



Jimm Holsteins Mr. Mike (Hoekland Maik x Tiamo), very correct and VG 89 (the maximum score for a young bull), is used by De Vries as a jumper bull. Standing 1.7 m tall at the hips and 1.85 m tall at the shoulder, he is analyzed aAa@ 465.



Hellen 585 (Goldwin x Norik), dam of former National Champion Hellen 589 (Shottle), has produced 90,000 kg of milk and was recently classified EX 93.



De Vries is pleased with his results from Mascol. This Mascol daughter, Leentje 60 (Mascol x Fieldhouse), was classified EX 92, produced 16,000 kg milk in 305 days, and has never had mastitis.

61 Excellents, 19 over 100,000 kg Milk, 6 over 10,000 kg F&P

‘I enjoy every day’

After receiving the Supreme Champion award at the National Show in 2012 for his Shottle daughter Jimm Holsteins Hellen 589, things quieted down for her owner John de Vries from Boijl in the Netherlands. But that doesn’t mean he focused any less attention on his breeding program. “I’m more fanatical than ever about breeding good cows”, De Vries says.

“Let the photographer come around 4 o’clock, then the cows are in and we can go together to look at them,” responded De Vries, age 42, when asked about providing photos for this article. Rather than presenting his cows in show form – clipping, washing and, if necessary, Photoshopping – it is notable that De Vries prefers to show his 95 cow herd, which boasts no less than 30 Excellent cows, in their work clothes.

An Old Barn

The increasing professionalization of the show

circuit is something De Vries can live without, “especially when you have to do so much preparation on your animals. I can enjoy my animals at home just as well.” De Vries has no spacious, new barn and makes no special accommodation for show cows. All his cows, including Excellent 94 National Supreme Champion Hellen 589, live in a 1973 freestall barn where each stall is only 1.1 meter wide. As we make the rounds in the barn, De Vries nudges his cows up one by one. All of them are big, strong cows who also appear elegant with long, lean necks. They stand up with no difficulty in the manure filled stalls. “She has

trouble”, says De Vries as he points to a stiffly moving cow 1.7 meters in height, who belongs to a friend. “It is not so important that your stalls are built correctly, it is more important that your cows are built correctly”, he says.

Waiting to Breed Back

Hellen 585 fills an entire stall at the front of the barn. After a bit of coaxing, she stands up easily. She is remarkably strong and wide for a Goldwyn daughter and has no problem with milk production. In her 4th lactation she produced 24,488 kg milk with 4.14% fat and

3.50% protein in 703 days, with a lifetime milk production of 90,000 kg. De Vries is waiting longer before breeding his cows back. “As long as they produce 45 kg of milk I don’t breed them. You don’t need to strive for a short calving interval just for the sake of getting a calf. Cows don’t need to calve every year if they have a great will to milk and you do not feed them TMR”, he believes. “But there are also cows here who need to calve every year and they do.” Hellen 585 was Honorable Mention in the mature cow class at the National Show in 2012, behind her herdmate Hennie 302, another heavy Goldwyn daughter who is still in the herd. “I used Goldwyn on heavy cows with Smooth and Style (aAa@ 5 and 6). Hellen 585’s dam was a really wide, strong Norik daughter.” Hennie was classified Excellent 93 in 2014 and Hellen 585, now in her 6th lactation, was classified Excellent 93 in September 2015.

His Ultimate Goal

A little further away, daughter Hellen 589 is lying down, ruminating. “Let her lie down,” De Vries says, “she is so tame she will walk behind you every time.” He explains that Hellen 585 has a bit of a low back and loin, that’s why he used Shottle on her in the mating that produced the National Supreme Champion in 2012. Producing a national champion was the ultimate goal he set for himself when he found himself farming alone at a young age. His father died unexpected when De Vries was only 20 years old. A couple of years ago, he decided to honor his father by taking his father’s name in his prefix. Jimm, of Jimm Holsteins, stands for Jan (his father), Isil, Merlijn and Madelief (his 3 children). De Vries could not have wished for a better farewell to the show circuit than with the victory of Hellen 859 in 2012. “I have achieved what I wanted to achieve, a national champion.” He has no desire to return to showing. “Shows take a lot of time and I do enjoy getting cows ready for a show. But there are other things that need to be done and I’ve had enough to do the last few years. I enjoy

my cows here at home, too.” While De Vries is not exhibiting at shows anymore, that doesn’t mean people can no longer see his cows. “I am open for farm tours, but not to large groups, as we just walk between the cows.”

Breeding Choices

Hellen 589 is not only beautiful but also very productive. So far in her 3rd lactation she has produced 19,003 kg of milk with 4.26% fat and 3.35% protein in 398 days. She has been flushed 10 times thus far and has produced 123 embryos. One of them resulted in the bull KIK Prizewinner, a son of Big Winner, which KI Kampen started marketing as a young sire in October. His full brother, Mr. Winner, will be tested by KI Samen soon. “ET specialist Freek Lok flushed Hellen 589 and said, ‘I can finally put my arm in a full grown cow again’,” De Vries says. De Vries does not make conventional breeding choices, as demonstrated by the fact that he not only flushed the cow to Big Winner but also to Maniac van de Peul. “I found him a beautiful bull,” Maniac is aAa@ 516, the same aAa@ numbers as Big Winner, and that is not a coincidence. “aAa@ is in my system,” explains De Vries. Not that he follows it blindly, “You have to use the system and not misuse it.” De Vries has a third lactation Starleader daughter out of Hellen 589, and out of her a heifer from the old Lorenzo. He also has an Acme heifer out of the Shottle who is pregnant to Jerudo.

Reliability

It is obvious that De Vries does not hesitate to use old bulls. “Bookie was by far the best bull I’ve ever used.” He says he does not look at indexes, but he listens to others’ experiences with bulls. Some of the bulls he uses, or has used in the past, are Jerudo, Seaver, Canvas, Niagara, Fez, Lotus, Outlaw, Supersire, Mogul, Fawi Pirlo and Mascol. “Mascol is a really good bull. I have two Excellent 92 cows by him.” Oman blood is almost completely missing in his barn. De Vries doesn’t care about genomic bulls. “I don’t know anything about genomics,

so I don’t do anything with it. I only use what I know.” De Vries does not subscribe to the theory that says that genomic bulls improve genetic progress. “The genetic progress is not so great, I think management is better than it was in the past. Using bulls correctly, that’s what is really important.”

More Home Bred Bulls

Nowadays De Vries uses more than half own bulls, which is easier now that AI has discovered them. His bulls don’t have high NVI figures, but that doesn’t matter to him. KI Samen offers Mr. Bobo (Maik x Active), Mr. Fred (Scooby Duu x Goldwyn), Tomahawk (Tandem x Rembrandt) and his son Mr. Bill (Tomahawk x Jesther). Mr. Bill is a son of Willy 86 (EX 91), a cow who produced 100,000 kg of milk in just over 2,000 days. “She produced 70 kg of milk for 17 consecutive weeks, and 31,399 kg with 4.41% fat and 3.29% protein in 617 days.” De Vries has 3 Very Good second calf heifers from Mr. Fred and he expects them to become Excellent. He also has high hopes for a Mr. Fred heifer out of a Cosmo dam who produces 40 kg. Mr. Fred, Mr. Bobo, Tomahawk – and also Veeecom’s Brandaris (Active x Goldwyn) – all come from the Venetie cow family. Venetie 5 (Goldwyn x Rembrandt x Emerson x Juror x Aerostar x Cleitus x Sheik) was classified 89 as a heifer and became National Champion, ►

Cows receive grass silage every 3 days, with a top dress of corn silage and beet pulp added twice daily.





Jimm Holsteins Hellen 589 (Shottle x Goldwyn) as a second calver at the National Show in 2012, where she was Intermediate and Grand Champion.



All De Vries' cows, including the National Champion, are housed in his 1973 barn, in 1970s sized box stalls bedded with horse manure.



De Vries uses many home bred bulls. All three of these calves are by his own bulls.



Like the barn, this 2x6 herringbone milking parlor was built in 1973. There are plans for a new 2x10 herringbone parlor, but De Vries still enjoys milking twice a day for 2.5 hours.

but was lost to an accident as second calf heifer. Her mother Venetie 3 (with Rembrandt a remarkable sire) was also shown at the National Show, was classified Excellent 90, and became a 100,000 kg cow this past June. Her dam out of the well-known Oslo was National Champion as a heifer and became an Excellent 91 cow, just as the 4 generations who followed her. The bull Cosmo comes also out of the same cow family .

Mr. Mike

Besides his bulls in AI, De Vries has also a mature bull in front of the barn. This correctly built Mr. Mike (Maik x Tiamo) out of the Prelude Spottie family was classified VG 89 – the maximum score for a young bull – and he is analyzed aAa@ 465. “People sometimes come by for a look, but shy away when they see him”, laughs De Vries. The bull measures 1.70 meters at the hips and 1.85 meters at the shoulders. He also the sired the youngest calf out of Hellen 585, who produced 5 consecutive heifer calves by the bulls Bookie, Shottle, Mr. Samuelo, Mr. Bill and Mr. Mike. The Bookie daughter, Hellen 587, produced a son, Fawi Mr. White (Maik), who is available from Veecom and KI Samen. Besides Mr. Mike, De Vries keeps also about 15 bulls at the home of a close friend, whose barn he rents and where

his heifers are also kept. There they are fed a ration of straw and pellets. 4 kg of protein-rich pellets per day, “for the heifers there is no better feed than that”, John believes.

Simple Feeding

De Vries feels good calf rearing is very important. He feeds his calves fresh milk and plenty of concentrates. He does not skimp on calf rearing and tries to calve heifers at a young age, “younger than 2 years. The benefits are coming into milk sooner and easier calving, because bred heifers don't have time to become fat. Because of that they also don't get ketosis and they develop better. In addition, calves are smaller and have more vitality. Heifer production, however, is not terribly high. A heifer seldom produces more than 40 kg of milk,” says De Vries. But he doesn't feel high heifer production is necessary. “I do not expect too much milk from heifers, but I do from older cows.” All the milking cows are in one group and have been fed a simple ration for many years. “If something is going well, I don't readily change it,” says De Vries. “A cow should have as stable a life as possible. You should not change a ration too abruptly.” The cows receive a fresh block of grass silage in the feed bunk every 3 days, with corn silage and dry beet pulp added twice a day as source of energy. Mixing

feed is not necessary for his farm. “It needs to stay workable I think, since most days I work alone.” He says the cows consume the corn silage and beet pulp in 10 minutes and that is not a problem at all. “The rumen is a large mixing vessel that works all day.”

Acidosis is Disastrous

The dry cows get leftover feed from the milking herd, plus day dry corn silage and minerals twice a day. “Whatever is left over from the dry cows goes to the bull, so nothing goes to waste. He eats everything that's left.” Once in a while, De Vries leaves everything in front of the milking herd until they clean it up. “They just have to eat everything until it's gone. That is possible when you feed clean silage. Moles have been eliminated here, so there is not much soil in the feed. Since no cows are allowed in the fields before the grass is cut, there is also no manure in the silage. I bring silage from fields where cows have grazed to the bulls.” De Vries starts feeding his cows slowly after they calve. The cows do not get a collar for the first two weeks after calving, so during that time they cannot get any concentrates from the concentrate dispenser. John starts the cows out with a digestible concentrate in the milking parlor, up to 4 - 5 kg per day, and

after that the concentrate dispenser takes over. Eventually cows get a maximum of 8 kg of concentrates per day from the dispenser, composed of 3 kg carbohydrate and 5 kg protein, plus a little added lure grain in the milking parlor. De Vries says his cows' production peaks about 60 - 70 days after calving. “A cow always has a bit of a recovery time after calving, but she continues to eat concentrates. A cow may get sick from too many concentrates, but not from too much roughage”, he explains his thought process. “Acidosis is disastrous for cows. If a cow develops acidosis, she never really gets rid of it.”

Grazing

The cows go out to pasture after the first grass is cut, grazing outside all day during the day and with the freedom to go outside during the night if they wish. Initially the cows get one large pasture of 6 - 7 hectares, then after second cutting he uses smaller pasture blocks. The cows continue to graze as long as weather and soil conditions remain good, some years as late as December. During the cooler months, the cows get corn silage and beet pulp first thing in the morning, before they go to pasture. De Vries makes sure his cows always have a pasture with short grass, and he applies a little fertilizer every 14 days. “It is important to keep the grass

tasty and with this system the urea level remains much more constant.” De Vries says he pays careful attention to feed. “We cut the grass in the afternoon, evening or at night, always after a period of sunshine. In overcast weather there is not enough sugar in the grass.” He cuts his grass a little later in the spring so he can get more from his first cut without sacrificing quality. “In the spring I go for sugar, in the fall for protein.” He makes silage in the morning, because at night not a lot of sugars are used up, and it goes “cold into the silage bunker. Sugars are needed for good preservation.” The first cut goes into one silage bunker, then subsequent cuts he puts on top of each other.

Hoof Trimming

It is not surprising that De Vries says he cares a lot about his cows. “I do everything for a sick cow. For example, I give them an infusion for diarrhea or mastitis immediately.” It is not unusual for him to trim hooves on a lame cow, but it is notable that his cows are never structurally hoof trimmed. “We never trim cows' hooves routinely, only when needed. Sometimes months go by and we never trim a cow's hooves. When you trim hooves frequently the hoof grows much faster.” De Vries usually milks by himself in a 2 x 6 herringbone parlor without automatic take off built in 1973.

There are plans to build a new, 2 x 10 herringbone with automatic takeoff, and more space for the cows, but the implementation of the plan is still pending. The milking parlor will be built in front of the barn, which will be extended. The old milking parlor will be repurposed into a waiting area. The barn from 1973 has already been extended once to accommodate 120 cows. De Vries feels that his old barn and milking parlor are still functioning well. “Each milking takes 2.5 hours, but I don't care about that. I earn my money with milking and I'd rather save time when doing other chores.”

'I enjoy every day'

De Vries says he enjoys his cows every day, and rightly so. He has already bred 61 Excellent cows. His first was cow classified Excellent 1996, and every year more of his cows reach that status. Last year he had 9 Excellent cows, and already this year 13 (in some cases cows who were already classified Excellent and upgraded). His mature cows have an average type score of 90 points. It is important to note that no less than 19 cows have surpassed 100,000 kg of milk lifetime. Six of these also produced over 10,000 kg fat and protein. De Vries does not only want a herd of beautiful cows, more importantly he wants a herd that produces well and does so for a long time. ■

The barn on the left houses young stock. De Vries plans to extend the front of the barn on the right, where the milking herd is kept.



Some farm information

John de Vries has 95 milking and dry cows on his farm in Boijl, located on the border between the provinces of Friesland and Drenthe. He does the majority of farm work himself, but is supported by a group of colleagues who help out or offer advice. Minne de Jong is a great help for 16 hours a week. In recent years, the farm's annual milk production has exceeded one million kilograms. The most recent annual herd average is 10,009 kg milk with 4.48% fat and 3.49% protein, at an average

age of 5 years and 5 months. Since the repeal of milk quotas, production has increased to 35 - 37 kg per cow per day, with an urea between 18 to 25. The average classification score for mature cows is 90 points. Over half the bulls De Vries uses are home bred (some are in AI) and the others are bulls like Jerudo, Seaver, Canvas, Niagara, Fez, Lotus, Outlaw, Supersire, Mogul, and Fawi Pirlu. De Vries makes a good ancillary income selling replacement heifers, 2nd calvers,

jumper bulls and embryos. His cows graze from after first cut until late fall. During the winter months the cows are fed unlimited grass silage, with corn silage and beet pulp added twice a day. Cows are also fed 2 kinds of concentrates, with a maximum of 8 kg total per cow, via concentrate dispenser. De Vries has 40 hectares of land in use, with 5 hectares devoted to growing corn and the rest used for growing grass and for pasture. De Vries purchases additional corn as needed.

