



In recent years the popularity of cross breeding has increased

Using cross-bred bulls gives half the hybrid vigour

## Cross-bred bull benefits

With Montbeliarde, Holstein Friesian, Brown Swiss and MRI blood in his pedigree, Woeste Polder Reladon is immediately interesting. And interest in cross-bred bulls appears to be increasing in many other countries.

text **Annelies Debergh**

In three months Woeste Polder Reladon achieved a place in the top 10 of the most sold bulls in The Netherlands. Such

popularity generally doesn't arouse any interest. But it's different in this case, because

Woeste Polder Reladon, a true cross-bred bull



Alger Meekmit

with Reladon – as a son of the Montbeliarde bull Redon and Fitlist daughter Woeste Polder Anoeska 30 – it involves a true cross-bred bull.

On a farm visit to producer Jack Houbraken, CRV product manager Jan Hiddink and CRV classifier Marc Cauwenberg happened to track down the cow family of Reladon. Jan admits that the demand for cross-bred bulls comes from the market and is the driver behind CRV's work with cross breeds. "There are still three cross-bred bulls in quarantine at CRV."

### Breeding decisions

Jan is not surprised that the use of a cross-bred bull such as Reladon has shot up in such a short period of time.

"I think that a number of producers are searching for different blood lines," he says, pointing to the hybrid vigour and the high protein inheritance of a bull such as Reladon.

"That happens because cross-bred bulls often appear to have good conception rates. That also plays a part."

In recent years the popularity of cross breeding has increased. Xsires' Hans Kerkhof says: "We import bulls of different breeds into The Netherlands that are suitable for crossing with Holstein cows.

"We keep all crossing breeding plans open and which plan the producer uses

## Jack Houbraken: "Another Fleckvieh half brother of Reladon into AI"

For 15 years Jack Houbraken has been crossing with other breeds. Fleckvieh, Brown Swiss, Montbeliarde and MRI are the breeds that, alongside the traditional Holstein, have a chance in his herd. "The pure Holstein was too milk focused," explains Jack. "By crossing with other breeds you gain in fertility, strength, and feet and legs. Udder quality also increases. The shape of the udder can vary, but the quality is usually better." To correct the faults of an individual cow, Jack chooses a matching breed, so for bull mother the VG88 Woeste Polder Anoeska 30 (62% Holstein, 25% Brown

Swiss, 12% MRI) a Montbeliarde was chosen.

"Anoeska 30 really could not be bettered." So he points to her feet and leg score of 91 points. In her fourth lactation the Fitlist daughter achieved 11,444kg of milk with 4.77% of fat and 4.15% of protein and she produced 33 good embryos from two flushings. "The high protein is bred in this cow family. With Montbeliarde bull Redon I wanted to support the protein."

Redon son Reladon also has a place on this unit. "The first calves from him have now been born." Meanwhile a son



of Van Anoeska 30 with Fleckvieh bull Imposium left for CRV's breeding programme.

depends on the herd and the unit." At Xsires, cross-bred bulls don't fit in. "Cross-bred bulls go against every theory of hybridisation. So you don't achieve the maximum effect of hybrid vigour and return for the cross. There is also concern about the spread of the descendants of cross-bred bulls."

With the use of cross-bred bulls the hybrid vigour effect does apply, albeit to a lesser extent than with a totally different breed. Gerben de Jong, head of the Animal Evaluation Unit at CRV, confirms this.

### Hybrid vigour

"With a bull with 50% Holstein blood and 50% blood from another breed you get half the hybrid vigour effect. The advantage with some Holstein blood is that you have to allow less for characteristics such as productivity. The producer does gain the advantage in the area of fertility, life expectancy and other figures."

Jan also says that the use of cross-bred bulls fits in with the tendency towards bigger farms. "With the increasing number of milking cows, producers are looking for cows that are easy to manage." Then the aspect of simplification in the breeding comes into play. "Producers are now often using eight or nine breeding bulls, but that is also changing. I am already seeing farms with 300 milking cows that are still using two bulls. We shall see that more in the future. In that case it can be two or three Holstein bulls, but also a Holstein and a cross-bred bull."

The phenomenon of crossing is not new. The dairy cattle sector is the only one in which crossing rarely occurs, says Jan.

"In Denmark the top bull is a cross bred. But Kian and Sunny Boy are actually not pure bred."

The New Zealand branch of CRV, CRV Ambreed, has experience with testing cross-bred bulls. Of the 120 bulls tested each year, 10 have both Holstein and Jersey blood.

"By using a cross-bred bull you still get 50% of the hybrid vigour," says Peter Berney, referring to the popularity of cross-bred bulls.

Peter is marketing manager in CRV Ambreed. "These bulls are used particularly by producers who want to profit from hybrid vigour, but don't have the time themselves to make the optimum crosses between breeds."

Cross-bred bulls owe their popularity to their good fertility results. "Because you are using bulls on cows that have a low relationship score with the bull, you

often see the fertility results are high. The results are very good, particularly with cows with a high inbreeding score. Because of the grass orientated farm management, a year between calvings is the aim and good fertility scores are very important here."

Peter is positive about the final breeding results. "In New Zealand 25%, on average, of the top 30 bulls are cross bred.

"These top bulls often have 75% Holstein blood and 25% Jersey blood. Bulls with a higher percentage of Holstein blood do have better breeding results."

He says that the disadvantage of working with cross breeds is the great variation in offspring.

"The spread is often large. There are very good daughters, but also offspring that clearly perform below expectations." |

Fitlist daughter Anoeska 30, dam of Reladon



Alex Arkink