

While O Man continues to amaze breeders and producers alike by the way he beats the competition, his US-based breeder still has his feet firmly on the ground. "The genes just fell in the right place," says Gaylon Obert, on how it feels to breed the world champion bull based on total index.

I still remember playing football with my brothers. 'Hey, O Bee' they used to shout across the field. My nickname came from the first letters of our surname, and I use them now as a prefix," says Gaylon Obert. The dairy business he runs with those same brothers is the birthplace of O Man. Or, to give him his full name, O-Bee Manfred Justice. O Man is at the head of the sire index publications in seven countries (based on non-converted figures), and in second place in two more, thanks to the proofs of nearly 20,000 daughters. So what's his secret? "O Man was way ahead of his time. He combines yield, health and external appearance. I didn't aim for this combination consciously, I wasn't looking for Manfred x Elton. In retrospect, it seems the genes just fell in the right place," says Gaylon. O Man's breeder does his best to stay modest under the glare of attention surrounding his sire. But, with some pushing, it becomes clear how it feels to have bred the number-one sire in the world. "Nothing makes me happier than when someone says I've bred the best sire in the world. I was still at school when I first wanted to breed a breeding bull."

#### Genomic selection

Gaylon was in Europe last month along with Charlie Will. Last year, the sire analyst Charlie Will for AI organisation Select Sires said O Man should not, based on markers, be in use yet. This conclusion has since been modified, as a year later, Select Sires is no longer working with twelve, but with 1,200 markers, and the year after with 52,000. The latest tests indicate O Man codes positive for milk but Gaylon says that genomic selection still has to prove itself. "But I'm looking forward to developments. To a breeding organisation, it's definitely useful to be able to select the best from three full brothers. But as a breeder you have to take care for your self because the young sire, which is contracted, must deliver an extra something that is at least equal to what his full brothers are worth." Gaylon nods when asked how far a breeder can control this 'plus'. "I would say the young sire can only leave if I get a top-

up payment, that guarantees the revenues if he breaks through. Now that only happens with 5% of sires, but I'm also well aware that many stockholders can't afford to take that attitude."

#### Birthday celebrations

O Man is heavily used as a sire of sons worldwide. His owner alone, Select Sires, has 80 sons out of a test capacity of 330 Holstein sires a year. The first 12 get their first figures in August this year. Gaylon has reason to celebrate this month: if all goes well, O Man will be celebrating his tenth birthday. "I'll be honouring the sire with a visit to the Select Sires stalls. O Man is still producing at full steam. They even take his sperm on Sundays. He's produced 850,000 doses and he could give his millionth next year." Gaylon, with his brothers Steve and Gary, milks 180 cows, 50% of them related to O Man. "Which is why I only use him sparingly myself." Of O Man's now 25 daughters, there's also a descendant from the Jenny Lou family. The breeder hopes to set himself apart here with another bloodline. But there is no need to spread the risk like this for the moment, as breeding engineers know very well how to find their way

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to O-Bee Holsteins in Dakota, Illinois. Gaylon carries out two ET sessions a month. "There are some breeders who flush much more, but I want to implant all embryos in my own stock. I'm not selling any genetics until AI sires catch up, otherwise I'll price myself out of the market." The most current donor is an 87-point Boliver daughter out of a Stormatic out of a Decision out of O Bee Formation Josey registered with 93 points, a descendant of Jezebel (v. Elton), O Man's mother. Boliver's daughter has now delivered 50 embryos, and eight resultant sires are going to AI.

#### Sire advice programme

Gaylon doesn't expect to breed another O Man, but he's still trying. "My breeding aim is simple: breed sire mothers. That makes farming much more exciting. To keep animals of interest for breeding, the American TPI index usually leads

when it comes to choosing sires. I'm now using Robthom Moscow, Velvet View Socrates and Ensenada Taboo Planet. The pedigree's sire advice programme makes the combinations with cows which aren't contracted." O-Bee Holsteins has 20 cows under contract at present, and 40 are waiting for AI.

#### Earning money

"When I'm giving presentations, I use to say quite happily I could milk cows every day for 50 years, but the reality isn't quite so romantic. I've been negotiating with breeding engineers for 30 years now, and we were one of the first in our area to start flushing in 1980. I remember we had a flush with 56 embryos, a record those days. Ultimately, it just comes down to earning money." Gaylon has certainly done that with O Man, even if he has enough commercial savvy not to say exactly how much. There was a ceiling on his earnings, though. Apart from O Man, his mother, Jezebel, produced eight more sons that made it to become breeding animals, including his full brother O Bee Manfred Justin, but he has the CVM gene, unfortunately. Jezebel's latest son, O Bee Jobez (v. Morty) has a provisional +2.65 for type overall. "Jezebel was always in good condition. Throughout each of her lactations she always weighed 800kg, even when she was at her peak as far as milk production was concerned."

Gaylon sees a lot of Jezebel in O Man daughters he's seen in different countries, and knows their health is good. To his mind this proves that there's no point crossing with other dairy breeds. "His daughters show their heat earlier in lactation and calve easily as well. O Man brings the characteristics that producers want from crossing. Why cross if there's a sire like O Man?"

Tijmen van Zessen

Gaylon Obert: "Why cross with other breeds if there's a sire like O Man?"

# O Man is way a head of his time