

# Melinda Reveals Championship Secrets

GAY BROWNLEE

Somerset Co. Correspondent  
BRUCETON MILLS (W. Va.)

— "There are no secrets, just a lot of hard work," Melinda Thomas tells persons interested in how the cows she is showing are kept so clean.

"I don't leave them lay in manure," she says. "I pitch the stalls twice a day." Thus, no indelible manure stains stick to the hide.

It's been a good career for the 20-year-old, 4-H'er who is showing her final year. She isn't complaining about having owned three grand champions during that time.

Besides numerous trophies, purple, blue, and red ribbons — seemingly hundreds representing 11 years of dairy projects — dominate a large portion of the interior walls of Lowell and Phyllis Thomas's house. The testimonials overflowing from their daughter's bedroom also decorate hall ways and the home office. They are lined up on shelves and according to size, occupy floor space, too.

Before she was old enough to show, Thomas used to envy Jeff and Greg, her now-married elder brothers and cousins who already were showing animals. In 1990, her turn came.

"I started with a little March calf and it just grew out of that," she says.

Mayday, an 89-point cow bought to flush, in 1993 took grand champion honors at the Garrett County Holstein Show, McHenry, Md.; the West Virginia Black and White Show at Jackson Mills; reserve champion at the Somerset District Holstein Show, and reserve champion at the West Virginia State Fair in Lewisburg.

Out of the five good eggs flushed from Mayday one of the heifer calves — Mel-T Astre-Mayday-ET — was junior champion at Garrett, Somerset, Jackson Mills, and Lewisburg, in 1996.

Then, on to Harrisburg's All-American Junior Show where the same animal took first place and was named junior champion. "She did well. Everywhere we went she excelled and won,"

Thomas said. "We decided to go big-time."

So it was off to Louisville, Ky. for the North American International Livestock Exposition. The heifer placed sixth in the open show and third in the junior show.

"The only thing I regret is we didn't take her to Madison to the World Dairy Expo," Thomas says, retrospectively.

"It was the feeling of 'I didn't buy her, she was bred and raised here on the farm,'" added Thomas.

Tracy, a 91-point Foothill daughter was 1994 grand champion at Somerset District Holstein Show and Pansy, a 93-point cow, in 1996, was grand champion at Garrett County; grand at the West Virginia Black and White Show and grand at Somerset. Again, in 1997, Pansy was grand champion at Garrett County and Jackson Mills.

Thomas describes the traits that generally characterize a champion. "You have to have a good tall, stylish cow with a good high, wide rear udder and smooth fore-udder placement and good teat placement.

"You like them high and wide because they can carry more milk in their udder. More milk means more money in your pocket," she says.

"I have over 50-head of my own," Thomas says of Mel-T Holsteins, the business name for the registered herd she built from flushing.

Meanwhile, the immediate Thomas clan is cloistered on the fringe of town, surrounded by lush green acreage known to be the Ward Thomas and Sons Dairy. Ward Thomas is her grandfather. About 1,000 acres provide a vista of healthy stalks of corn and other grains that support about 191 head of milking Holsteins.

At one time, Ward Thomas and Sons owned and operated the Grantsville Livestock Auction, Grantsville, Md.

She says that Ezra "Mose" Yoder, herdsman for the farm has been a great help. "Mose would find good cows and dad and mom always supported me," she said gratefully, adding that Ron Kling does the flushing.



Melinda Thomas is pictured with Trojan, the dairy animal the reserve junior champion at the Somerset District Holstein Show 2000 and grand champion at Garrett County (Md.) Holstein Show, 2000.

Tanned to a light golden brown from hours spent working in the sunshine, from her side of the white wrought-iron table on the enclosed porch, Thomas talked about what's next as an illustrations career in 4-H closes. She says one day she, herself, may become a 4-H leader, but not immediately. During summer, she joins the farm's work force.

The extensive lawns, for instance, are hers to mow every week, weed, operate field equipment and run errands, all of which are significant contributions to the overall picture. Cow care, however, is her specialty.

"These cows are my hobby," she says, adding there also are two horses kept for pleasure riding.

"Blue," the Australian blue heeler and constant companion to Thomas goes everywhere she goes including on the four-wheeler.

The West Virginia University junior has two years under her belt in the way of an animal and veterinary science major, however, six more years of study are required before the lover of animals can expect to be a doctor of veterinary medicine.

It is a lofty goal, but she says the most disliked subjects are now behind her.

She is able to maintain a high grade point average that, repeatedly, finds her name on the Dean's list and this fall term of classes will benefit from the awarding of two separate scholarships.

Strongly drawn to the sport of womens' softball, Thomas joined a league. She has played high-school fast pitch, and when a senior, attended the World Series of fast pitch softball, she said.

Rarely does Thomas fall prey to discouragement — the only thing that dampens her usually bright spirits, is a bad grade on a college exam. She also treasures solitude.

The important things Thomas says are getting through school and one day getting married.

In that case Thomas may require the services of a maid. She says, afterall "It's hard for me to do anything in the house. I prefer the outdoors."



In the office of Lowell and Phyllis Thomas is a sampling of ribbons and trophies won by their daughter, Melinda since she started showing dairy animals in 1990.



Melinda Thomas loves to go pleasure riding on "Granny," a Paint, left and "Sandy," a Morgan, at her home in Bruceton Mills, W. Va.