day. It might as well be beautiful!

What would you do differently - What would you do the same?

This goat breeding business has been a real passion. Each year we are given a whole year to plan the following year's breedings based on what just happened this year. Each year I plan to the very best of my ability to help God create a sound and pretty animal. Therefore, I do not think I would do anything differently. I purposely remain small, so there is a certain amount of hope and luck involved in getting that spectacular animal with such few breedings. Where I have lacked in the past has been in udder capacity and bone. I have gone back to REVERIE for udder capacity and to RHETT, a RISHONA son, for scale.

What advice would you give new breeders?

I am often contacted by new breeders anxious to breed beautiful competitive goats, and I enjoy giving them advice. I tell them, "study the description of the standard. Go to the local and regional shows with a notebook. Make a photo scrapbook of the goats that most appeal to you. Attend a national show when the opportunity arises. Write down the names of the winners and of the animals you like. Write down their strengths and weaknesses. Talk with other breeders while you are there to broaden your understanding. When you go home, evaluate what you have learned, and build in your mind what your Alpine should look like, still conforming to the standard. Then choose the lines and animals to breed to or purchase that best align themselves with that vision upon which you have decided. The smartest thing you can do is stand upon the shoulders of others, as I did."

With artificial insemination and other access to animals across the country an astute and dedicated newcomer can build a successful herd in a relatively short time.

Today, what do you see as the over all strength and weakness of the Alpine?

Alpines, of course, have always been the most popular breed, and rightly so. Alpines are personality plus. They are intelligent, individualistic, feisty, and loving. The Alpine look, with its pretty head, is so popular that I have watched other breeds, i.e. the

Toggenburg and the Oberhasli begin to lose their distinctive traditional look and begin to look more like colored variations of the Alpine. I am not sure such imitation is a good thing. It does underscore the unique beauty of the Alpine.

The most frequently voiced criticism I hear of the Alpine is that, because the breed is so improved, and so much more uniform, breeders attempt to breed to the extremes to catch the eye of the judge. Thus, in an effort to breed for a very long body, the result has been that legs and shoulders have moved too far forward. This gives the impression of a longer body, but also creates undesirable side effects, such as a pinched heart girth, a narrow chest floor, and poor front legs that exhibit bowed legs or feet that toe out. This has been most frequently voiced with purebreds, as opposed to Americans, probably because of the reduced gene pool. Since I only breed French Alpines, I have taken this problem on as a personal challenge.

From the time you started breeding dairy goats what bucks or lines do you feel have made the most impact on the breed? The most impact on your herd?

Bucks: NIXON'S JOI HUCKSTER; REDWOOD HILLS SUNSHINE REVERIE; SHAHENA'KO SUMO TIERRA, QU'APPELLE JOI ACCLAIM, NIXON'S RANCHMAN, SODIUM OAKS ROYAL RISK and HOACH'S QAAG LASABRE.

Lines include the SNOWBIRD lines, the PROPHECY lines, the CONCERTO lines, the STELLA lines, and the JENNY lines.

What bucks or lines do you feel are NOW making a major impact on the Alpine line, as well as on your lines?

Four time National Grand Champion Rishona's granddaughters are just starting to come into their own. Through her sons, Alpine breeders will be able to see how much of an impact on the breed she will have. Again, I am not familiar with the American lines, so although major impact is being made by such breeders as CHERRY GLEN and their current reigning National Champion, Her Highness RADICAL GESTURE, I am not current with American lines.

On the current Alpine scene the sons and grandsons of GCH MAPLE GLEN CLASSICS ANGELA, and GCH MAPLE GLEN PM's CARRIE are holding the forefront in the purebred lines. They were used successfully by WILLOW RUN and have such depth of quality that breeders can use them with high expectations. Related lines making an impact are the GCH ++*B ABUNDANCE DANISH CLASSIC lines crossed with the ++*B SAND DANCE RICO SUAVE lines.

How do you feel about French vs. American Alpines?

My herd started all French and I have continued to maintain a completely French Alpine herd. I have perhaps made it harder for myself to breed exceptional udders and some of the many strengths that Americans have brought to the breed, but I have been content to remain French. There are primarily two reasons: first, I have remained a very small herd. Staying in the smaller gene pool of French Alpines has helped me to check the size of my herd. It also helps me to stay focused. I have become very familiar with the French lines, their strengths and faults, and I don't get surprised. So all my reasons

are very personal and have nothing to do with quality of American Alpines.

In general what future do you see for the alpine? What should breeders be working towards, correcting, or adding to the breed? What direction should the alpine breeder be taking?

I tried to explain what I thought Alpine breeders should be working on earlier, in Question 15. I really do not have prognostications for the future. For the dairy goat in general, taking its rightful place as the Foster Mother of the Human Race seems a much more likely probability here in America than it was when I started. All breeders, producers, and friends should try in every way take their husbandry seriously and responsibly. We all will benefit if we increase the rightful respectability in the public eye of this noble animal that it so richly deserves.

Your involvement in the dairy industry:

Tells us about your books, cheeses and over all experience outside of the show ring world.

My husband Larry wrote a series of articles in the nineties which were published in the United Caprine News. In those articles he detailed some of the experiences, funny and/or achy, that we had experienced in raising goats. He collected them all and put them into a book called "Hold to the Rod." It's a pretty entertaining little book, and I am proud of it. Anyone can order it on our website, [www. Ironrodalpines.com](http://www.Ironrodalpines.com). He hasn't written anything about me lately, although, since we just lost two yearlings to a dog attack, he probably could.

Our cheese making enterprise is highlighted in our book as well. We were talked into making some cheese by a prominent chef in Charlottesville. He was very complimentary, and we saw the possibility of finding a way to use our excess milk while at the same time paying for the dairy goat enterprise.

We set out to meet all the stringent requirements for pasteurizing milk and producing fresh cheese here in Virginia. We built a separate building, and equipped it with drains in every room, washable walls, six sinks, refrigerators, a boiler for hot water, a cooler, and a pasteurizer. Although we are very small, using only a 50 gallon cooler and 50 gallon pasteurizer, we meet all the Virginia requirements. We sell to Whole Foods, four upscale restaurants, a couple of deli's, and many one or two other places. We make only fromage Blanc, plain and several flavors. We sell all we produce, and our customers are loyal and complimentary. The cheese and animal sales continue to pay all the bills and give me a little spending money.

We were excited to bring our cheese to the National Show last year and show it off at the Wine and Cheese tasting dinner. We periodically accept an invitation to provide cheese at a wine tasting festival or the like here in Virginia. We are very pleased with our cheese.

I am constantly meeting new people who have heard about goats, are interested in goats, or are desperate because their children cannot tolerate cow's milk. I usually have a visitor or two a day. I have made many friends in the local area, as well as all over the country who have purchased a goat from me. The people in the local area who have bought a pet quality goat from me, I usually hear from regularly, asking me questions. I

have been involved with 4-H kids, who need pointers in raising and showing their animals.

It's the kids who need goats' milk for their health that are the tough ones. Although we pasteurize our milk, we do not own milk packaging equipment, so it is illegal to sell goats' milk in Virginia. They want unpasteurized milk for the health benefits, and we cannot sell that either. It's an untenable position to be in—turn away someone in need or break the law. We are allowed to sell unpasteurized goats' milk to be fed to pets, however.

For additional information please visit:

www.ironrodalpines.com

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