

## The Summer of 1976 and a Backyard Milk Goat - The History of Munchin Hill

**By Kevin W. Kinney**

Do you remember Ninety-Two or Ninety-Three? No, not the year but the does GCN Munchin Hill Ninety-Two and GCH Munchin Hill Ninety-Three, they along with Munchin Hill does like GCH Nightingale, the 2<sup>nd</sup> place 3 year old at the 1993 National show or GCH Billie-Joe 9<sup>th</sup> place and GCH Nugget 5<sup>th</sup> place does both at the 1997 National Show paved the way for does like GCH Munchin Hill Peek-a-Boo, 1<sup>st</sup> place 3yr old at the 2006 National show and are the foundation of a very successful French Alpine Breeding program.

A program like most herds that started out with a backyard goat just as a milk supply that steadily grew into one of the most successful French Alpine herds in both New York and West Virginia. So, how did Munchin Hill do it? One sure way is they followed the old adage that was given to them when they first started out: "breed the best to the best and cull the rest." This along with a kin eye for structurally correct does and an understanding of using proven bloodlines has been just a few of their secrets to success. Now in her own words, Pat Adels shares some of her herd's history, advice on breeding and general thoughts about the Alpine breed.

### **When and how did you start in dairy goats?**

Well, way back "in the day" Jeff would always drive by this farm on his way to work where he saw dairy goats grazing in a huge pasture. We were into homesteading big time and Jeff got it into his head that we should get our own milk supply by purchasing a backyard goat. I really balked at this. You see, I was a horse person and had the widespread American notion in my head of goats being shaggy mangy-looking critters with absolutely no aesthetic attraction at all. Then too, I didn't want to have to be committed to milking twice daily. I had also tasted goat milk we had bought locally, and it was horrible. Well, Jeff persisted and promised he would milk one shift if I would milk the other. So we watched the local newspapers and answered an ad for a grade milking doe. Thus it was in the summer of 1976, that Jennifer came home with us -and yes, Jennifer was very shaggy and mangy-looking with that long bleached-out "skirting" hanging down to her knees and hocks! For the next three days all she did was cry for companionship and drove us crazy with all her racket. We learned goats are herd animals. So it was that we located another grade, Sun-Kissed Bitsey Bambi which we purchased from Eleanor Rider. (And, the milk from these does was delicious!)

I had no love for the whole dairy thing though, let alone goats in general, until Jennifer and Bitsey kidded that following year. My eyes filled with tears of wonder and joy watching those newborn kids and how they bonded to us and wagged their little tails when being bottle-fed. The horse got sold. Hmmm, Jennifer and Bitsey didn't look half-bad clipped down. So our love affair began.

Our children were just toddlers when Jeff and I became hooked on goats. They spent their summers playing in saw dust piles at the ends of show rings. What a mess! Those first years are a blur in time now, but what fun they were....We wonder where we

got the energy to do it all. We retained about seventeen senior does each year. All were hand-milked just about year round, and we had excellent demand for every drop we could produce.

### **Have you always worked with the Alpine lines?**

Those first two grade does had mostly Toggenburg in their pedigrees. After having them for about four to five years and becoming avid show exhibitors, Jeff and I fell head-over-heels at the Alpine coloration we saw at the shows. We were especially drawn to the big milky cou blancs and cou clairs in the Springsun and Sun-Kissed herds. We sold our grades and the does we had bred to American Togg status. We decided to purchase French Alpines, because at that time in the goat industry, there was prejudice against anything that was not purebred. Our first milker was a mouthy and incorrigible yearling, Sun-Kissed Niklolette, who was to become one of the hottest does in town.

### **What lines were people working with when you started?**

Gee, that's a long time ago. I had to really think on this one. Raymar, Nixon's, Hill-N-Holler, Thunderhead and Diamond-Sunshine were the biggest names I can remember that the New England breeders were using. The Springsun herd owned by Rich and Toni Davidson from New Jersey had, overall, the most consistent nationally competitive does in the area. The Davidsons had brought in some very prepotent Hill N Holler bucks that traced back to the Nixon's lines. Hill N Holler Star Journey was heavy in the lineage. To the north, there was heavy competition from three Vermont herds: the Little Rise herd owned by Kathryn Jones, Sam Whiteside's Evermore herd, and the Sudbury Hill herd owned by Art Keefe. Sunshine Stella's Strike and Sunshine Robelta Rommel were found in their pedigrees. The Alpine entries at shows were huge in the northeast. It was quite common to see classes of well over twenty milking yearlings.

### **How have you seen the breed evolve over the years?**

Definitely yes, Udders were the be-all and end-all in the show ring way back then. That was every breeder's sole goal. If you had a doe with an exceptionally nice udder, she won. Many judges would, very obviously, just bend down and look at udders and udders only, to make their placings. Finally there came the days when the whole goat was put into balance in the show ring. Just because your doe had a huge well-attached udder, no longer meant she would take her class. It was wonderful to see feet, legs and bodies now taken into account. Then came the front-end era; Alpines up to that time had pretty much everything else conformation-wise. After that phase, the direction headed toward the larger framed animals with those very long-bone patterns. It seems the last few years, the tall, really well-balanced correct milky does have remained the goal of most breeders. The Alpine has come a long way and I really like today's standards.

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

In our early years, we simply had beginner's luck. We bred some of our long, leggy New England does with bucks from the Springsun herd (Springsun J Dandy, Springsun V Ricochet and Springsun V Lukas). The crosses worked beautifully. The offspring retained the size and scale of the Northeast does but had the addition of superior udders and better front ends.

In selecting bucks now, we try to choose those that have both the pedigree and the type that we prefer. In checking those pedigrees, we generally just look two generations back at the sire and dam and grandsires and granddams. These ancestors are the ones that have the most influence genetically. Now, if these ancestors also all have the type, or most of the type we prefer, then that is the buck we select as a herd sire. Sometimes in searching to bring in a new buck from another herd, we may like the dam, but not the sire to which she is bred. The opposite is also true. So we keep searching.

As far as type goes, we prefer the long-boned, "necky" dairy goats, and dairy character, dairy character and more dairy character! The taller does are the ones we have always favored over the years. I'm the shortest one in our family and so it is easier for us to show does with greater stature. We find that a milk pail fits much more easily under a long-legged doe than it does under a short-legged doe. Now the last and this is a purely aesthetic reason because I was a horse-person and loved Arabians, I just simply enjoy watching the long graceful does out in their pasture.

### **What were/are your strongest dam lines?**

Our strongest dam line was from that first very cantankerous French Alpine doe, Sun-Kissed Nikolette. The only reason Eleanor Rider from Sun-Kissed sold her to us was because of Nikolette's aggravating temperment. Nikolette was tall, long and lean and had a socked-on udder with tremendous area of attachment. She had a lineage with Raymar's Intimidator, Diamond Sunshine Reflector and Nixon's Nobility in her background. Nikolette easily finished her championship and gave us five daughters, all of which were wonderful show does with fantastic udders. Four of them easily completed their championships. The fifth had a permanent teat injury and couldn't be shown. Over the years, almost all of our does were related in one way or another to Nikolette. We were very relieved that none ever inherited her disposition. Eventually we ended up selling Nikolette for the same reason she was sold to us. She was purchased by Larry McVey from Fire-Fox Alpines, who also got some nice offspring from that old gal.

One of Nikolette's daughter's, GCH Munchin Hill Nuggette, became the dam to our very pre-potent GCH Munchin Hill Napoleon. He had the conformation, size, dairy character and style that were passed on to almost all his daughters.

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

Due to the small size of our present herd, we can not use too many of our own bucks. Presently we are very impressed with a young boy bred by Cherry Glen that we

were able to purchase. He is Cherry Glen Abraham Rushkin, sired by Willow Run Armand Abraham and out of GCH Willow Run Ahren Rivkah. Rushkin leaves nothing to be desired in conformation. We were totally "wowed" when we brought him home. He has the same type and style that we hope to maintain within our herd.

We also have a nice young buck here, Munchin'Hill Avant Garde, out of our own Annie who was 2nd place milking yearling at the 2004 Nationals. His sire is CH Qu'appelle V Etienne, full brother to Ember, sire of Redwood Hill's Americale, a National Show ResGCH. We will be using him this fall of 2008.

Roeburn's Lincoln is another sire we now have on the farm. He is sired by Hoach's Londia Lohengrin and out of Roeburn's Brutus Liesel LA 91(EEEE). Lincoln should give us added strength and maintain correctness throughout.

We always are keeping an eye out for what other herds may have that would complement our gene pool. Because we are unable to visit herds distant herds, we really appreciate those breeders who are able to get some nice pictures up on their websites.

### **What are your future goals for your herd?**

I think we will pretty much stay with the course we are on. If we had the luxury of affording reliable hired help, we would be able to retain more does in our herd. Since Jeff and I are no longer in our prime years and have commitments apart from the goats, we do need to keep the herd a hobby size. Still, we will select the best we can from what we freshen each year and hope to stay competitive with larger herds that show nationally. Our does have to remain productive in the milk pail. We plan to continue to appraise regularly. We find that there is always something we can learn from the appraisers who are fortunate enough to see many more dairy herds throughout the country than we ever could.

### **A number of national level breeders as well as hobbyist breeders that have used your lines; what kind of influence are these lines making or have made across the nation?**

When we resided in New York State, there had to be at least twenty smaller Alpine breeders in our area who would use our bucks for breeding. Our boys more than earned their keep every year! Napoleon especially, was used quite extensively and we are amazed at the number of offspring, both registered and unregistered that he actually had out there. Because we have attended only a handful of National Shows, our herd was only known in the Northeast. Still, on occasion, some of our lines have found their way into larger herds. Included are the Welbian, Shady Lawn, Sutton's, Kickapoo-Valley and the Pleasant Grove herds.

I believe that in using any particular lines, ours included, some have worked and some have not. It is a matter of trial and error in most cases. Otherwise breeding national champions would be a piece of cake. Some of the matches we made here were complete disasters. One example was our 1997 Junior National Champion. She had the body of bodies. In the show ring, nothing could touch her locally or at the

Nationals. Then she freshened. Sigh....It turned out that her sire completely ruined the medial suspensory ligament not only in her, but in every one of his progeny in our herd. Yet in another show herd that buck threw lovely mammaries in his daughters. Go figure, so breeders have to be aware about any outside line that is introduced and be careful before you put all your eggs in one basket.

For the most part in talking to those breeders who have used our lines, we have found that our lines do pass on style and improve length of bone and body as well as milk production.

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

Gee, this is where I get to brag about our girls. But, honestly, I feel humbled with your actually asking me these questions because of the extremely small size of our herd compared with others all over this country. Having been to only five National Shows, I am happy to say that with the exception of our very first National Show in 1988, all our girls "made the cut". You have to realize that here on the east coast, many of these classes had upwards of more than seventy does entered!! Due to our herd size, we were limited to entering somewhere around six seniors and a few juniors each time. In 1993, GCH Munchin'Hill Ninety-two was 3rd yearling milker, having the best general appearance in the class. Her dam, GCH Munchin'Hill Nightingale, was second place three-year old. Our other milkers also placed in the top ten in their classes. We were, I believe, 3rd place dairy herd.

In 1997, Nightingale had 1st place produce of dam with three lovely daughters, GCH Nugget and Nightshade owned by us and GCH Snowbird, owned by Donna Pearce. Nightshade was Junior National Champion.

In 2004, our highest placing was with CH Munchin'Hill Annie, who went 2nd milking yearling, beaten by a Willow Run doe that would turn 2 yrs old the next week! The 2006 Nationals saw our Munchin'Hill Allegheny take 3rd, CH Munchin'Hill Power Klassic was 4th place 4 yr old, CH Munchin'Hill Peek-a-boo went 1st place 3 yr. old and 1st udder, and CH Munchin'Hill Kickoff took a very respectable 10th. We really should have entered the awesome Kickoff and Klassic duo in dam and daughter, because locally they had been undefeated. Oh, well...

In our early years in goats, we were on DHIR testing for eight consecutive years. When we lived in New York State, every one of our milkers easily made her "star" as a yearling. They were really good producers. In those years ADGA designated superior does as "Supreme Champions" if they appraised (actually "classified" in those days) 90 or higher and produced at least 3500 lbs of milk and also completed their championships. From what I can recall, we had at least two does in that category. One was GCH Munchin Hill Molly and the other was GCH Munchin Hill Nuggette. After our tester retired, almost all of our girls were able to make their stars at one-day milk tests held in late August at the huge Dutchess County Fair. Down here in WV, we are not on test but do weigh the milk monthly. This way we can give a good approximation of each doe's yearly average to potential buyers.

We usually try to appraise every two years. The herd has done very well, with most of our champions appraising excellent as mature does. Our present does haven't been scored since 2005, but did well the last time around with Kickoff at 91(EEEE) @ 5 yrs, KClassic at 90(VEVE)@ 3 yrs, Annie at 89 (VEEE) @ 2 yrs, and Peek-a-boo at 91(EEEE) @ 2 yrs. Some other does that we have sold since our last appraisal, have also scored excellent.

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

Selecting for the tall, angular, milky does has definitely been our main focus over the years. Generally, most kids born here exhibit those qualities and we are content in having achieved that end. However, no herd has ever reached the perfection stage, so that's what keep us all focused on what requires fine-tuning in each of our does.

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

Differently? Well, I believe we would have been able to achieve our preferred style of dairy goat more quickly if we had used AI. Unfortunately, I have eyesight difficulties so had to rely on doing natural breedings over the years. We probably also would have retained a greater number of doe kids and milkers than we did. It seems we always found ourselves caught in the dilemma between spending more time with the breeding program versus more time with other family activities. It's a fine line that we had to walk with balancing the two so that our dairy goat venture would not become a total obsession.

The same? We would still cull heavily in spite of sentimental attachment to some of the does. Culling would include those herd members that had obnoxious personalities and tested both our patience and sanity, and conformation traits that are personal pet peeves such as "east-west" teat placements. If we had retained too many in the herd, we would have easily ended up in burn-out mode.

**What advice would you give new breeders?**

If you plan to compete well against established breeders, then purchase the best does you can and not someone's culls. Find honest breeders who are willing to sell some of their better animals. Make certain that the animals are CAE negative and growthy for their age. Realize that genetics is only half of the equation. Without good management, your herd will never be able to reach its best potential in heavy competition. I have had the opportunity to judge some non-ADGA sanctioned shows, and it has pained me tremendously to see beautiful Alpine does that have wonderful conformation and mammary systems, yet are very undersized and in poor flesh.

Many new breeders want to use their homebred bucks as sires. If he is better than anything else genetically, then by all means use him. But, don't get caught in an ego trap and use him just because he carries your herd name. Don't keep a herd that is larger than you can physically care for and financially support. Finally, follow the old

adage that was given to us when we were newbies: "breed the best to the best and cull the rest."

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

There are many strengths in the modern Alpine. Thirty years ago the Alpine was known for its much splayed feet, weak pasterns and poor front ends. The breed now has much better feet and legs, improved front end assemblies and more substance to its frame. Breeders have to remain on this track to assure that these faults do not re-emerge in the future.

There seems to be a trade-off between having excellent rear leg angle and enough width in the escutcheon to accommodate a nicely-arched wide rear udder. Some of the herds have been able to mesh these two traits, while other herds are still having difficulties in this area. Also, I have seen a certain coarseness creeping into some lines where the does are big and beautiful and correct but have not retained the high production that should remain one of the important attributes of the breed. Being really drawn to dairy character, we would hate to see this lost.

**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?**

Most probably Sunshine, Nixon's, Hill N Holler and Sodium Oaks are some of the names that stood out in our early years in Alpine breeding. The last 10 years or so, we have to give a nod to what some herds like Hoach's and also larger ones like Willow Run and Cherry Glen have accomplished with their ability to mesh some of the best gene pools from all over the country into some gorgeous, strong and productive dairy goats.

I liken breeding fine dairy goats to being a fine chef. We add a little bit of this and a little bit of that to the mix with the hope that the best of the ingredients meld well. When it does, you can look at that little 7 lb newborn doe, smile, and have sweet dreams about her becoming a future GCH! If you ask me to narrow down the lines to the one that made the most positive impact on Munchin'Hill animals, it would most probably be those early Springsun bucks that were basically from Nixon's/Hill N Holler lineage. They contributed high wide udders with extreme production and attachments, and also front ends that were correct and smoothly blended.

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

With the dissolution of Willow Run, some fine Alpine bucks and does have found their way into many herds across our country. This has enabled many smaller breeders to add larger framed animals and improved mammary systems to their herds. I know that there are also many other breeders out there with fine animals who are currently doing wonders in the show ring and the milk pail. These include (but are not limited to) Kickapoo-Valley, Pleasant Grove, Cherry Glen, Lady-K, Pearl Valley, Hoach's, plus

the "oldies but goodies": Nixon's and Sunshine which seem to have been around forever!

### **How do you feel about French vs. American Alpines?**

Just because Munchin Hill has all French Alpines does not mean that they are necessarily better than Americans. A nice doe is a nice doe, be she French or American. The prettiest doe Jeff and I probably ever laid eyes on was American. When we first saw SGCH Cherry Glen T. Holly's Hope in the flesh, Jeff was nearly brought to tears by both her beauty and her dairy character. The problem with maintaining a French herd is that you have a limited gene pool. On the other hand, those who do retain exclusively French lines have the opportunity to sell their bucks into both American and French herds. My take is that whatever the lines you prefer, just breed the best you can.

### **In general what future do you see for the alpine?**

Being biased, I, of course, just think the Alpine has it all! (BIG GRIN) There can be no regrets with having a breed that milks its heart out for you, blesses you with many sets of triplets and quads, is a survivor and not a shrinking violet in the goat world, and gives you the surprise of color, color and more color combinations and surprises than you could ever hope for. The Alpine is here to stay. We breeders just can't be barn-blind and must use only the best sires out of the best does of the breed. If we are selective, then the breed will retain its present strengths and eliminate any conformational problems that may present themselves.

### **What should breeders be working towards, correcting, or adding to the breed?**

In my opinion, we should all be breeding does that are strong and genetically pre-disposed to good health and longevity. Retain those lines that have easy kiddings, rebound well after stresses and continue to milk well. After all, Alpines are very DAIRY goats. That is the main reason most folks get into goats in the first place. Since the back end is the working end in does, I like to see very wide rumps that are level from thurl to thurl on our milkers. This trait enables the doe to both easily carry a large productive mammary system and have easier kiddings. A trait that seems to bear watching is the head. We love pretty heads here at Munchin Hill, although I have to admit that sometimes we have sacrificed those pretty dish faces in order to incorporate some other characteristics into our gene pool. As Alpine breeders, we should not lose sight of the breed character.

### **What direction should the alpine breed take?**

The breed itself should aim at sustaining a wonderful feed to milk conversion ratio. Sometimes this is neglected by some show herds that may only focus on



conformation. Yes, we all long for the big red, white and blue rosettes when we attend shows, but the Alpine is one of the major dependable dairy breeds and high production must remain a major goal.

In linear appraisal, no single dairy goat has ever reached a perfect score, so there is always room for improvement in all four areas of the scorecard. There are presently several lovely Alpines in the country who have achieved appraisals of 93. Yet, in my lifetime, I do sincerely hope to see some fine Alpines surpass that mark.

To learn more about Munchin Hill Alpines:

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