

From M&M Acres to Olentangy Alpines: *The rewarding experience of breeding their style*

M&M Acres like most herds started out as 4H project, but a dedication to breeding correct productive animals and then a across country move inspired M&M Acres to evolve into Olentangy Alpines, one of the strongest modern alpine herds today. The following is a look at the history of this notable herd and the thoughts of its accomplished breeder, Mark Baden, in his own words.

BY Kevin W. Kinney

Your involvement in Alpine Dairy Goats:

When and how did you start in dairy goats?

My family had a large flock of Suffolk & Hampshire sheep in the early 1980's due to my older brother's growing 4-H & FFA projects and we always had one or two goats running with them. Goats that can be seen in old family photos appear to be Saanen types, but I'm sure they were grades of one breed or another. In 1982, my sister wanted an animal because my brother had sheep and I had some rabbits, so she asked for a horse. My parents said that we couldn't afford one. Her quick response was "Then how about a goat?" Not wanting to be left out of anything at the time, I asked for one too. My mother looked in the newspaper and found an ad for some kids for sale. The next weekend we came home with two grade kids...and I've had registered dairy goats ever since.

Have you always worked with the Alpine lines?

Those two grade kids were 50% Alpine 50% Nubian experimental. The breeder told us to be sure and breed them Alpine because if we didn't, and bred them to a Nubian buck, the odds of the resulting kids turning out weren't very good. We showed those kids in 4-H and did very well. My sister sold her doe to me two years later after her interest in animals declined. Twenty-seven years later, I can honestly say that every doe in my current herd goes back to my sister's original 4-H doe, WALSAL DANAPAR'S SMILEY E000499879. We didn't have an official herd-name back then and the names we chose for the goats had no organized format. My original herd prefix was M&M Acres (Mark & Margaret) representing my mother and myself. Smiley's granddaughter would become my first generation American Alpine, M&M Acres Crystal. From her I derived a new hobby of dairy goat gemology and mineralogy, creating unique and unpronounceable names for some show secretaries for years to come!

During my own 4-H career, I won an essay contest where I received an American Toggenburg donated by Donna Shepherd of Peebles, Ohio. With that doe I would win my first ADGA rosettes and first ever ADGA Best Senior Doe in Show award. There weren't very many Toggenburgs in Northwest Ohio at that time and finding a buck to breed was difficult. I had "graded-up" my recorded grades to American Alpine status and decided to sell the Toggenburgs I owned.

Over the years I have had one LaMancha, a Spotlight Sale Oberhasli, and a small show herd of Saanens. Recently, I have become partners with the members of my milk test group in order to help them breed and show their competitive Nubians. Over time I've always loved the Alpines for both their humorous & ornery character, variety of color, size, scale and general aesthetic beauty.

What lines were people working with when you started and how have you seen the breed evolve over the years?

In the early 1980's, not many breeders ventured out to fly in a bucks from the west coast, so what you saw at shows was very regional. Dominant herds in the Alpine breed in the Midwest at the time were TWIN MILLS, ANACACHO, ABUNDANCE, GOOSE-CROSSING and SUNSHINE. Purebreds were very common until Judy Schad of Fox Spring Alpines and Capriole Cheese, Pekin, IN purchased a majority of the SODIUM OAKS herd in 1988. Judy brought GCH SODIUM OAKS TWISTER WILLOW to a large show in Delaware, Ohio where she went Best in Show. WILLOW was inspiring! She changed my view of the kind of Alpine that I wanted to have and I sought out to breed does like her or better from that day on.

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

When selecting a new herdsire, I choose two traits in general appearance and two in mammary system that I want to improve in my herd (in general terms). Then I start researching for the best breeding that has the highest reliability to produce a buck that could accomplish those trait goals. I concentrate on dominant doe lines that have the ability to reproduce themselves for multiple generations. Ideally the doe would have two or more milking daughters and you can identify the desired general appearance & mammary traits in her daughters. I have never purchased a buck without having first seen his dam in person. Sire selection is too important to be fooled by Photoshop ® editing!

For artificial insemination sire options, I rely heavily on linear appraisal data. When I have had good luck with a new buck, I like to purchase semen on his half brothers (maternal and/or paternal) and that has proven to be effective.

What were/are your strongest dam lines?

My best milking line in both production and components is the "C" line starting with SG Olentangy Es-Sell Chatoyant *M and one of her progeny in my herd today is SGCH Olentangy Fortune Chrystin 4*M. As far as show quality and repeatability, that would have to be the "T" line that most people associate with GCH Olentangy Fortune Trona 3*M. That family is dominant in my herd at this time and includes five generations of permanent grand champions that I have bred, including the last three generations have placed in the top ten as milking does at ADGA National shows. My favorite doe line though is my "A" line for their outstanding general appearance & overall style. This line has been frugal with does, but the ones I've gotten have all been outstanding.

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

I have been using Redwood Hills and Clovertop bucks with great success the past ten years both in natural service and A/I. When I use Sodium Oaks bucks via A/I it seems to generate a lot of interest as I have accumulated quite an old inventory over the years. I think that new Alpine breeders (less than 10 years into breeding dairy goats) have heard so many of us 'old timers' (over 25 years in dairy goats) comment on the impressiveness of Donald Smith's breeding program and they want a part of it. There isn't a Sodium Oaks web site out there or many copies of old sales lists for new breeders to introduce themselves with the name. Each year when I post my breeding list and I have used a Sodium Oaks buck, those are the first breedings that receive

reservations.

I'm fortunate to have quality competition at my local shows in the Pacific Northwest, primarily in Lauren Acton's Tempo herd. Recently we have begun to use each other's bucks with good success, primarily because both herds are influenced by Redwood Hill genetics. I'm happy with the style that I have been able to create with these lines and hope to continue with some modifications through careful, proven sire selections.

What are your future goals for your herd?

I appreciate the high standards that my good friends Don & Judi Hoy have established for their renowned Lucky*Star herd, and I have adopted my own, similar expectations. My goal is for a herd of does that can produce 3,000 pounds of milk and 100 pounds of butterfat, appraise final score 90 or above with excellent scores in general appearance and mammary system, and finally, achieve their show championship status by maturity. I also would like to see half of my milking herd achieve Superior Genetic status as this is the newest ADGA award program available highlighting the best in the breed. I think those are realistic, attainable goals. Some other 'pie in the sky' dreams would be to breed a National Show milking class winner, Top Ten does or a buck that is atop the USDA Sire Summary. I hope that the plans I have in place today can make those dreams a reality.

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?

It's flattering when other breeders inquire and decide to incorporate my breeding program with theirs. I have focused on mammary systems with an emphasis on teat size, placement and medial support and in general appearance, correctness in front end assembly. I hope those are the traits that others have found improvements in when they have used my lines.

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

I think that the most significant accomplishment I have experienced so far is having three different doe lines be able to reproduce themselves and improve generation to generation; creating a 5 consecutive generation show permanent champion line (the "T" line), a 4 consecutive generation of EX90 or higher and permanent show champions (the "C" line) and 3 consecutive generations of EX90 or higher and show permanent champions (the "A" line). Sometimes it's hard to just get a nice dam and daughter group, but to continue to maintain correctness and make improvements for continued generations has been a rewarding accomplishment.

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

According to the ADGA member's site, I have owned 238 registered dairy goats since 1982. I've never had a large herd, maybe the most I have ever had at one time has been 35 including wethers and bucks. To date I have bred 16 Superior Genetics, 36 Show Champions and 36 animals appraised EX90 or higher. Not bad considering my first permanent champion was in 1994 and my first doe to appraise EX90 was in 1996. My breeding program has come a long way the past decade! The first National success my herd achieved was in the Alpines International All-American competitions. I've had over 40 All-Americans and it has been rewarding to see

kids that were honored eventually "turn-out" and become milking All-Americans and show champions. Growing up I was always told about the junior champion "kiss of death" and the fear it created that she wouldn't turn out. Now as an adult when I look at established breeding programs, regardless of the breed, I can see champion qualities in their junior animals at a young age and I'm not surprised when I see that same junior champion of last year become their winning milking yearling this show season. I expect my junior champions to be a part of my show string for years to come. At the ADGA National shows I've graduated from just 'making the cut' to having most all of my entries place in the top ten. I've won a few junior classes and groups but that blue ribbon in a senior doe class has eluded me thus far.

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

That's a catch 22 for me. It took a long time to develop a quality, show string via the "breeding-up" method. I'm not sure in today's competitive climate that I would have stayed with a dairy goat hobby for so many years without having more show ring success earlier on. In the 1980's, ADGA club shows in the Midwest always had showmanship competitions for each ring. I was very competitive in showmanship, often those were the only rosettes I brought home. Without that reward, I think it would have been hard to keep coming back from shows every week empty handed. Club shows that I attend or judge in the 2000's, rarely have showmanship competitions and more often than not, there aren't many youth in the ring. It's hard to compete on a 4-H budget when there are veteran breeders with adult funds in the ring! I always requested sales lists from the elite herds across the country and dreamed of owning one of their animals, but I never could afford one.

It took a long time, but it has been a much more rewarding experience breeding my own style of dairy goat. I wouldn't feel the same sense of accomplishment had I merely purchased two gene pools and attempted to merge them. If I changed how I did things, I wouldn't have the herd that I am proud of making today. Sure it would have been nice to have mastered artificial insemination years earlier or to have been able to purchase a buck instead of having to rely on what other area breeders had available to use for stud service. Overall, I can say that I am happy with the goats I go out to feed and milk each day.

What advice would you give new breeders?

Don't let your new dairy goat enthusiasm get in the way of practical reality! Keep your herd numbers in check, the better care that you can give each individual animal, the more opportunity for success each of those animals have. Never sacrifice animal or herd health because that will be your reputation at shows and with other breeders. Have an attainable goal to achieve and update it accordingly, this will help your motivation and prevent early 'burn-out'. Be very selective on sire choices and do your research! Finally, if you have a choice, buy a *good* milker, not a *great* kid.

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

Modern Alpines are powerful, dairy and productive individuals. Alpine mammary systems have come a long way in my tenure. Many are as correct as if an artist drew them on a canvas. While current day Alpines are much larger in size and scale than earlier generations, the general appearance correctness hasn't always grown with the additional size. As a breed, front leg straightness and strength needs improvement in both the French and American gene pools. And

then there is the great confusion about what really is a “correct” front end assembly. I would love to see this topic explored and made a priority as a joint effort by the ADGA type, linear appraisal and judges training committees to educate the membership on what *really* is correct in this area. Some Alpines have smooth shoulders but that doesn’t mean they have an entirely correct front end assembly! Regardless of the breed you raise, we all need to have the same understanding of this trait in order to be able to see improvements in future generations.

How do you perceive East Coast vs. West Coast bloodlines, styles, production and over all breed quality.

I wouldn’t have been able to appreciate the differences had I not moved my herd over two thousand miles in 2001 to the Pacific Northwest. Comparing photos in advertisements or web sites doesn’t give the entire perspective unlike seeing your animals in the ring next to breeding programs you previously only heard of. When I exhibited my does the first time on the west coast, I knew *immediately* that my does needed to milk more. Alpine production among show does is significantly higher (in my observation) on the west coast. In general, the west coast does dictate the trend in American Alpines with fancier mammary systems and longer & taller bone patterns. French Alpines are more at par coast to coast. I have made it a practice to attend the ADGA National show every year either as an exhibitor or spectator and the western locations have been far more inspiring.

From the time you started breeding dairy goats, please reflect on what bucks or lines that you feel have made the most impact on the breed? Please reflect now on the lines that most impacted your herd?

Without question, Sodium Oaks Sasin has had the greatest impact on American Alpines beginning in the early 80’s and still today. Almost all influential Americans now trace back to Sodium Oaks lineage. A French buck that has had coast to coast success in the same time frame in several breeding programs is Redwood Hills Sunshine Reverie. Some more regionally impressive French sires of note were: Abundance Danish Classic (a Serendipity breeding that would ignite the Willow Run French Alpine lines), Sand Dance HLS Rico Suave (another Serendipity based breeding made famous by Randy Hoach), and New Era’s Kane (yet more Serendipity...see a trend?).

My own herd’s success is directly descended from Sodium Oaks. The first buck I ever owned was a Sasin son. Although the next buck that I purchased is the one that really put me on the map. He was a Yreka son, Iroquois-KC Yreka Phenomenon, which transformed my herd from a 4-H project into to a real breeding program.

What bucks or lines do you feel are currently (NOW) making a major impact on the Alpine as well as on your lines? What do you see them doing – good or bad?

The notable bucks today arguably are Tempo Aquila Freelance (owned by Redwood Hills) and Pleasant Grove Super Saga (owned by Kickapoo Valley). Saga is the reigning three time National Show Premier Sire, more than any Alpine other than Sasin. Freelance is siring exciting daughters with top ten production credits that win best in show honors.

I have had good results with Redwood Hill bucks and I show with the Tempo herd locally, making me very familiar with Freelance’s style. I currently have a son from the 2007 ADGA

Reserve National Champion and will be able to evaluate his first daughters by the time this article is printed.

How do you feel about French vs. American Alpines? Is there really a difference?

There is a difference between French and American Alpines, how much it affects your breeding program depends on your goals. What is important to discuss is what really makes a purebred 'pure'? LaManchas have an open herdbook, unlike any other ADGA breed. I participate in DNA typing of my goats on a regular basis, the parentage qualifies generation after generation, yet they remain Americans. We submit our registrations 'on our honor' with no requirement to prove the pedigrees they represent (other than embryo transfer). What it boils down to is French or American is just a designation on a piece of paper, nothing more.

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

The Alpine breed has a wide and diverse genetic pool with dedicated, competitive breeders across the country. I would like to see the Alpines International breed Club take on a more proactive role of breeder education. I made attempts at that when I was the Club's President and newsletter editor, but I wasn't as successful as I'd hoped to be! Promoting increased participation in linear appraisal and DHIR to supply unbiased data about structure for trait specific improvements would help breeders of all levels. I have observed time and again internet discussion lists where bloggers became upset or even hostile if one negative trait was mentioned in association with a certain buck or herdname. Wouldn't it be more beneficial to talk about these issues openly and honestly for the greater good of breeding better Alpines?

I've heard phrases like "longer and taller" or "there's just more goat" for oral reasons at the ADGA National Show. This seems to justify placing gargantuan does at the head of the line. Perhaps we should revisit our breed standard? Do we really want alpine to be 30" at the withers or not? With this current push for larger scaled dairy goats and the constant desire for aesthetic balance, we should consider adding milk production and strength and substance of bone to the general makeup of modern Alpine conformation.

Anything else you would like to add or talk about?

There is something about every breed that I admire. I am not opposed to ADGA expanding to new breeds in the future, because I love the diversity! I am troubled though by the lack of specific definition in the breed standards. The Alpine breed standard allows solid white bucks and does to be registered. The Sable breed standard does not. This is confusing to me. The Sable breed derives from Saanen genetics, and yet can't look like a Saanen, but an Alpine can. The ear, nose, height and weight requirements are all the same, nothing to distinguish an Alpine from a Sable on paper. I wouldn't have as much of a problem with this if we had more safeguards in place like DNA typing of sires or at least all A/I (collected) bucks.

I have really enjoyed my dairy goat experience despite all the financial and emotional costs. But I worry about the future opportunities for all dairy goat owners. Costs in all areas of livestock care and management are on the rise. Urban encroachment and restrictive zoning laws exist in every state. Youth participation is decreasing. I applaud those who make the extra effort to mentor new breeders and youth. It's that kind of positive community service that we all need to

participate in to ensure dairy goats are a desirable endeavor for anyone to explore.