

La Revue Holstein Québec

Heat detection

Technological tools to make life easier

Ferme Des Sauges

A predilection for prestigious lines

Ferme René Dupuis

In praise of Gloria!

Moulin La Pierre
NORBERTVILLE

1845



Vicki Fletcher

BY
VÉRONIQUE
LEMONDE

Editor



Heat detection **An art now aided by tried-and-tested tools!**

All breeders know that inseminating a cow at the wrong time, too early or too late, is clearly a waste of time, not to mention the waste of a dose of semen. Heat detection is thus a key aspect in developing a high-production herd with solid genetics. A higher reproduction rate means the herd will progress more rapidly and have a better chance of success.

While the vast majority of breeders continue to detect heat simply by observing their cows, technology now gives them additional means – tools that have more than proven their worth – to help them make the right decisions in timing the insemination of their cows.

Let's start at the beginning

Despite the effectiveness of these tools, basic observation remains essential to success. Heifers are bred after their third heat, between 9 and 22 months of age, depending on breed and sexual maturity. Most of the time, however, the timing of a heifer's insemination is based on weight, when the animal is at least 13 months old and has reached a weight of 400 kg. After calving, a cow will generally come into heat again between 45 and 60 days after giving birth. But the heat cycle of

a cow that has already calved can be unpredictable, hence the importance of being able to recognize the behavioural signs of an animal that is coming into estrus.

It's most often in the morning or evening, when all is calm in the barn, that breeders can quietly observe their herd and detect signs of heat (or estrus) in some of their heifers. Cows remain in heat for about 18 hours and usually ovulate 12 hours after the end of estrus. This is a crucial period, because the ideal time for insemination is 10 to 12 hours after the appearance of the first signs of heat. Head resting on the rump, licking genitals, flehmen (ruminants curl their upper lip), general restlessness, increased sniffing, pinkish and swollen vulva, lack of appetite, more time spent standing, and active and passive



GEA CowScout monitor

mounting activity are all possible signs that the animal has begun ovulating. Breeders should trust their instincts, because all the technology in the world will never be able to replace intimate knowledge of one's animals.

Synchronize or let nature take its course

Heat detection is a key element of successful breeding. But for some breeders, it's a significant source of stress. Although artificial insemination can be timed according to the cows' natural ovulation cycle, protocols for synchronizing ovulation also exist, allowing for timed breeding. These protocols do require good planning, however. For example, the number of injections, the type of hormones (progesterone, prostaglandin), and the use of a vaginal implant are factors that vary depending on the protocol used. The choice also depends on cost, age (heifer or cow), and whether the cow is cyclic or acyclic. Moreover, because cows will need to be handled three to five times during the process, the protocol must be rigorously applied, and the farm needs to be well equipped. In a tie-stall system, ovulation synchronization is easier, but heat detection is less so. In free-stall systems, on the other hand, heat detection is easier because the cows move around, but handling the animals to do the injections is more demanding.



Lely device

Nonetheless, all this theory is a whole lot easier on paper than in practice. Indeed, according to *Allice – La Maison nationale des éleveurs*, in France, "Deficient expression of estrus is more and more frequent in dairy herds, with the period of visible signs of heat that lasted 18 to 20 hours in the 1980s now reduced to a mere 4 to 8 hours, for the period of mounting activity. Likewise, an irregular cycle associated with heat cycle anomalies and more discrete expression of heat make heat detection more difficult."

The same article¹ emphasizes that "the consequences of inadequate heat monitoring by breeders can lead to a significant zootechnical impact on fertility with AI done during heat but outside of estrus and/or

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on fecundity with delayed breeding due to undetected heat. In North America, to free themselves from heat detection, [many] large herd operators have adopted a breeding program based on induced heat using systematic hormone treatments.”

Likewise, a study done at the University of Wisconsin a few years ago found that the rate of successful heat detection rate in Holstein herds in the southern United States fell from 50.9 per cent in 1985 to 41.5 per cent in 1999. This drop in the success rate for heat detection is quite often associated with very large high-production herds. The study also found that accurate heat detection was easier in cows with average production.

All these findings indicate that technological tools can be extremely useful to Holstein breeders, helping them avoid ill-timed surprises. A skilful balance between herd observation and the use of technological tools will certainly help breeders make the right decisions for the reproductive performance of their herds.

Collars are in!

Electronic activity monitors installed around a cow's neck are an intelligent solution for monitoring dairy cows, allowing breeders to take action with as much information as possible about individual cows and groups of animals in terms of reproduction, health, nutrition, and well-being. Collars are the technological tool the most commonly used and proposed to Holstein breeders in Quebec.

One of the better-known monitors, *Heatime*, developed and distributed by the CIAQ, significantly reduces the time breeders devote to observing their herd to detect heat in their cows. Using an infrared system, *Heatime* collars record all relevant herd data. For Jean-Pierre Morin, of Ferme Gaston Morin, in Sainte-Jeanne-d'Arc, in the Saguenay region, the system quite simply allows him to get a good night's sleep. “With round-the-clock data on my cows, I can manage my herd much more closely. Even when I'm not on the farm, I can see on my cell phone that one of my cows will be in heat this afternoon and have her inseminated while I'm away. It really takes a lot of weight off the employees' shoulders as well,” he explains in a testimonial.

Similarly, GEA's *CowScout neck* and leg monitors provide constant heat monitoring and indicate when a cow is ready to be inseminated. Used in combination with the Monobox milking robot, the *CowScout* system speeds up milking, making it easier to detect heat. For organic dairy producer Julien Lemay, of Ferme Roussette, the system allowed him to cease synchronizing the ovulation of his heifers. With the automated collar, heat is detected naturally, with the collar replacing the eyes of producers, were they to have time to observe their herds, which are only likely to increase in size. Moreover, data is transferred continuously, in real-time, by means of UHF radio technology.

The monitor or collar is very often integrated into the automated milking system. This is the case for the *Lely Astronaut A5* milking robot, which Lely says improves breeding efficiency through accurate heat detection. This in addition to providing health data, ensuring better milk quality control, and optimizing feeding efficiency and grazing. The entire system is managed with *Lely T4C InHerd*.

Accurate detection means better productivity!

“In free-stall barns, all of these systems [collars and pedometers] detect about 80 per cent of cows in heat,” says Stéphanie Claveau, from Agrinova. “In a tie-stall system, we've found they detect about 60 per cent, and up to 70 per cent of heat, which is actually quite good if you consider that producers detect 35, 40, 50 per cent when they're really good.”



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In 2019, Agrinova tested the efficiency of a collar and pedometer system. According to Stéphanie Claveau, Agrinova's Project Leader in Research and Innovation, the findings are conclusive because they offer solutions to a very real problem, as the low rate of heat detection is one of the greatest limiting factors for herd productivity. For the study, AgriNova installed a monitor developed in Israel, ENG's *Track A Cow* system, on three free-stall farms in Quebec: Ferme Trésy, Du Fjord, and Comestar Holstein. Following the extremely positive results of this pilot project, the system, consisting of a pedometer attached to the cow's leg, is now distributed in Quebec through Conception's service laboratory in Beaumont.

Conception's laboratory also provides pregnancy tests (DG29®) on milk or blood samples from 28 days after breeding. According to a testimonial by Florent Leclerc, of Ferme Floroma, in Pont-Rouge: "With identification of non-pregnant cows and rapid insemination, we can reduce the days open and increase our income." Many producers also testify to reducing their calving interval, an additional benefit of the heat detection system.

Another option available to breeders, Select Sires' *CowManager* system, uses ear tags to provide accurate information on herd fertility, health, nutrition, and cow location. The *CowManager* modules monitor the cows' temperature, activity, rumination, and feeding and rest time. As is true for all heat detection systems, the companies developing these technologies are banking on their time-saving potential for breeders, as well as the user-friendliness of the software and the round-the-clock availability of herd data, all aimed at determining exactly when a cow is ready to be inseminated.

Heat markers and milk analysis

Besides the technologies involving collars or pedometers worn by cows – indeed the most commonly used systems – there are other systems that can be used to accurately detect heat. Among them are



Select Sires' ear tag.

heat markers, such as Select Sires' Detect-Her tailpaint. A very economical method for breeders, weather-proof tailpaint sprays and markers allow breeders to identify animals that have been mounted recently, a reliable sign of heat, but closer monitoring is required.

The *Estrotest* breeding indicator patch, also distributed by Select Sires, works like a scratch card. The patch is installed between the animal's hip and tail head, perpendicular to the vertebrae. As mounting activity occurs, the silver ink film is gradually rubbed off by friction, revealing a red underlayer that indicates the optimal moment for breeding. All these types of markers work well with cows that have normal and regular heat cycles, but they can generate some false positive results.

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Finally, DeLaval's *Herd Navigator* system provides a precise milk analysis for each cow in the herd, detecting heat with 95 per cent accuracy by measuring milk progesterone levels. *Herd Navigator* is in fact a mini analysis laboratory that functions in conjunction with a milking robot of the same brand. It is a very practical tool for detecting silent heats that have no visible signs. According to a testimonial by Jimmy Harvey, co-owner of the Rewill farm, in Alma, where they use a DeLaval VMS V310 milking robot, this allows breeders to cut down on the time the veterinarian spends in the barn and to use fewer injections in the herd.



Heat markers, like *Detect-Her* shown here, are a very economical way to identify signs of mounting activity among cows coming into estrus.

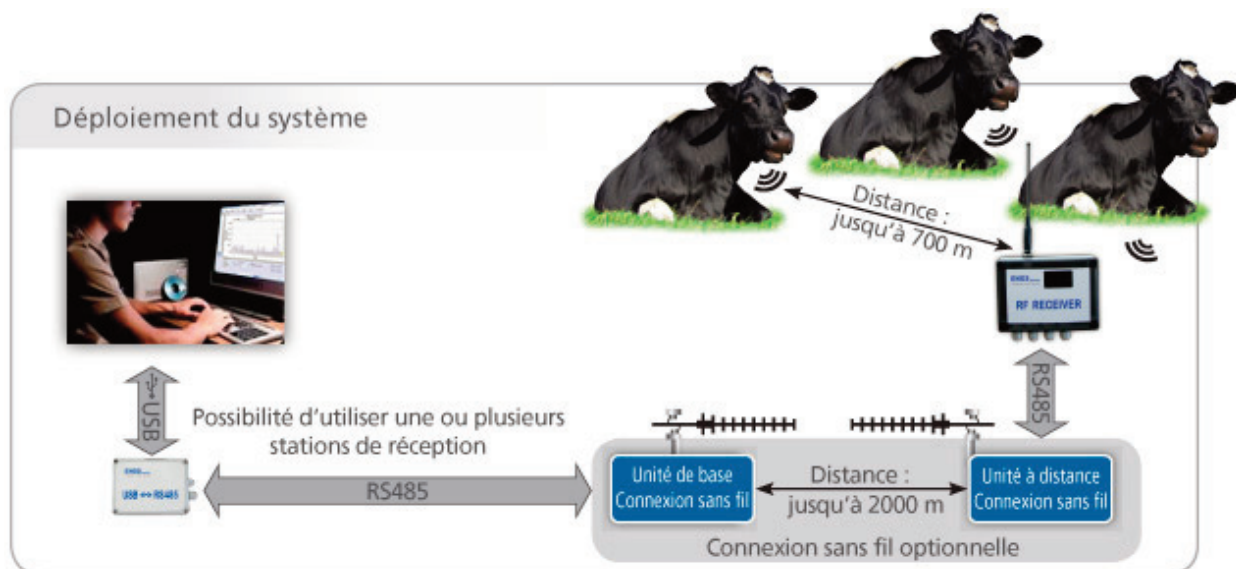
Finally, in another video testimonial, producer Sylvain Boivin, of the CMS Boivin farm, in Coaticook, says that "Every day, *Herd Navigator* is our eyes! I couldn't do without it anymore. It's so much easier to get management data on our herd." He uses two DeLaval VMS milking robots along with *Herd Navigator*.

Conclusion

Beyond monitoring the physical signs of heat in cows (nervousness, signs of mounting activity, milk retention, frequent lowing, clear strands of mucus...), the main challenge for producers is, indisputably, identifying the right time for insemination. Estrus, or true heat, generally lasts from 6 to 24 hours, averaging 18 hours. Yet nearly 25 per cent of cows have very short heat cycles, lasting less than 7 hours². Identifying peak estrus, the exact moment when AI is likely to stick, is quite difficult for breeders. Hence the technological tools available have become indispensable for breeders, with the added benefit of providing them with in-depth knowledge of their herds and the cows that comprise them. ■

1 Une bonne détection des chaleurs pour organiser l'insémination, allice.fr.

2 La détection des chaleurs et le moment de l'insémination, Guy Lacerte d.l.a., CIAQ, a conference given on October 30, 2013, Saint-Hyacinthe.



Simplified operation of the Track A Cow system. An antenna monitors animals over a distance of 2 km. Accurate heat detection is thus possible for cows in both tie-stall and free-stall housing, as well as those out on pasture.



LA REVUE HOLSTEIN QUÉBEC | OCTOBRE 2021



BY
VÉRONIQUE
LEMONDE

Editor



Club Holstein St-Jean **A dynamic and youthful 88 years old!**

*F*ounded in 1933, the St-Jean Holstein Club celebrated its 85th anniversary in 2018. With a membership of 167 in 2020, this dynamic association offers its members an array of social and networking activities.

Encompassing some 200 prefixes over the years, the Club covers the verdant and often hilly landscape of the southern Montérégie area, bringing together many Holstein breeders of Swiss, Dutch, and Belgian origin, who were drawn here by the beauty of the countryside. Arriving in waves in the 70s and 80s, these breeders enriched the St-Jean Holstein Club, noted for its unique diversity. One such breeder is the Club's current president, Terry Kaiser (Hepatica), of Swiss origin. "My grandfather, Walter Kuhne, was one of the first Swiss to settle in this region. He's recognized as one of the builders of our Club, and was awarded a Master Breeder title in 1985," says Mr. Kaiser, of Ferme Hépatica, in Saint-Armand, who is now in his third year as Club president.

In a territory that comprises the areas of Saint-Jean-sur-Richelieu, Iberville, part of Brome-Missisquoi, and Napierville, it was in Saint-Mathieu-de-Laprairie, that Roméo Sédillot became, in the 1930s and 40s, one of the pioneers of the St-Jean Holstein Club, with his 35 Holstein cows producing an average of 13 000 pounds of milk. In 1959, he also became the Club's first Master Breeder.

Getting together...

As early as 1938, the St-Jean Holstein Club was already innovating, organizing a calf improvement contest. Shows have always been a priority for the Club, as have live cattle sales. "In the 1980s, we organized the Vente Sud-Ouest sale, which later became the Distinction. It was held in collaboration with the Rouville and Huntingdon-Ormstown-Beauharnois (HOB) clubs. We always held the sale the day after the Bedford Fair, but we stopped holding it about five years ago, because the market wasn't as good," Terry Kaiser explains.

In 1970, the St-Jean Holstein Club organized the region's first Holstein Québec Picnic, hosted by brothers André and Maurice Surprenant, on their farm in Saint-Valentin. More recently, in 2004, the Holstein Québec Picnic was again held in the St-Jean region, this time at Ferme L. Campbell & Fils, in Sainte-Sabine. Pierre Paradis, then MLA for Brome-Missisquoi, attended the event, as did singer Grégory Charles, who enhanced the musical atmosphere.

In 2013, the annual Holstein Québec Convention was held in Saint-Jean-sur-Richelieu, where a mentored sale was a terrific success. "It gave many young farmers a chance to network with more battle-hardened breeders and get advice about acquiring new animals. The event was greatly appreciated," Mr. Kaiser recalls.

... and competing!

For the past three years now, the St-Jean Holstein Club's Breeders' Cup has given breeders who are interested in shows but don't always want to travel a way to exhibit their finest daughters. A judge appointed for the event visits the farms of the candidates entered in the Cup.

"Over the years, we've chosen the classes that we want to highlight in the Club, like the Purchased Cow class, for example. We make our own rules. It's a lot less work for producers because we go to them. It also gives us the opportunity to discover some of the Club's lesser-known herds. This past summer, we visited 20 farms and judged nearly 100 cows for our Breeders' Cup," says M. Kaiser. The



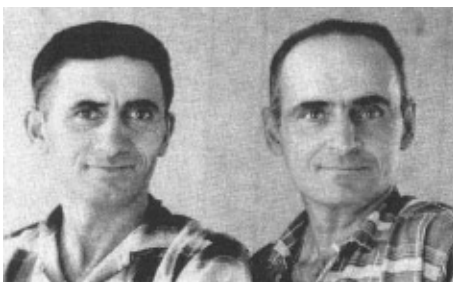
In 2004, the Holstein Québec Picnic was held in Sainte-Sabine, at Ferme L. Campbell & Fils (Camphols). This major event put the St-Jean Holstein Club in the spotlight.

A virtual board of directors

The current board of directors of the St-Jean Holstein Club is composed of Terry Kaiser (Hepatica) – President, Benoit Gherardi (Ginel) – 1st Vice-President, Édith Gazaille (Bessette) – 2nd Vice-President, Karolane Hélie – Secretary, Kathy Kessler (Swisskess) – Treasurer, Anthony Kessler (Swisskess), Michael Breault (Middleview), Marie-Ève Michaud (Helerent), Jean Van Wijk (Arwijk), Maxim Dumouchel (Carmel), Gabriel Surprenant (Rojo), and Coralie Schaller (Rauracienne). Throughout all of 2020 and part of 2021, the board held its meetings virtually, due to the pandemic. The Club's social activities also took place virtually, including the announcement of the winners of the Breeders' Cup this past spring. With the shows over the summer season, on-site events have been gradually making a comeback.



In 1959, Roméo Sédillot, from Saint-Mathieu-de-Laprairie, became the Club's first Master Breeder.



In 1970, another picnic was held within the boundaries of the St-Jean Holstein Club, this time in Saint-Valentin, hosted by brothers André and Maurice Surprenant (Surprenon). In 1981, the breeders sold their 125-head herd of purebred Holsteins, a herd they had established in 1948. Maurice Surprenant was president of the St-Jean Holstein Club from 1957 to 1978.



Grand Champion of this year's St-Jean Holstein Club's Breeders' Cup was Blue-Top Callen Felicity, from the Martin Liechti farm in Stanbridge East.

Another event that brings the region's breeders together is the Beford Fair, where more than 90 animals are shown in a good year. The event is organized in part by the St-Jean Holstein Club.

Prize-winning herds

In addition to its eight Master Breeders – St-Mathieu, Kuhne, Hillrise, Canado, Séric, Camphols, Frontview and Amigo – the St-Jean Holstein Club also has a good share of well-known, prize-winning herds.

For example, Ferme Séric, in Napierville, is home to a Master Breeder herd that is ranked among the top 10 in Quebec for milk production/BCA, year after year. Fermes Verhaegen, also a Master Breeder, named in 2018, has one of the Club's largest herds, with 200 head and at least 30 EX cows! The farm produces an average of 14 000 kg of milk per cow.

"A farm like Swisskess Holstein, in Saint-Georges-de-Clarenceville, is becoming widely known, for example. It's our first member farm to have a compost system, and we held a barn day there not long ago," says Mr. Kaiser.

"We've been watching this breeder develop and it's really interesting to see the results." In April 2021, Kessler family received a Lait'xcellent Great Distinction certificate for the outstanding quality of his milk. Moreover, his cow *Swisskess Mike Just On Time*, EX-93 4E, was recently ranked sixth for Lifetime Production, 60 000 kg, at the Supreme Dairy Show 2021. "What's good is that we have all sorts of producers in the Club, with a variety of breeding philosophies. We have many young members as well, which livens up our social activities," Mr. Kaiser adds.

Other members of the St-Jean Holstein Club, farms like Des Sauges, U. Grégoire et Fils, Rehols, Les Comballes or Middleview, no longer need an introduction as they are often in the limelight.

Activities for all!

Be it visits to Holstein breeding operations in other regions, poker nights, barn days, field days for young farmers, open-house events at Club farms, clipping days, etc., the St-Jean Holstein Club takes into account the large number of young families within its ranks, organizing a multitude of activities that appeal to all.

In 2010, the Club organized an event to pay tribute to its builders, recognizing the undeniable influence of Walter Kuhne and Lambert Dohmen, two former presidents who marked the Club's history. In 2017, a brunch was held to underline the contribution of long-time members, who were awarded commemorative pins.

The Club's current directors are very keen to continue in this direction, offering activities that focus on recognition, training and networking. Vitality that stands the test of time. ■

◀ The Vente mentorat during the annual Holstein Québec Convention, in 2013, in Saint-Jean-sur-Richelieu.

BY
VÉRONIQUE
LEMONDE

Editor



Ferme René Dupuis In praise of Gloria!



mere 10 minutes north of the New York border, Ferme René Dupuis inc. showcases the gentle and verdant landscape typical of the southern Montérégie region. A few pregnant heifers and dry cows graze in the pasture in Saint-Bernard-de-Lacolle, while Myriam Ledoux and Marc-André Dupuis take care of the cows in the barn. A human-scale herd for these young breeders, who will be forever grateful to their mascot, Gloria, who died in 2019.

LA FERME RENÉ DUPUIS

Number of head: 80, including 35 lactating cows

Production: 10 300 kg of milk, with 4 % fat and 3.32 % protein

BCA: 217-217-223

Classification: 7 EX, 16 VG, 8 GP

Quota: 47 kg BF/day

Crops: The farm has 29 ha under cultivation, devoted mainly to grain corn and silage corn used to produce silage on site, and hay. The cows are fed a TMR composed entirely of corn silage.

Marc-André's grandfather, René Dupuis, settled on the farm in 1945, initially establishing a herd of crossbred cows, which he gradually improved over the years. René's son Réjean maintained that momentum, from the construction of the first cow barn in 1974 to the purchase of the herd's first purebred Holstein. Today, the destiny of the farm and the Maranie prefix is in hands of Marc-André and his partner, Myriam. "The first purebred cow my father bought was a Comestar, from Victoriaville," says Marc-André Dupuis. "Since then, we've often collaborated with Comestar Holstein. It was with them that we acquired the embryo *Comestar Gloria Outside*, the leading lady of our herd, in 2001."

For 18 years, *Gloria*, EX-91 4E 8*, was the uncontested leader of the small Maranie herd, in which nearly two-thirds of the animals are direct descendants of this magnificent cow. "She was a real fighter, she had guts, and on the conformation side she was very productive," says Myriam Ledoux, who considered the cow almost as a friend. Affectionate and an integral part of the Dupuis family, *Gloria* showed incredible longevity for a cow that exemplified a perfect blend of

conformation and production, in addition to her ability to transmit her attributes to subsequent generations. By the end of her 18-year life, she had generated 87 female descendants. This superb dairy cow had eight lactations, of which the five publishable yielded 73 828 kg of milk, with 3.6 per cent fat and 3.1 per cent protein, for a composite BCA of 708. She also produced 16 classified daughters, 3 EX, 8 VG and 5 GP, 12 of which recorded an average mature equivalent milk yield of 12 120 kg of milk, with 3.7 per cent fat and 3.2 per cent protein.

"Shortly before her death, we had seven generations of her line in the same barn, all *Gloria's* direct descendants and all in production. It's incredible to have been able to achieve that and to watch this line develop," says Ms. Ledoux. "When she died, 43 cows out of the 80 head in our herd originated from her." A finalist in the Favourite Cow contest in 2020, *Comestar Gloria Outside* graced the cover of the St-Jean Holstein Club's calendar that same year. In 2017, she received a Lifetime Production award for a lifetime production of over 60 000 kg.



Myriam Ledoux with the beautiful *Comestar Gloria Outside*.

Incredible longevity!

If *Gloria's* incredible longevity is nothing short of astonishing, she also seems to have passed that trait down to her offspring. Indeed, many cows in the Maranie herd are more than 10 years old or have even lived to the age of 15. One of those is *Gloria's* eldest



The whole family and team were extremely proud to win both the Breeder and Exhibitor banners at the Bedford Fair in 2019.

Their passion is a family affair!

With 10-month-old Mathys, Myriam Ledoux and Marc-André Dupuis are living the life of their dreams on the farm. As a teenager, Myriam lived in the village nearby and began to work on the Dupuis farm in the summer months. After spending some time clearing rocks, she developed a keen interest in milking... and in young Marc-André! Now living just beside Yvette Beaudin, "Mémé" to the family, their son has the best of all worlds: beautiful cows and a close connection to the generations before him.

Marc-André Dupuis, ► holding Mathys, aged 10 months, alongside his partner, Myriam Ledoux.



In 2019, Maranie Genessy Fever, EX-93 2E, one of Gloria's impressive granddaughters, won Grand Champion in the St-Jean Holstein Club's Breeders' Cup and was the highest-scoring cow bearing the Maranie prefix. Her dam, Maranie Sanchez Glorinia, VG-86 2*, also won several titles, including Reserve Junior Champion at the Brome Fair, in 2011.

daughter, *Maranie Glorie Goldwyn*, a cow that recorded eight publishable lactations in 15 years. Classified EX 5E 4*, *Glorie* won Reserve Junior Champion at the Bedford Fair in 2007 and first Senior Yearling at the same show in 2008. "*Maranie Glorie Goldwyn* was the first cow that Marc-André fitted for shows and contests. After that, *Maranie Braxton Genny*, EX 2E, a daughter of *Glorie* and granddaughter of *Gloria*, was the first cow we fitted together, as a couple," Myriam recalls. Now 10 years old, *Genny* won Reserve Junior Champion and first Intermediate Yearling at the Bedford Fair in 2012, and first Senior Two-Year-Old there in 2013.

Another of *Gloria*'s granddaughters, *Maranie Genessy Fever*, EX-93 2E, produced 67 397 kg of milk in four lactations, with 4 per cent fat and 3.4 per cent protein, for a BCA of 253-276-

263. She was also crowned Grand Champion in the St-Jean Holstein Club's Breeders' Cup in 2019 – another winner in the herd at Ferme René Dupuis! *Genessy* is also the cow that achieved the highest score in the herd's history, with 93 points.

Conformation is the base

Marc-André Dupuis describes himself as a conformation and show guy. He visits many shows and makes his decisions based on what he sees there. "I like that we breed our own replacements, so I'm looking for good families in terms of genetics, with good health traits and good conformation," Marc-André explains. "I don't use genomics much because I find it less stable. Instead, about 75 per cent of the cows in our herd are sired by already proven bulls."

To inseminate their cows, the couple uses sexed semen to ensure they have the replacements they need, but with their less productive cows, they just use Angus semen. "His idea of the cows we'll breed to develop the herd, it's all happening in his head," Myriam says with a smile. "We have to put a lot of work in, but by starting with a solid base, like the *Gloria* line, for example, we're able to develop a successful herd." That's also the beauty of a smaller herd, say the breeders, because all the cows get special attention and are treated with the respect and care needed to bring out the best in them.

Time for the final touches!

A great source of pride for the breeders at Ferme René Dupuis is entering their animals in shows and being able to compete on the

same level as farms that have much bigger herds. The quality of their animals is accentuated in that context. "When cows from our herd distinguish themselves, they're rarely animals that we've bought from other breeders," Mr. Dupuis explains. "Most of the time, they're animals that we've bred and reared from A to Z on our farm. And that's fantastic, because it proves we're making the right decisions in developing our genetics," he adds.

Gloria's descendants, for example, have done particularly well in the showing. At the Bedford Fair in 2019, 10 of the 13 animals exhibited under the Maranie prefix were descendants of *Gloria*. The farm won several prizes that year, including the coveted Breeder Banner, an honour that goes entirely to the venerable dam.

For Marc-André Dupuis, preparing his cows for the various shows is a long-term undertaking that begins many months prior to the event. "It's what you'd call the fine-tuning phase! We select our best cows and then we adapt their diet, they're milked three times a day, washed twice a week, they spend a few nights outside to speed up hair growth, and then we have to halterbreak them. And since they're housed in a tie-stall barn, the cows we select need to develop their mobility and gait. It's a lot of work, but we love it!" Marc-André concludes. ■

BY
VÉRONIQUE
LEMONDE

Editor



Ferme Des Sauges Quality lines for constant herd improvement

Moving to Quebec from his native Switzerland in 1993, Antoine Bapst and his family purchased a dairy farm in the Farnham area. Starting with a 30-kg quota and a herd of 90 crossbred cows, Antoine Bapst was determined to develop a herd of purebred Holstein cows. Having fallen into the magic potion at a young age, his son, Benoit Bapst, now shares that passion.

FERME DES SAUGES SENC

Number of head: 160, including 70 lactating cows

Production: 11 000 kg of milk, with 4.26% fat and 3.32% protein

BCA: 260-289-281

Classification: 24 EX, 45 VG, 12 GP

Quota: 95 kg BF/day

Crops: The farm has 100 ha under production, 24 of which are rented. Most of that area is devoted to grain corn, hay, alfalfa, and grasses. The herd is fed a TMR, with each cow receiving a daily ration of 2 kg of soybean meal, 20.5 kg of protein supplements, 5 kg of high-moisture corn, a half gram of wheat straw, 2 kg of dry second-cut hay, 25 kg of corn silage, 16 kg of second- or third cut partially dried hay, and 350 g of minerals.

Photo Amélie Larivière



The young Bapst brothers, Ludovic (age 7) and Michaël (11), each exhibited a heifer at the Rendez-vous Laitier in Bedford this past summer. Both boys proudly left the event with ribbons in the championship event for young breeders, a first place for Ludovic and a Reserve Champion title for conformation for Michaël.

"My father was already breeding Holsteins in Switzerland and had taken part in a number of shows there," says Benoit Bapst. "As for me, I really got my taste for shows from guys like Serge Lampron, for example, a cattle fitter who helped me integrate into the Holstein world in Quebec." Mr. Lampron was a well-known heifer fitter who was very active with the youth sector. It was through him that Mr. Bapst developed an interest in good-looking purebred cows and decided that he too would breed competition-worthy animals.

A first outstanding cow

Dessauges Astre Molly, a homebred cow, was the first cow bearing the Dessauges prefix to be named All-Canadian, as a four-year-old in 2004. Although she was sold after her first calving to Ferme Deslacs, in Victoriaville, Benoit Bapst is still delighted with the mating that gave his prefix an EX-91 2E. "She was a great dairy cow with superb conformation," he says. "*Molly* was my motivation to continue in that direction." Co-owned at the time by three Ontario farms (Phénix, EDR and Nipponia prefixes), *Molly* was a finalist at the RAWF in Toronto, in 2004, placing second among the four-year-olds.

It's clear that Benoit Bapst has never worried about letting go of good cows, even after only one or two calvings. "In my view, that's the name of the game. When we have a good cow, we sell her to extend the influence of our prefix. If I take one or two animals out of my herd, I bring in another. I sell genetics to buy genetics," he explains. "That's more or less my philosophy."

It was in 2011 that a first Dessauges cow, *Dessauges Audini Lara*, EX 4E 2*, was crowned Grand Champion at the Brome Fair. With six publishable lactations, *Lara* has a lifetime production of 66 688 kg.

Cows on the move

Born in 2005, *Dessauges Chapter Gina*, EX-92 2E, like *Molly*, has had a few different owners. First Senior Yearling in Bedford in 2007, *Gina* also won All-Canadian Senior Yearling and Reserve Tout-Québec Senior Yearling that same year. In 2008, she won first Senior Two-Year-Old at the Eastern Ontario Western Quebec Championship Show, and, in 2011, first Five-Year-Old and Grand Champion at the Lindsay Exhibition, in Ontario.



According to Mr. Bapst, the future is with our youth, which means good training is important. A clipping session photographed here during a day reserved for young breeders at Ferme Des Sauges.

"One of my goals as a breeder is to work really hard on certain lines. In partnership with another producer, for example, I purchased *Budjon-JK Stormatic Enya*, a cow born from an embryo transfer from one of the great lines of the renowned Budjon Farm in Wisconsin," explains Mr. Bapst. *Enya*, a magnificent EX-94 2E CAN (and EX-94 USA), has given the Des Sauges operation some prodigious daughters, such as *Dessauges Gold Chip Elektra*, EX 2E, and *Dessauges Doorman Eileen*, a cow that has just been classified EX with three lactations. "Right now, I'm working a lot with these two cows that have a lot of potential. It's a lineage I'm developing," he explains.

Prominent lines

Among his prominent lines, backed by solid and long-lasting genetics, Benoit Bapst recently decided to focus on *Lookout Avalanche Ella*, a VG three-year-old bred by Lookout Farm, in Hatley Township, that he acquired from the Martin Liechti farm. "Martin is a long-time breeder and friend who always has good genetics advice," he says. *Ella's* sire, *Dymenthalm Mr Apples Avalanche*, is from a noteworthy line registered under the KHW prefix, also known for its red and white Holsteins.



A promising cow with an impressive udder for her young age, *Lookout Avalanche Ella*, a three-year-old VG bred by Lookout Farm, in Hatley Township, took up residence at Ferme Des Sauges in early August.

"*Ella* has a remarkable udder for a three-year-old. That's why I always check out the live-stock at shows. It's how I find what I'm looking for in terms of conformation. I often choose cows that are aggressive at the feed bunk; the way they eat gives me a lot of information. I don't use embryos very often, maybe two or three a year. For my inseminations, I like animals with good conformation in the feet and legs, as well as a good mammary

Family first!

In making sure the operation runs smoothly, Benoit Bapst is fortunate to be able to count on the expertise and experience of his father, Antoine, who remains a shareholder and actively involved on the farm. Mr. Bapst also can't imagine what he would do without the valuable contribution of his partner, Amélie Larivière, who also works as the Agricultural Accounts Manager for the National Bank. This young mother is always there to support Benoit in his plans for the farm and to encourage their two sons, Ludovic and Michaël, to get involved in young farmers' activities.



Photo Véronique Lemonde

system," he explains. As for *Ella*, she recently won Grand Champion, Intermediate Grand Champion, and first Junior Three-Year-Old at the Rendez-vous Laitier, in Bedford, last August.

Another line that Mr. Bapst has his eye on is the red and white *KHW Regiment Apple-Red*. "It's a new family that we're working on because it's riding high worldwide. I'm always looking to improve my herd - and sell good cows," he adds. Both *Dessauges Unstopabull Amarula* (VG-85) and *Dessauges Unstopabull Arabella*, daughters of *KHW Defiant Ancy-Red*, EX-91, are showing good potential on the farm.



Dessauges Astre Molly, EX-91 2E, was the animal that sparked Benoit Bapst's interest in breeding. *Molly* was the first cow bearing the Dessauges prefix to make it to the finals at the Royal Agricultural Winter Fair, winning second Four-Year-Old in 2004.

At a sale held in August by the Blondin – Master Breeder farm, Ferme Des Sauges recently acquired *Ryla Musketeer Claire*, EX-94 2E, a cow bred by *Ryla* Holsteins in Ontario. "It's a partnership with the Rehols farm, in Saint-Armand. *Claire* is the daughter of an EX-94 2E 1* from Jacobs – Master-Breeder, so it's very promising," says Benoit Bapst, who is always looking to add value to his herd, an activity he is truly passionate about.

Moving up through the ranks!

Showwise, Benoit Bapst believes that young farmers should start gradually, learning the ins and outs of preparing and leading show animals. To that end, youth competitions are the ideal opportunity. He himself started with the Bedford Fair, in 1994, and he still loves training a heifer or cow today! His own sons, aged 7 and 11, are already involved in the young farmers group and are following in the family's footsteps, proudly preparing their heifers.

At the Bedford Fair, in 2019, *Hillrise Atmosphere Hypnotic* won Reserve Junior Champion, and *Dessauges Sidekick Pussycat* (VG-87), an Honourable Mention – a significant achievement for this breeder.

In addition to the success of *Lookout Avalanche Ella* at the Rendez-vous Laitier in Bedford this past summer, Ferme Des Sauges also did well with *Dessauges Cruhabull Adriana* (VG-86) (first Junior Two-Year-Old – Best Udder), *Blue-Top California Daisy* (EX-92) (First Four-Year-Old – Best Udder, and Honourable Mention), *Ryla Musketeer Claire* (EX-94 2E) (first Mature Cow – Best Udder), and *Dessauges Dumbledore Sandy* (first Senior Yearling). "The five cows we showed all finished first in their class!", says Mr. Bapst proudly.

Besides having bred more than 50 EX animals bearing the Dessauges prefix, Benoit Bapst is also proud to have twice collected the Exhibitor Banner at the St-Hyacinthe show, in 2013 and 2014, in addition to winning both the Exhibitor and Breeder banners in Bedford, in 2013. Outstanding cows will be charming Benoit Bapst for years to come! ■