

## 35 years of Consistency: Roeburn Alpines

By Kevin W. Kinney

With high levels of quality throughout Roeburn Alpines of Lebanon, NH have created their niche in the French Alpine world; they have done it all from licensed dairy to show herd to top ten animals, this is one herd that has and is still making their mark on the national scene. In their own words they share what it takes to achieve consistency in an award winning herd.

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

The best way to explain my start in dairy goats is to say that I truly “fell into” the world of goats and farming. My parents both grew up in the city of Boston, pursued primarily intellectual interests, and knew nothing of farming. Moving to a New York City suburb by the time I was in elementary school, we led a fairly typical suburban life with our only exposure to animals being to that of our dog.

I can now identify a couple of experiences that I believe had a strong influence on my eventual involvement in dairy goats. The first stemmed from an invitation by friends of my parents in New Jersey to vacation at their “summer home” in the Adirondack Mountains of New York. The place turned out to be a 200 acre former working farm with all the buildings intact, but with the house completely unimproved without electricity or indoor plumbing. A neighboring farmer’s Holstein heifers happily grazed the land. I was 7 years old, and immediately smitten. I could hardly wait to return each summer after that to spend my days in the fields with the cows. I still remember my parents’ dismay!

I had no exposure to farm animals again until, after completing graduate school, I found myself living in a converted barn on a small family farm in Pennsylvania where the animal population included a single goat. This goat followed me everywhere and it was then that it first occurred to me that it might be fun some day to own a goat.

The opportunity finally presented itself when I moved to rural New Hampshire in 1974 to take a new job as a clinical social worker in a community mental health center. Initially renting barn space, I purchased my first doe, a British Toggenburg kid, in 1975, followed just a couple of months later by an American Nubian doe kid. The following year, in 1976, I purchased my first Alpine, a registered purebred named Greenfield’s Mary Lou.

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

At the very start, I had a small number of Toggs and Nubians, but within the first couple of years, I chose the Alpine breed. I enjoyed the variation in their markings, and their personalities seemed to fit best with my own. In 1979, I added a Grade Alpine milker, a beautiful Sudbury Hill doe out of Sunshine Robelta Rommel, and she became the

foundation doe of my American Alpine line. Somewhat unfortunately, over the next few years the Purebreds seemed consistently to produce more doe kids and the Americans buck kids, and eventually, the herd returned to one of exclusively Purebred Alpines.

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

I find it fascinating to trace back the bloodlines of today's Alpines, as so many of the top animals in the breed today go back to a very small number of individuals. In the 1970's, when I purchased Mary Lou, it seems that the predominance of registered Alpines went back to Laurelwood Acres, and Laurelwood Acres Pistacio (born in 1959) in particular. Pistacio was the sire of the very famous Laurelwood Acres Westward Ho (1964). Among the influential Westward Ho offspring were Laurelwood Acres Commander (1970), who was used heavily in the Sunshine and Diamond herds and is behind such animals in the background of my herd as Sunshine Stella's Strike and Sunshine Robelta Rommel. Westward Ho also sired Hill N Holler's Ho's Eclipse (1977), who when bred multiple times to Nixon's Joi Huckster (1974) led to the well known and very successful "V" line in the Hill N Holler herd. Laurelwood Acres Pistacio appears on both sides of my Mary Lou's sire's pedigree (Ryan's Regal Sid, 1975). Another Westward Ho son, Laurelwood Acres Fugitive (1973) became the basis of the Sanstorm herd, and is behind my present day herd through his son, Sanstorm's Court Jester (1978), my first purchased buck.

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

I would say that the area in which I have seen the greatest improvement has probably been that of udder attachment. While I believe that some of the herds who have been most influential in the evolution of today's Alpines were breeding animals long ago who would still be competitive today, when I look back at photos of GCH does from the 1970's, the advancement in the breed becomes quite obvious. In addition to improvement in the mammary system, I feel that overall the breed has shown tremendous structural improvement over the years. I see animals today that are longer bodied more level in the topline, with much improved leg set. I think that Alpine breeders as a whole are continuing to struggle to improve front end structure. I've observed with interest the degree to which the ADGA standards, as set forth in the score card, have influenced the development of all the dairy breeds. I recall that when a number of years ago, ADGA changed the score card to place greater emphasis on rear udder height over fore udder attachment, the impact that the association had on breeders' selection was very quickly evident.

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

I was interested in breeding a better animal from the time I started in dairy goats, and so did my best to learn how to

evaluate my own animals and their needs. While my knowledge was still very limited, from the start I selected bucks from well known herds who were seeking to improve the breed.

My first purchased buck was Sanstorm's Court Jester in 1980. After Jester, I turned to the Sudbury Hill and Little Rise herds, which were geographically close to me, and working with some of the most proven Alpine lines at the time. Art Keefe had purchased both Sunshine Robelta Rommel and Sunshine Stella's Strike from the Considine's, and used both extensively with much success. In 1983, I purchased my second herd sire, +\*B Little Rise SS Asher Benjamin, a Strike son out of a Rommel daughter. Diverging into other genetics lines, although distantly related through Laurelwood Acres, my third purchased buck, in 1984, came from the Springsun herd in NJ, who were working with Hill N Holler lines.

Interestingly, as my own herd improved and my ability to evaluate the animals was refined, I gradually shifted from believing that I had to use outside lines to improve herd quality to having more confidence in my home bred bucks. This shift came as I began to recognize that I had far greater knowledge of my own genetics over the generations than I could ever have of others'. Additionally, I found that, possibly because of my better sense of how to use bucks of my own breeding, I was having greater success with my own. I brought in new bloodlines through the use of AI breedings of my best does to well proven bucks such as Redwood Hills Marvelous Profet, and in more recent years, Hoach's Lyric Liason and Sunshine Seign Sedic.

When I purchase a buck kid now, I look for a kid with proven parents who have depth of pedigree. Given that in the best of circumstances, the results will be uncertain, I would be much more likely to select a kid from a line which has shown consistently high quality than from a top winning dam whose immediate relatives are only average.

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

Amazingly, every doe in my present day herd descends from my original Alpine doe, Greenfield's Mary Lou, not just through the direct doe line, but also through breeding other purchased does back into the Mary Lou line.

In the early 1980's, I acquired a doe from Maine, Foxhollows Pollywog, who was destined to become my second and strongest foundation doe. Descended from Sunshine Robelta Rommel, I bred her to my Rommel grandson, Asher Benjamin, and the resulting twins, GCH Roeburn's AB Portia, and GCH Roeburn's AB Petra, have formed the basis of my herd for many generations. Portia was my first homebred GCH, and the sire of Roeburn's Gatwick Brutus, perhaps the most outstanding of my home bred herd sires. Petra became the first in a line now 4 GCH generations deep, and 3 Linear Appraisal 92 EEEE generations deep. Does in this line in the current herd include GCH Roeburn's BR Rose of Sharon FS92 EEEE, GCH Roeburn's HLL Black Velvet 92 EEEE, and GCH

Roeburn's DVK Sheba FS 92 EEEE. I have had excellent success in breeding the Portia and Petra lines together.

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

My lines seem to have combined well with Hoach lines in recent generations. My first use of these lines came when I acquired a buck, Kickapoo Valley CAL Fritz, out of Hoach's California Gold, from Ed Jodlowski, in 1994. Fritz sired three outstanding does in the herd, GCH Rose Petal FS 92, GCH Dolce Vita, and Roeburn's KVF Lindsey. Following Kickapoo Valley's lead, I then used their sire, Hoach's Lyric Liason, by AI to produce Roeburn's Liason Limerick, who I then used on the Fritz daughters and their offspring. In 2004 I purchased a buck directly from Randy Hoach, Hoach's Londia Lohengrin, whose dam, Londia, was a littermate of Liason. Continuing in these lines, I now have two very closely related Kickapoo Valley bucks in the herd, a two year old Liason son, Kickapoo Valley HL Lord Peter Wimsey, whose offspring are very exciting, and KV Saga Sibelius, out of GCH KV Liason Music. The Pleasant Grove Super Saga influence is new to the herd, but maintains the Hoach and Sunshine lineage.

I would love to bring my own Brutus back into the herd through an outside breeding, as my own herd is still too related for me to want to use him on any does in the herd. If I could find a Brutus son out of an outstanding doe or a buck out of a quality Brutus daughter in another herd, I would definitely snap him up!

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

I hope to be able to continue to keep a small but top quality Alpine herd at a size that I can manage well, but which will be large enough that I can have the range of genetics I need to continue to work toward herd improvement. I will continue to place equal emphasis on production and type, and will not compromise one to gain the other. Having dabbled in the dairy business, I find that I gain far more satisfaction from working directly with the animals in the barn, than I do spending my day in the milk house. I love the challenge of breeding a better animal, and hope to continue to contribute to the advancement of the breed. I am edging toward retirement from my professional job, and imagine that I will have to face some changes in what I am now doing, as I will simply not have the cash flow to maintain my current level of activity as a breeder. I have no plans to expand the herd.

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

I am proud to have bred three Top Ten does here in the often bitterly cold North, most impressive of which is SG Roeburn's Brutus Eliana, FS EEEE, who placed Top Ten for

four consecutive years! I calculate that I have bred 23 permanent Champion does, while rarely attending more than 3 shows per season. The herd's Linear Appraisal average score currently stands at 90, and our DHIR rolling herd average generally runs at approximately 3000 lbs. I have never shown at a National show and doubt that I will, as I find showing to be too stressful both on the animals and myself. As a one person operation, I just do not have the support that this requires both on the home front and at the show.

***How have you seen your genetics utilized in other herds? What kind of influence are they making when crossed with Pure French or American lines? Structurally and genetically speaking how would you recommend the use of your genetics?***

I wish that I had more information about the influence of my genetics around the country. I have sold animals to herds in Canada, Florida, Texas, Arkansas, California, the Midwest and mid Atlantic states, so they are out there. Repeat buyers tell me that my genetics have contributed to improvement in herd production, udder attachment, and general appearance. Multiple dairies in northern Vermont have based their herds on Roeburn genetics for the advantage they state they gain in production and longevity. I am very pleased when long term breeders such as Kickapoo Valley, Munchin Hill, Addi-Hill and others decide to incorporate my genetics, because it is through herds such as these, who use ADGA performance programs, that the influence of my breeding program can best be evaluated.

With the purebred Alpine gene pool gradually shrinking and so many herds now working primarily with American Alpine lines, I now have many buyers coming to me specifically look for a purebred buck in order to maintain their limited purebred lines.

I would say that Roeburn genetics should in most cases contribute increased stature and overall scale, strength of bone and overall width, improved mammary attachment, and production. My lines appear to cross well with Hoach and Sunshine lines.

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

More than the achievement of any single individual, I think the greatest accomplishment of my breeding program has been in the consistency of my herd, both in type and overall quality. I know the "look" I want to see in the herd, and breeding for that look (although I'm sure that that "look" has matured along with the owner) for almost 35 years, I believe that my animals are for the most part very similar in type. Mammary attachments are very consistently high and tight, and it has been years since anyone has been culled based on udder attachment.

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

I don't think I would change much. I reached my goal in the 1980's of becoming a state inspected dairy, shipped milk, made no money, and burned out in the milk processing and cheese making business. But I don't regret having tried. There have been times when I have felt overwhelmed by the numbers in the barn, but I now hold to strict limits of milkers I will keep and numbers that I will breed each fall. I've accepted the fact that sometimes milk must be dumped and sometimes animals need to go to the auction. One thing I would never do again is play with hormone treatments to produce out of season kiddings. I succeeded for several years in breeding does this way, but saw a significant rise in the incidence of birth defects. While I have always taken the goats seriously, I think that my conscious decision neither to try to make a living from farming nor to achieve national fame in the show circuits has allowed me to continue to keep the herd on a scale that I can enjoy and manage well.

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

- Start small
- Start with the best genetics you can afford and buy from a reputable breeder
- Give priority to purchasing healthy animals from a breeder who adheres to strict standards for health maintenance and disease prevention
- Do not go into raising goats with the expectation that you will make money; you need first to know that you enjoy working with the animals
- Maintain a herd size that allows you to do what you're doing well and to enjoy what you're doing!

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

As I show fairly locally, I don't often have the opportunity that a judge or appraiser would have to see Alpines from around the US, but I use the tools I have, including the ADGA Performance programs data and networking with others, to keep abreast of what is happening in the breed. Overall, I see recent generations of Alpines as having improved structural correctness over their ancestors, with improved feet and legs, excellent mammary attachment, and with good overall size that does not compromise dairy character. I'd like to see more consistent emphasis on milk production, especially in the purebred lines, as the advantage of producing animals with excellent dairy type and the structure to hold up over years of production is lost if the production isn't there. The breed also continues to have some lurking recessive traits, such as teat problems and overshot jaws.

***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?***

Among the purebreds, I would say that Sheila Nixon's lines have had as profound an impact on the development of today's Purebred Alpines as any. Most of today's purebreds can be traced directly to Nixon's Tomboy, born in 1968. Other influential herds that started with Nixon lines were the closely related Serendipity and Abundance herds in the late 1970's and 1980's. Abundance Danish Classic was an important buck behind the Maple-Glen herd, and the sire of GCH Maple-Glen Classic's Angela, who went on to be an ADGA National Champion. Maple-Glen provided much of the founding genetics of the Willow Run herd, which became so prominent in the 1990s. Many of the best known animals in the Hoach herd also descended from Nixon and Serendipity lines. Sand-Dance Rico Suave, born in 1991, was a very heavily used buck, and the sire of Hoach's SRS Lyric, whose longevity allowed her to produce a number of influential sons throughout the 1990s and beyond. One well known grandson of Lyric was Willow-Run LA Armand, the sire of the famous 4X National Champion, SGCH Willow Run Armand Rishona. Other widely known Lyric sons carrying the Hoach name included Liason, Longevity, Landmark, and Landslide.

Among American Alpine lines, I think none are better known or have been more influential than Sodium Oaks Royal Risk, and his son, Sodium Oaks Sasin, bred by Donald Smith. A heavily used and well respected Sasin grandson out of National Champion Shahena'ko Kamikaze was Shahena'ko W Sumo, who then sired the even more heavily used Shahena'ko Sumo Tierro. Another widely used Royal Risk son was Shahena'ko Crown Royal, who sired Tangleroot Royal Image, who is behind many animals in the present day Cherry Glen herd.

In my own herd, I can fairly easily identify those bucks who have contributed the most to my herd improvement. Starting with my second purchased buck, they are Little-Rise SS Asher Benjamin (Sunshine lines descending from Laurelwood Acres), followed by Springsun V Lukas (Hill N Holler lines descending from Nixon). In 1994, I acquired Kickapoo-Valley CAL Fritz, sired by Hoach's California Gold, adding the first of the Hoach genetics to the herd. Fritz sired three prominent does in my herd, GCH Rose Petal, GCH Dolce Vita, and Roeburn's KVF Lindsey, the dam of my four time Top Ten doe, SG Eliana. Since Fritz, I have been fortunate to have bred two extremely consistent bucks with outstanding daughters, +\*B Roeburn's Gatwick Brutus, and \*B Roeburn's Liason Limerick, an AI son of Hoach's Lyric Liason. I see Brutus as perhaps the top buck I have bred for combining quality of type and high production, and hope to be able to continue to use his genetics in the herd.

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

I realize that the majority of bucks currently in use are young bucks who have very limited proof, as so many herds are small and often a buck's value is not appreciated during his lifetime. Some of those who are gaining attention at this time are currently in use, but many others who I mention below are deceased but still in use through AI. Many

are direct descendants of those individuals mentioned in my answer to question #15. Among the Purebreds, Rishona sons Ahren Rhett, Romulus (both now deceased) and Redemption (in the Wailatpu herd) have all been used heavily both by natural service and by AI. An Armand son, Abraham, and Abraham sons Wonder, Tsavo, Abner (all bred by Willow Run) and Cherry Glen Abraham Rushkin (owned by Munchin Hill) have all produced outstanding daughters. Nodaway Spirit of Endurance, owned by Nixon's, has a number of sons and grandsons working in herds across the country, such as Nodaway and Sweet-Dreams. +\*B Sunshine Seign Sedric, whose pedigree combines some of the best of the Sunshine and Nodaway genetics, has been very widely used, and has sons who have been used across the US, including in my own herd. Pleasant-Grove Liason Superior, descending largely from Hoach lines, produced triplet sons in 2003 by GCH Stardust Cordite Saba. These bucks, Legend, Saga (in the Kickapoo-Valley herd) and Standout (in the Pleasant-Grove herd), have all been widely used. Tempo Aquila Free Radical, while born in 1995, is continuing to be used in both purebred and American herds, and has clearly had a significant impact on the breed in recent years. Perhaps the best known of his sons was Cherry Glen Radical Highlight, out of their Tierro daughter, Hope. Radical Highlight is also the sire of Cherry-Glen Radical Gesture, the 2006 ADGA National Champion. Another Tempo Aquila buck, Freelance, born in 2003 and owned by Redwood Hills, is descended from Tangleroot Royal Image and Shahena'ko Crown Royal, and is being used heavily on the west coast. He has many impressive and productive daughters in the Redwood Hills, Shining Moon, and a growing number of other herds around the country. Another American buck, Sweet-Dreams Wildfire, through his widely used and respected sons, Clovertop's Snapple, in the Sweet Dreams herd and Clovertop's Fire Starter, in the Hoach herd, have had an impact on the Alpine lines in the past decade.

Regarding my own herd, I would say that the predominant influence in the past few years has been that of Hoach's Lyric Liason. Because I was so impressed with the style and mammary systems in daughters of my AI buck +\*B Roeburn's Liason Limerick, in 2007 I purchased Kickapoo-Valley Saga Sibelius, a Saga son out of GCH Kickapoo-Valley Liason Music, the 2008 ADGA Reserve National Champion. In 2008, I followed that purchase with the acquisition of Kickapoo-Valley HLL Lord Wimsey (barn name "Petey") a Liason son out of a Saga daughter, CH Kickapoo-Valley Saga Whimsay, the 2006 Junior National Champion. The first season of Petey kids truly awed me with their style and correctness of type, and I anticipate breeding between these two bucks over the next couple of years, while using my third senior herd sire, \*B Roeburn's Sedric Bruno (SGCH Roeburn's BR Rose of Sharon, a Brutus daughter, X Sunshine Seign Sedric) to maintain the Brutus and Sunshine genetics in the background of the Roeburn lines.

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

First, I'll state the obvious: there are many outstanding individuals among both Americans and Purebreds. I would happily own both, but as my herd happened to evolve

into an entirely purebred herd, a shift to owning Americans will only happen if I purchase an American doe. I am concerned enough about maintaining a purebred gene pool that I have chosen not to breed my purebred does to American bucks. As it is, the American Alpines significantly outnumber the purebreds; I have observed that there are a number of highly regarded purebred bucks from the past, an example being Sunshine Robelta Rommel, whose descendants are now almost entirely American. While I believe that a strong, productive, and structurally correct animal that can hold up over many years should be the shared goal of American and Purebred breeders, I still regret the loss of an outstanding buck such as Rommel to the Purebred genetic pool. I see the somewhat limited gene pool as a frustration but I am also challenged to expand on the genetic diversity and improve on the quality and productivity of the Purebred Alpine breed.

***In general what future do you see for the Alpine?***

I expect the Alpine to continue to be a popular breed around the US for both show and commercial dairy herds. I see them as well suited for small family farms as well as large dairies. Combining the strength, the hardiness of constitution and personality, and the will to produce well over many years, I see Alpines as remaining at the forefront of the dairy goat industry in the US.

***What should breeders be working towards, correcting, or adding to the breed? What direction should the alpine breeder take?***

While breeding to the ADGA scorecard is a worthy goal, I believe that it is important to consider goals for the breed in a broader context, one that can combine the Alpine's aesthetic and utilitarian qualities. I am a proponent of the careful use of line breeding, which is, breeding the best to the best within an already successful bloodline. I believe that the Alpine breed as a whole can stand to improve in the areas of shoulder assembly and feet. I would like to see breeders selecting for size, overall strength, and a constitution which will hold up over many years of high production. I'd like to see more Alpine herds on DHIR, so that we know how the breed is producing, and so that breeders can use this information in selecting productive breeding stock. However, having had some very high producing does in my own herd, I have found that these very heavy milking does can demand complex and time-consuming care, and now feel that ease of management is also an important goal for selection, especially in a sizeable operation. I believe that breeders need to learn to cull animals who do not meet breed standards. To reduce the incidence of defects in the breed, those with defects such as extra teats or overshot jaws should be culled, not sold to others. Likewise, semen from lines harboring defects should not be sold even though the line may have produced notable GCH offspring. I feel strongly that as a group, Alpine breeders need to acknowledge the presence of defects in certain lines, so that we can all work together to eliminate these problems. We are all aiming to improve the breed!

