

# Myers Family Breeds Top Holsteins In Shenandoah Valley

BY JULIE GOCHENOUR  
Virginia Correspondent

**HARRISONBURG** — When Walkup Valiant Lou Ella brought \$185,000 at a Pennsylvania sale in November, no one from Walkup Holsteins or nearby Harrisonburg was too surprised. Dan Myers and his daughter, Teresa, have a reputation for breeding cattle that do well for other people. What's more, they also breed Holsteins that do well for themselves and carry on the Myers family tradition of fine registered Holstein cattle.

It's a tradition that goes back to 1922 when Dan's father, Victor Myers, brought the first registered Holsteins to the family dairy as a 4-H project. Five years later, Dan's father and grandfather requested and received the Walk-up prefix from the American Holstein Association. The Walkup herd was 100 percent registered before he ever came along, Dan Explains, and it has been gaining recognition ever since.

That recognition includes no less than three All-American nominations, one for each of the last three generations. "Around 1937, my dad showed a reserve honorable mention All-American and since that time we've been able to have two others nominated," the dairyman says. "The first one that I bred myself was in 1971 and the second one was the Astronaut daughter, Walkup Astronaut Lou Ann, that Teresa bred and carries our prefix."

Myers keeps between 75 to 80 cows in the Walkup milking herd and the herd average as of November was 18,154 pounds at 3.7 percent and 670 pounds of fat.

"This is a 100 percent registered herd with a few exceptions of cows we use for recipients and have cancelled their classification. The B.A.A. average is 103.4 with six Excellents and I don't know how many Very Goods," the dairyman continues. "There's also approximately 70 to 75 heifers from calves to bred heifers on the farm at all times."

The bright star of the herd is undoubtedly Walkup Astronaut Lou Ann, 3E 94, who is still going strong as an 11 year old. While being nominated and shown for All-American, Lou Ann had two consecutive records over a 1,000 pounds of fat, and from 24,000 to 28,000 pounds of milk on both records. "Her most important contribution, however, is not what she did but what her offspring are doing," Myers notes.

"As registered breeders we strive for cattle that will produce and reproduce; there is by far the best cow that's stayed on this place. Her daughter, Lou Ella, may be great, but at this point we're not able to value her transmitting like we can Lou Ann's. Lou Ann has transmitted exceptional type and production, consistently." The proof, he explains, is a growing number of outstanding daughters such as Lou Ella — not just one.

As a breeder, Myers realizes that cows like Lou Ann do not come along every year, or even every 10 years. "If we look through the statistics of the Holstein Association and those of people who merchandise and develop cattle, such cows come along one or twice in a state every 10 or 15 years. We're just blessed that she

came here," Myers says modestly.

"I believe that to develop good cattle it takes a lot of effort, a lot of concentration and work and I believe that close to 50 percent of it's luck," he declares. And while he can't do much about the luck, Dan admits to putting the maximum amount of effort, concentration and work into his breeding program.

"I strive for the combination of milk and total type," Myers reveals. "I do not breed for all milk or cow index. I do not breed for all type," he emphasizes. "I believe we have to select our breeding for more than one trait and cannot forget the others."

"This means breeding complicated. It's certainly easier to say a bull with 1200 PD is better than a bull with 100 PD, but that's not necessarily true. We're looking for bulls that will be consistent in what they provide for us, be it type or milk. Each breeding is a special mating for us," Myers adds, acknowledging that he spends hours pouring over sire summaries.

It takes a lot of dedication to make such a program work, especially if it occasionally flies in the face of accepted beliefs. "We are trying to use bulls that are in excess of 500 pounds of milk and a point and a half on type," the breeder says. "There are a few exceptions, but they're rare. That's what we put in our semen tank basically on type."

"We have lost cow indexes because my philosophy is the improvement of the cow instead of maintaining an artificial number in cow index," he reports. "The cow index is a tremendous tool to



Dan Myers stands with Walkup Astronaut Lou Ann, 3E 94. Myers notes that inspite of her outstanding records, "Her most important contribution, however, is not what she did but what her offspring are doing."

be used in mating but in no way is it the desired end in the registered Holstein business. As a dairy farmer I believe that we need to be able to work with those cows.

"From my experience and the experience of others, the quality of the cow many times suffers to the point that the successes are not worth those you loose," he continues. "We are trying to breed that total cow. The cow that has type, that can produce and reproduce. What else is there? If you have those, the people will be climbing the walls and walking in your drive and begging for your cattle — because that's what the industry is about," Myers maintains.

The dairyman may not be beating off potential customers with a stick, but he sells as much as 50 percent of his heifer crop a

year and could market still more. "In a specific year we might sell as much as 50 percent of his heifer crop a year and could market still more. "In a specific year we might sell as much as 50 percent of our heifer crop but it's going to have to be less than that on an average. I like to be a little critical on the cows we keep and I am very hard on young cattle. If a cow can make the first three or four lactations here, I know she'll go as long as she'll go. If not, she's gone."

He practices what he preaches. "We are culling the highest indexed cow in the herd as a three year old and she's going to have a 'Big Mac attack'," Myers said. "I would not let her leave the farm as a breed cow because she does not have the body conformation, or the udder quality, or the type, that I

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Walkup Holsteins, located near Harrisonburg, in Virginia's Shenandoah Valley, maintains a rolling herd average over 18,000 milk with a BAA of 103.4 on 75 cows.

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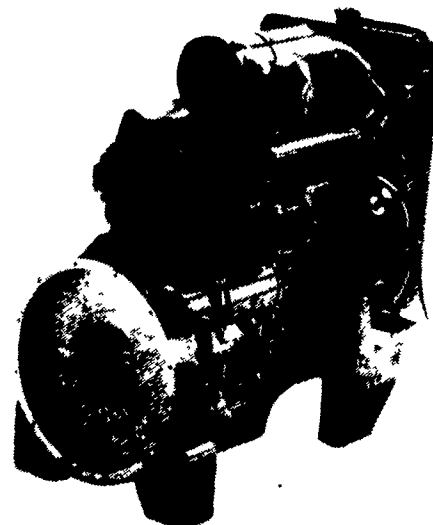
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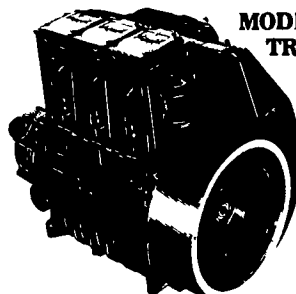


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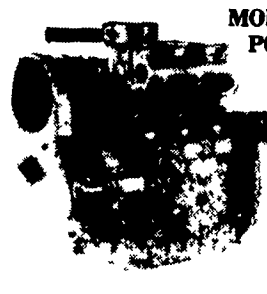
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