

Remsberg's job is shooting cattle

BY SHEILA MILLER

HARRISBURG — Parked outside the Farm Show Building, a maroon Chevy Malibu station-wagon, sporting Maryland tags and stuffed with feedbags, buckets, and long, black boxes waits patiently as its owner is called back for one more job before the two of them can motor home.

It's been a long, two days for the car and its owner, filled with more black and whites — both cows and film — than the two of them have shot in the same time span for at least a week.

Well, this is the last one for the day — the grand champion Holstein bull at the Pennsylvania State Holstein Show. The Malibu's engine almost starts to purr at the thought of heading home — if only he'd hurry up. But then, no cow or car ever hurried Jack Remsberg — patience and perfection are his motto.

Jack Remsberg (really John H. Remsberg, Jr. — but everybody calls him Jack) is, at age 54, one of the foremost livestock photographers East of the Mississippi.

As he waits for Ray Seidel, a dairyman from Kutztown, to bring the calf out for the camera's critique, Remsberg focuses in on a pouch of Red Man chewing tobacco he plucked from his green overall pocket and positioned where the calf will stand. Satisfied the picture will be sharp, he snatches the pouch out of the shavings and concentrates on the calf.

"In this business you have to know more about your subject than photography," Remsberg claims. "You have to be a student of conformation — able to recognize an animal's good and bad traits."

Remsberg helps get the calf set up positioning in front of the pine tree back drop. Moving slowly, he positions the young bull's feet, snips off some unruly hair on his top line, and gives just the right lift to his forequarter with the help of wood blocks.

To keep the calf's tail from swishing like a cat's while the camera's shutter is winking, Remsberg catches some hair from the switch with a fishing line, anchors the line under a metal bar, and feeds it out of the picture for a helper to hold.

Satisfied with what he sees through his Mamiya's 'eye', Remsberg calls for the calf's back to be 'straightened with a pinch while a two-legged noisemaker, posing as a quaking pine tree, keeps the calf's curiosity up and its ears forward. As the shutter goes off, the 30 minute ordeal is recorded on film.

The negative of Champion Indianvale Kerchenhull Kona will join the other 15,000 2 1/4 x 2 1/4 inch negatives on file in Remsberg's basement office just as soon as the Malibu can get back to the home farm in Middletown, Maryland.

Jack was born and raised on the farm, one of the top dairy operations in the state. And his love for dairy cattle was practically inherent being the son of J. Homer Remsberg, a national director of the Holstein-Friesian Association for sixteen years and former president.

"I started milking cows from the time I was enrolled in the first grade," Remsberg recalls. "My dad said if I was old enough to go to school, I was old enough to milk cows, too."

Remsberg is proud of his farm heritage and boasts, "We bred the All-American 4-Year-Old of 1950 — Lovcale Master Marcy."

His loyalty to the family dairy business influenced Remsberg to stay on with the farm after graduating from high school.

"I worked on the farm four years before going to the University of Maryland to study dairy science. I received my Bachelor of Science degree in 1951. The day I graduated, I married Marcia Ellis, a home economics major I met at the University," he reminisces.

With his marriage to Marcia, Remsberg got his first camera (it was his wife's) and together they traveled to Anchorage, Alaska where he served two years as a First Lieutenant in the Air Force.

"While we were in Alaska, our first daughter, Valerie, was born and I started taking pictures. I bought a \$15 Kodak developing kit and started printing my own photographs — teaching myself everything," he remembers. "Besides everybody in Alaska carries two cameras around his neck all the time."

Remsberg and family returned



It's a team effort priming a champion for the camera. Getting the animal posed to perfection sometimes takes hours. To keep the bull calf's tail from swishing at the wrong time,

Remsberg anchors it with a fishing line, held taut by one of the helpers. All this effort for a picture? You bet — and it's one worth framing.

to the farm in Maryland in 1953. After having been bitten by the photography bug in Alaska, Remsberg didn't put his camera on the shelf after coming home.

"I started taking pictures of our cows that were heading for a sale," he recalls. "Then, a couple of other guys said they wanted me to take pictures of their cows for the next year's sale. Soon, there were dispersals and shows to shoot."

"I never advertised or solicited work — it all came to me. And, I did all of this between milkings and did all my processing of film at night."

As on many dairy farms, there came a time when the Remsbergs had to make a decision to either get bigger or get out of the dairy business.

"My dad decided to sell out for economic reasons in 1970. That's when I went to photography full-time."

"Before that, it had already gotten to the point where I was only milking in the mornings."

"This is a unique career. If you do a respectable job, there's no end to the demand. If you're not so good, you could have trouble."

Remsberg attributes some of his success to being in the right place at the right time.

"I had been kicking around the idea of going full-time in the livestock photography business at about the time Stroymeyer and Carpenter retired. They were the only dairy cattle photographers around — they were from New York."

Today, shooting dairy cattle on film comprises 99 percent of Remsberg's work with an occasional horse or sheep picture thrown in for variety. Remsberg recalls his first job in Pennsylvania was a picture-taking session for Clarence Cornman, a Cumberland County dairy farmer whose son Clarence Cornman, Jr. is an official classifier with the National Holstein Association.

The life of a photographer is not always sunshine and roses, as Remsberg points out. There are days when the working conditions find him braving 100 degree heat or wind chills of 40 degrees below (the client's name was Glenn Freese Oxford), or rain, like last Wednesday's showers.

And getting an animal posed for a picture can take anywhere from 30 minutes to 3 hours, he explains.

"I try to accent the cow's good points and hide her poorer traits," he says. "Customers are happy if I can get an animal to look as good or better than she does in the

I guess you could say I flatter the animal on film.

"Just like people, some cows are more photogenic than others — and they can have their good and bad days too."

Remsberg confesses he has kept his business fairly local so he and his Malibu aren't on the road too much of the time, concentrating his work in New York, the Carolinas, Mississippi, Virginia, Maryland, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Delaware, and West Virginia.

"Twice a year I go to Select Sires in Columbus, Ohio to photograph their bulls, and I also shoot Atlantic Breeders Cooperative, Lancaster and Sire Power, Tunkhannock."

The photographer emphasizes his is not a job for a 'hyper' person — it requires patience. He chuckles as he recalls an incident that happened at one of the Holstein shows at the Farm Show Complex.

"I was taking a picture of Bob Kauffman's bull when it suddenly got loose and headed for Cameron

Street. He was almost on the highway when the fellows got him headed back to the barns where we finally caught him."

Packing the last of his gear into the station wagon, Remsberg is ready to head down the highway himself, back to the family farm where he built his home and one-man business. For sentimental and economic reasons, he keeps a few head of Holstein on the farm which is run now by his daughter, Barbara Fisher and her husband

Remsberg speaks fondly of his family, Marcia and daughters Valerie, Gail, Barbara and Jill. And he is proud of his four grandchildren, born last year to his four daughters in order of age.

"I never could get away from the love of dairy cattle," Remsberg says as he prepares to leave. "This is one job you have to like to do, it's not easy, it's a demanding occupation."

"The most satisfying part about it though is I'm able to work with the most honest and dedicated people in the world — farmers."



Poised and ready to shoot, Jack Remsberg calls for "noise" to get his subject's ears forward before pressing the shutter button of his Mamiya professional camera. Remsberg, of Middletown, Maryland, has built a reputation as one of the top livestock photographers in the East.

DHIA names directors



New Directors of the Pennsylvania DHIA include, from left to right, back row: Ellis Denlinger, treasurer, Gordonville; Jay Kowes, secretary, Warriors Mark; front row; J. Robert Kindig, vice president, Conestoga; and Oliver Butler, president, Wellsboro.