

## Wilder Holsteins - Riding Momentum to the Top of Germany's Breeding Scene



It is no new discovery that it will be more and more difficult for breeders to play an important role in the expensive and risky breeding business. Also in Germany not all fingers of one hand are needed to count the private breeders, who master the course and act in front. One of the few is definitely Norbert Holtkamp. Together with his brother Hermann and his son Hendrik he has brought the Wilder prefix to international recognition. The receipt for success: speed, consistency and most of all the right cow families.

### **STEPHAN SCHNEIDER / CHRISTINE MASSFELLER**

It is a Wednesday in February that we have made an appointment with Norbert Holtkamp. The highways that take us first through the populous Ruhr district and then through the intensively farmed western Münsterland to the German-Dutch border are clear. We arrive on time. Nonetheless, we need to wait briefly, so we take advantage by having a quick look at the cows, whose impressive conformation has clearly improved since our last visit 4 years ago. Norbert sits in the small office, which is placed behind one of the two milking robots and is on the telephone. We doubt that this is unusual, because anybody who breeds this intensively also needs to spend time marketing. Obviously, Norbert prefers selling young bulls to AI studs. That is the driving force in his work. The bull calves are the ones that turn the big wheel which even the relatively small farms like Holtkamp's have to maintain to stay in business. It is the highly-placed and intensively used young sires which paint the picture for a breeding program. The picture for Wilder Holsteins is painted exactly this way. Every year, 30 bulls go to stations: 8 or nine of them to German AI studs, and the rest are sold internationally. However, the sale of interesting heifers is also part of the business. Over 200 high-testing females changed hands to new owners in the past year, either via the German Selection Sale, which is organized by Holtkamps, or via other top auctions. But: the breeding

and marketing is not just done on the side in a family operation like that of Holtkamps. When it became clear that breeding would be a long-term and important part of the operation, Norbert, who had been working at a regional waste disposal service up until a few years ago, came back to work on his brother's farm. Norbert is the key figure behind Wilder Holsteins. He determines the strategy and he makes the matches. By now, Hermann's son Hendrik has also come down with the fever of his uncle's passion. He is also excited about breeding cows.

## SYSTEM

Despite Hendrik's involvement, the daily breeding business, including telephone calls, remains in Norbert's hands. And on this morning Hendrik will be happy that it is the way it is. The topic was not the sale of an animal. It was a call from the veterinary inspection office. A questionable result from the BHV examination was the reason. 'Really,' says Norbert, 'it is nothing unusual. Often the situation is quickly resolved, but it makes me nervous regardless. I don't want to imagine a situation where we would no longer be able to market our animals.' Norbert's position is understandable. For a farm with 145 cows that does over 50 ET flushes and 130 IVF sessions every year and produces more than 300 top calves, it would be no pleasant situation should marketing be impossible. But this situation would be bad for breeding in general. Without Wilder Holsteins, there wouldn't be sires of sons like Kanu-P (Semex), Hotspot-P (RUW), Hansa-P (RUW), Baymax-Red (Masterrind), Matt-RC (GD), Born-P-RC (RUW), Smiley-RC (CRV), Cashpoint (RUW), or Mark-RC (Semex). And of course, there wouldn't be the many other sires that we can't all list here but are still widely used by international AI studs. Indeed, Wilder Holsteins has made itself to a recognizable number on the international breeding scene, and this is no coincidence. Behind the breeding program is a system and understanding.



One of the favourites in the Holtkamp barn is Wilder K25 VG-88. The second-calf Brekem sister to Kanu-P has several high-testing sons and grandsons in AI studs and is also a highly-impressive free-stall cow. She completed her first lactation with 12,270kg 3.77% 3.45%. On the right her Bagno-daughter K33 VG-85.

## **SPEED**

So what does Norbert Holtkamp do differently than so many other breeders who are trying to breed top genomic animals? 'You have to be quick and you have to tackle the top,' is his spontaneous answer. 'Genomic breeding has so much to do with a system. You can't hope that luck will come your way. Of course, not all bulls work out as well as their breeding values indicate. There are those whose sons test very high and others for whom it goes surprisingly poorly. You have to develop a sense for which sires of sons work and which ones don't. For example, we used Honda. Now all of a sudden his sons are coming with high numbers. That was unexpected. And because we sell our bull calves around the world and test them in all different markets, one can't restrict themselves to having a high TPI or a high RZG. Sires of sons which test high in more broadly built indexes like \$NM also work better in other systems and seem to be more stable. And then Norbert continues: 'There are more hurdles before achieving success. For us, one of every 5-6 bulls makes it into an AI stud. So you need a large number of recipients. That is probably the biggest obstacle for a lot of breeders.'

## **COW FAMILIES**

Norbert talks a lot about the right strategies that need to be in place in order to be successful, but he admits that luck can't be forced. 'The most important thing is to have the right cow families in the barn. We regularly invest in embryos from the best cow families in the breed. We are working with offspring from the Cosmopolitans, Diepenhoek Rozelles, Juror Faith, Wayne Hays and the Massias. Even from these families we have branches that repeatedly produced high individuals. But it is also always a risk to invest in expensive ET or IVF. In the families of Wilder Kanu and Wilder Saloon Hira it is completely different. The reliability with which these lines produce high-testing bull calves is much higher. These are the families that make the difference,' says Norbert. And with that we conclude with what best reflects Wilder Holsteins, the Kanu family and the Hira family. The latter, Wilder Saloon Hira VG-85, who goes back to the European Champion Outside Kora, has put 12 sons into AI studs and is of course the granddam of the sires of sons Wilder Hotspot-P. Above all, Hira and her daughters and grandsons belong to the genomic giants which deliver top results in all sorts of systems. With Luminous (Damaris-Hira), Notify (Jedi-Powerball), Kerryhill (Kerrigan-Modena) and Hotspot (Superhero-Powerball), there are examples of four sons and grandsons in France's top-30. And the Kanu family, at the core of which Wilder K25 VG-88 can be found, lacks nothing compared to the Hiras. The Brekem half-sister to Kanu-P has several daughters who also show their dominance on various European top-lists with their sons and daughters. Of course we can't list all of the noteworthy young bull dams from the Wilder breeding program which Norbert presents to us in detail in this article. But you can be sure that you will meet them in one way or another down the road.



Norbert (50), Hermann (55), and Hendrik (19) Holtkamp – ‘Since high-testing young sires have been available from our families, we are also going to try line-breeding.’

### **Wilder Holsteins in Germany**

- Farm in Vreden, western Münsterland, about 1km from the Dutch border
- Owners: Hermann and Norbert Holtkamp
- 130ha: 80 corn, 34 grain, 10 intensive pasture, 6 extensive pasture
- 145 dairy cows, 230 heifers, 120 beef bulls
- Production (2x Lely robots): 11.200kg 4.02% 3.45%
- Feeding: TMR of 60% corn silage and 40% haylage, plus 6-7kg pressed pulp, 5kg brewers grains, 1.5kg canola meal, 1.5kg protected canola, 1.5kg grain corn, 1.5kg grain; additional concentrate in the robot (max. 5kg for cows)
- Sire use: 100% genomic young sires with high gRZG and gTPI values, with all heifers and about 70% of the milking herd being used as recipients carriers