

BLONDE BULLET

JANUARY 2009

Published by the Alberta Blonde d'Aquitaine Association



Welcome from the President

As I'm writing this the weather in area has finally smartened up a bit; maybe too much. I think we had only been above -20 for one or two days since early December, and now the last three days have been above freezing. Why can't we just get a nice -5 or so? Oh well at least the cattle seem a lot happier lately.

The Blonde breed, and for that matter any of the "muscle" breeds have had a tough go the last number of years. While the Blondes popularity continues to grow world wide, somehow in North America we just can't seem to make a breakthrough. A lot has to do with marketing; we don't have the critical mass to stand up and make ourselves heard. A lot also has to do with the misconceptions that we continually fight in this breed. Colin Manuel has written an amusing, but accurate article regarding this issue later in the publication.

We breeders know that Blonde cattle excel in the feedlot; we have years of data to back us up. They are very efficient at converting pounds of feed to pounds of gain, gain very well and don't tag up as badly as the other breeds do. They also excel on the rail due to their finer bone structure and less waste fat. When Blondes are

crossed with British breeds you have an ideal animal. One that will produce a high yielding, double or triple A carcass with less feed.

One of the other reasons the breed continues to excel abroad is the superior meat quality. The Blonde meat has a finer grain, and a lower shear force than many other breeds. Most studies I have read indicate that the meat of a Blonde is actually more tender than that of Angus.

We just need to keep plugging away, and raising the best cattle we can. We also need to keep up with the Jones's so to speak. We need to be using the most up to date methods of evaluating our cattle; EPD's, Carcass Ultrasound, DNA marker tests, etc.

I had to include this picture of the Blondes grazing in the fall. I've had this picture for years, and it is one of my favourites. It is also on the internet homepage of our association. I believe it was taken by Ross Young of Markwood Blondes west of Cochrane.

I'm not sure when the last Bullet was published, but I think it has been a long time coming. Thank You to the breeders who advertised; making it possible to print and mail the Bullet and also to those who submitted articles.

Reed Rigney



Blondes; Fast, Lean & Easy

Submitted by Colin Manuel

You know how it is in farming these days, most every farmer has to be something else, like a welder, an oilfield consultant or a trucker. I was a teacher at a local high school where several of the other staff were farmer types. So one day there we were in the staff room, just the three of us, all cattlemen. We were having a coffee and shooting the breeze before the next class, and as always our conversation steered its way to cows. Whoa, back up there a second! There was a substitute teacher in the school that day, a blonde lady with looks that turned heads, and she had just snuck into the room when Jim, his back to the door, popped the question.

"So why do you like Blondes so much?" he asked.

"Why?" says I, also with my back to the door, and oblivious to the presence of the lady. "Why? Because they're fast, lean and easy."

Uh-huh. Bob saw the lady freeze, saw her clearly contemplating breaking the coffee pot over my head. Thankfully Linda happened to arrive at this moment.

"Aha! I'll bet these farmer boys are talking cows yet again," she says brightly to the woman. "And I'll lay odds that Colin is babbling on about his beloved Blondes again, Blonde d'Aquitaine, right Colin?"

Only then did Colin realize how this conversation would later be construed as a near-death incident. Actually, the whole thing didn't happen quite this way but it came close.

That Blonde d'Aquitaine cattle are fast, easy and lean seems to be a secret, and a well-kept one at that. Blonde breeders know, commercial cattlemen who use

Blonde bulls likely know, but does anyone else? Perhaps not if the mythology surrounding the breed seems to indicate.

Fast; when the calves are born, they're born running, fast like a deer, not slow like a brick. And surprise, surprise, they're not born like an over-endowed wrestler; the muscle comes in after about a month, after which they muscle up fast. This explains why Blondes are so effective as a terminal cross.

Easy; Blondes are very easy keepers, easy on food despite their size and incredibly efficient at converting their feed into lean meat. They calve easily. You don't have to pull Blonde calves, unless of course the new arrival is holding the exit map to the world the wrong way up. They are easy to manage because they rarely come with attitude. I know this up close and personal because I for one do happen to run like a brick and so I don't keep attitudinally-challenged cows that can run faster than bricks. Better yet, they're easy to cross. A Gelbvieh-Blonde cross makes a wondrous cow for a commercial operator, even if Blondes are promoted as a terminal cross breed. A Blonde on an Angus or a Limousin gives added muscle. Put Blonde on Charolais and you get a veritable meat machine.

But perhaps the best part is the lean. In Europe, particularly in France, Blonde d'Aquitaine meat is highly prized. In France too, the Blonde breed is one of the most popular, and when it comes down to meat, the French are renowned for knowing what's cooking! First off, the meat is fine-grained, not coarse like so many other breeds...just ask a butcher. It is also sought after because it is so tender. You don't have to chase a Blonde steak around the kitchen and beat it into submission with a golf club or whatever

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comes to hand! Then of course, there is plenty of it. Our calves, Blonde and Blonde-Gelbvieh cross, have consistently cut out between 62% to 69% according to the data returned to us by the Laura's Lean Meat folks. In a world where obesity threatens to become a major issue, lean meat is going to be increasingly in demand. Blondes will provide that meat at a premium.

Like all Blonde breeders though, we are beset by a number of common myths. "Blondes have hair too short for Canadian winters". I don't think so! Take another look at a Blonde hide. The hair is short, yes, but like a top quality Turkish carpet, the weave is incredibly dense. It is tough to get down to the actual skin of a Blonde.

"Blondes don't have much milk because their bags are so small" is another misstatement we often hear from pro-

spective buyers.

"Take a look at the calf," I always say, and rest my case. Blondes tend to hold their bags high up in the body and so it is all too easy to dismiss them in passing. The calf will invariably tell the story.

The progressives in any business are those who are not afraid "to look over the wall" and see what others are doing. The same is true in the cattle business where the old saying holds particularly true, "if you do what you always do, you'll get what you always get". If you're a commercial producer or a hobbyist or just somebody who is looking for a cross that will bring a generous return and you haven't considered Blonde, then it's time to take a first or a second look. But remember, that's Blonde with a capital "B", that's if you wish to avoid low-flying coffee pots. You'll be glad you did!



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Annual General Meeting

The Alberta Blonde d'Aquitaine Association held it's Annual General Meeting on Saturday, November 22nd in Leduc. I would like to thank all of those in attendance, and especially those who let their name stand for the Board of Directors. Returning to the board are Shirley Jackson, Ken Mackenzie and Harry Nauenburg (after a one year hiatus). I would also like to welcome our two new directors Dave Kamelchuk and Colin Manuel. A complete listing of the directors, and their contact information can be found on the back page of this publication.

All proposed By-law changes were passed at the meeting. This proposed changes were emailed or mailed out to all 2008 members of the association along with the then current By-laws. If anyone has any questions regarding these changes please contact the office.

The association is in reasonably good financial shape, although if programs are to be expanded more revenue will need to be generated. Arsha Blondes (Art & Sharon Breitreuz) have offered to donate a heifer for sale or raffle.

Most of the meeting was left for open discussion on where we wanted to go as a breed and association in this province. 2009 will be a rebuilding year as there are many new faces on the board. Promotion was a key, and this publication is one of our steps forward. We are still planning to expand our Bull Congress attendance for 2010. Performance testing, and the BIO performance program were also singled out as necessities.



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Pick O' The West Sale

The 15th annual sale was held once again in Olds on October 25th. Consignors included Shirley Bilton and Myrna Fleisch from West Wind Blondes of Stavely as well as a select dispersal for Allan Langhofer of Bonanza, Alberta.

Cliff Balan bought the high selling bull, West Winds Uppercrust 233U, a January 2008 son of West Winds Rainier 11R from a MVF Cracker Jack 80E daughter for \$2300.

The high selling female at \$2200 was Lot 10, Black Marble Summer 99S, a June 2006 daughter of Hanover Jackpot 39J from a Hanover Special 25D daughter. The buyer of this line bred Gelstar 817X daughter was Little Creek Blondes, Dave and Janet Kamelchuk.

Sheldon Asseltine of Harrowsmith, Ontario bought the next two high sellers. Lot 7, West Winds Ritsey 127R, an April 2005 daughter of West Winds Minuteman 44M from a Bradbury Evan daughter brought \$1850. Lot 8, West Winds Rochelle 175R, a January 2005 daughter of Fergie 8M from a Heartwoods Eye Cather 10E daughter, brought \$1750. Sheldon also took two other females home to Ontario.

Several animals made their way east to Ontario and Quebec with the majority staying here in Alberta.

LITTLE CREEK BLONDES



West Winds Sheena 41S

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Sires



Amber Linika 146L



Little Creek Sarafina 146 S

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Janet & David Kamelchuk
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★ **YEARLING BULLS FOR SALE**

Blonde Performance Program

EPD's and how to use them

The Canadian Blonde Associations performance program is administered through Beef Improvement Ontario (BIO), and has been in place for over ten years. I have written this article to help clarify a very valuable, but often misunderstood or over looked selection tool; that being EPD's. I also want to encourage more Blonde breeders to become involved with the program, and commercial producers to begin asking for the information when selecting bulls (hopefully to further encourage the former). It takes pages to cover EPD's in depth, but I will do my best to cover some of the more important aspects of them as pertains to the Blonde breed.

What are EPD's? The full name for them is Expected Progeny Differences, and they are a tool for comparing cattle traits across different management and environmental conditions.

Comparing Weights Doesn't Work: Every breeder feeds their animals differently, every pasture has different grazing conditions and every farm a different environment. Cow management can affect calf birth weight as can environmental conditions. A big weaning weight could mean the bulls were on creep feed, or had better pasture than another group of bulls. The age at which the adjusted weaning weight (200-205 days of age depending on breed) is calculated also factors heavily. The younger the age of the bulls when they are weighed, the higher their adjusted weight will generally be (calves grow faster when they are younger). How do you compare a breeders bulls who are fed 15 lbs of grain a day versus bulls that are only fed 10 lbs? How do you take into account forage quality that the bulls get while on feed? The important thing to remember is that you cannot compare one breeders birth weight or performance numbers with another.

EPD's & Accuracy: EPD's are based on the animals actual trait performance compared to his peers in the herd as well as trait EPD's of his sire and dam (which automatically takes into account all performance of other relations). They are also based on every herd that had related animals under all the different environmental and management systems imaginable.

EPD's should be thought of in terms of more or less, not better or worse. Positive EPD's mean that there is more of something and negative equals less. People often get confused with birth weight. A negative value indicates lower birth weight not a worse birth weight.

SHAMBANI BLONDES

Colin & Felicity Manuel
Box 882

Rocky Mountain House, Alberta T4T 1A6

Phone: (403) 845-4914

Email: colinmanuel@hotmail.com

Accuracy values are attached to EPD's, and this is where EPD's get misunderstood. I often here people say that EPD's don't work; the cow that raises the biggest calf every fall has their worst milk EPD; everyone has an example where the EPD's don't seem to make sense. Chances are

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that the animal has a fairly low accuracy on the EPD. Why is that? Again remember that EPD's are based on pedigree and actual performance, and animals that have few offspring (cows average four to five calves) don't have a chance to build their numbers. Young bulls are in the same department. Lets use the cow with a poor milk EPD as an example:

Her sire has a -10 milk EPD and her dam has a +10; her milk EPD will be reported as zero (average of -10 & +10), but really she could be producing milk anywhere from -10 to +10. Her accuracy will be very low until she has some offspring, and even then her EPD and accuracy probably won't change much due to the few calves she will actually raise.

Accuracy Values:

Bull when born= EPD's based entirely on parents= Acc. of **10%**

Bull as yearling = EPD's based on parents, and own performance= Acc. of **24%**

Bull after one calf crop= EPD's based on parents, own performance, offspring=Acc. of **50%**

Bull after 100's of calves = EPD's based mostly on what his offspring have done=Acc. of **99%**

EPD's can measure what the producer can't: As producers we measure calving ease as unassisted, easy pull, hard pull, etc. How can we know the calving ease, milking ability, fertility, carcass quality, mature size and a multitude of other traits before we buy a bull? Again EPD's are the tool. Many traits are being measured that we can't effectively select for by looking at a bull or performance numbers, and more are being added all the time.

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Performance continued from Page 7.....

How to read Blonde EPD's: Each breed has a slightly different EPD structure and number of traits measured. I won't go through an explanation of each trait (most are self explanatory), but will point out some important aspects when reading Blonde EPD's. Below is an EPD report from the 2008 sire summary.

| PROVEN sires (Evaluated 2008-02-08) | Prog Herds | Calving Ease | Birth Weight | Weaning Gain | Yearling Gain | Grand Progeny Herds | Maternal Calv. Ease | Milk | Rib Eye Area | % IMF (Marbling) | Backfat | Scrotal Circumference | Hip Height |
|--|---------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|------------------|------------------------|------------------------|------|--------------|---------------------|---------|--------------------------|---------------|
| WSS MIGHTY DIO 43M | %wb | 89 | 95 | 16 | 3 | | 96 | 73 | 91 | 23 | 87 | 59 | 29 |
| reg: R 1166 Bdate: 19800401 | 242 BIO EPD | 1.4 | -2.8 | 21 | 11 | 139 | 5 | 19.2 | 0.9 | -0.3 | -0.8 | -1.2 | -0.2 |
| tattoo: DIO 43M | 50 acc | 95 | 98 | 94 | 93 | 38 | 93 | 92 | 25 | 11 | 82 | 86 | 86 |

It is extremely important to know what the current breed averages for traits are. Although all EPD's started with an average of zero, the average in the current population for many traits is far beyond that now. This is made easy in the BIO report as they include %wb (the top line) for each trait. This tells you where the animal ranks within the breed; higher being better. **In my opinion the %wb line is the most important when looking at Blonde BIO EPD's.** Our example bull is in the top 10% of the breed for Birth Weight (lower birth weight), Maternal Calving Ease (how easy his daughters calve) and Rib Eye Area (an indication of total muscle). He is near the top of the breed for Calving Ease, Milk (daughters milking ability), Backfat and Scrotal Circumference. He is near the bottom of the breed for Weaning Gain, Yearling Gain, Marbling and Hip Height.

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The actual EPD value is on the second line; denoted as BIO EPD. To me this value is secondary to the %wb as it doesn't really tell you much unless you know where the breed average is. Accuracy (acc) is on the third line, and as discussed earlier, tells you how valid the EPD value is; higher is better.

This is a very short introduction to EPD's, but if you have any further questions don't be afraid to contact the Alberta Blonde Association. Anyone interested in seeing the latest Sire Summary can visit the Alberta Blonde website at www.albertablondcattle.com, select the Performance Testing heading and follow the link from there. The Sire Summary is also available in the 2008 Blonde Connection that was mailed out last spring. If these options don't work for you, please contact the office and we would be happy to forward a copy to you.

Get on Board!

With BIO Herd Recording

Here is some basic information for those of you interested in getting involved with the BIO program. You can record Purebred and/or commercial cattle with them, and the cost is very reasonable for the information that you receive back:

- Electronic Submission – Herd-Link or Excel: \$1 per cow/year with a minimum charge of \$99* plus GST.
- Paper/Mail-In: \$2 per cow/year with a minimum charge of \$99 plus GST.

What do you get?:

- Weaning & Yearling Reports - detailed information on your calf crop performance.
- Cow Productivity Report - valuable information on the individual performance of every cow in your herd.
- Herd Management and Performance Report - a great tool to help you assess the performance of your herd compared to a provincial average benchmark herd.
- EPD's for your animals whether they are Purebred or commercial.
- Your birth date information will go into the CCIA age verification database.

For more information you can contact the Alberta Blonde office, follow this link for the start-up package <http://www.biobeef.com/Start-UpKit/StartUpKit.pdf>, or phone BIO directly at (519) 767-2665.

Spruce Vale Blondes



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Presidents Summer Tour

This past summer I made the effort of seeing as many Blonde herd in the province of Alberta as possible. I didn't get to everyone, but there's always next year.



There were several reasons for the tour. I wanted to get around and talk to and/or meet the members of the Association; especially those that I hadn't yet met. I also wanted to assess the quality of the herd in Alberta. It just so happened that we also had a summer intern, Damien Bouyssi, who raises Blonde cattle with his family in France. Their farm is in the South West of France about an hour north of Toulouse. He had been asked by the Manager of the French Association to report back to him on the state of the breed in Alberta.



Damien was the picture taker and part time driver. We found that there are still some pretty good Blonde cattle around in Alberta. Every herd that we went into had some top quality animals, which was encouraging for me. Damien even found some he liked; their cattle are generally quite different than ours.

Our order of priorities is different. In Canada fertility is number one. It doesn't matter how good the other traits are; the cow needs to calve once a year and do it in usually about a 90 day breeding period. We want very good udders, feet and temperaments because we manage larger groups of cows less intensively.



In Europe most producers don't stick to the strict calving periods that we do. The pedigree breeders of Blondes in France are more concerned with body conformation, growth and carcass characteristics.

On Damien's farm calves are separated from their mothers after about one week, and raised in the barn. During the summer the cows are brought in twice a day to let the calves suck. In the winter all the cattle are housed in the barn because the winters are wet and the ground doesn't freeze. The calves are raised in a barn until they are about one year of age.

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me time to ask a lot of questions about farming and Blonde cattle in France, and Damien did the same in regards to Canada.

Damien snapped some pretty good pictures of some pretty good cattle at the farms we visited. Thank you to everyone who took the time to show us around.

Even the shows in France are different. Pictured above is Damien with his father and brother along with their cow Tamise at the Paris show. All the cattle competing had to qualify at regional shows to be eligible for the Paris show. She placed 4th out of 20 cows; they were very pleased.

Anyway it was a really interesting driving around the province. The driving gave



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A Bit of Nostalgia



Anyone recognize this old guy?

Probably not, most of you weren't breeding Blondes when he was roaming the pastures at Dotted K Farms of Streamstown.

VOB OK Northern Justin really put the Keichingers on the Blonde Map. In his day he was one of the most dominant show ring sires. His offspring had a lot of eye appeal, depth of body and growth.



DJ Miss Randi 26R

One of the premier cows of her day; I don't think she was ever defeated in the show ring.

In 1986 she won Grand Champion Female at the five major show in Western Canada; Edmonton Farmfair, Regina Agribition, Brandon Ag-Ex, Lloydminster Ex. and the Calgary Stampede.

ALBERTA BLONDE d'AQUITAINE ASSOCIATION

Box 5959

Westlock, Alberta, Canada

T7P 2P7

(780) 222-5535

Email: albertablondcattle@yahoo.com

Web: www.albertablondcattle.com

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| Reed | Rigney | 780-348-5308 |

arsha1@telus.net

hootch@telus.net

ikarland@telusplanet.net

kenkb@telus.net

colinmanuel@hotmail.com

harconsf@mailhub.ca

rigney@clearwave.ca