

# Has PLI ‘obsession’ gone too far?

Renown pedigree breeder and runner up in the 2017 NMR/RABDF Gold Cup, James Tomlinson is disappointed with the latest bull proof run. We spoke to him to find out why.

TEXT RACHAEL PORTER

It's something he eagerly anticipates three times a year – typically because there are a few exciting sires to pick from an increasingly impressive array of bulls. “But this time I was disappointed – there were no sires I'd touch at all in the daughter-proven ranking's top 10 – or even the top 20. And the genomic ranking was only marginally better.”

So what's the issue? James says that the obsession with PLI has caused problems this time around. “The linears are falling short. There are too many extremes. And this is because breeders are chasing PLIs – they're becoming ludicrously high. There are far too many negative scores on key traits. As a result, problems with, for example, teat length and rump angle, are creeping back after generations of corrective breeding.”

## Number-one sire

Occupying the top spot in the daughter-proven ranking is Larcrest Commend, a bull who made his first appearance as a genomic young sire in 2015 and now has a Profitable Lifetime Index (€PLI) of €777. This Balisto son has a high Predicted Transmitting Ability (PTA) for milk quality, with fat and protein at +0.22% and +0.11% respectively. As more daughters have come into milk, he has also inched upwards for milk volume while

continuing to demonstrate a good Lameness Advantage (+2.7). There's no doubt that he's an impressive sire, but James is put off by his negative score for teat length. “When you dig down into the linears, you can really see the issues that chasing PLI are creating. With the considerable minuses on some of the traits, you can do a lot of damage in just one generation.”

Equally imposing is Weigeline Jacey Tabasco, who has moved up from fifth to second (PLI €734) with high PTAs for milk (+1,054kg) and protein (+34.5 kg). And Mocon, who led the way in the previous index run, now ranks third, with a PLI of €726 and an exceptional daughter Lifespan Index of +0.8.

“But he has a massive minus on chest width, as well as minus scores for feet and legs and rump angle. This is a shame as he's +2.3 on teat length and I would have considered using him if his linear wasn't all over the place,” says James.

He adds that teat length is becoming an issue in many herds. “It's my deal breaker. I have categorically stopped using these sires.”

James adds that other problems, such as sloping rumps, are also creeping back in. “This is a shame as producers have worked hard to breed out a lot of these issues, which were the result of chasing PIN and milk yield in

VH Balisto Brook



Cookiecutter Harper



EDG Rubicon



the past. And this is inevitable when one figure or trait is focused on at the expense of everything else.”

Looking at the genomic-sire list, James says that there are a couple in the top 10 that he'll enquiring about.

“Taking a broad view of the ranking, somatic cell count and fertility scores are all tremendous and breeders have certainly got that right. But, again, the wider linear for many of these sires is the issue.”

Pine-Tree CW Legacy, who retains his PLI of more than £900 and remains the leading bull among all young, genomic Holstein sires, transmits improvements to his daughters' mastitis (-4), lifespan (+0.7) and lameness scores (+2.3).

In second place is Denovo 7921 Atrium, who also retains his position from the previous ranking with a PLI of £878.

### New entry

The highest new entry, and the first sire to grab James' attention, is fourth-place bull Peak AltaLeap. A son of De-Su Quantum, AltaLeap's Lifespan Index of +0.8 gives his daughters a predicted 244 extra days of productive life compared to a bull whose LS is zero. His Calf Survival score is equally impressive at +3.2, and with a PLI of £871, he transmits all the usual production and health traits associated with the £PLI ranking. “I'm going to take a closer look at him and make some enquiries. He comes from a solid cow family.”

The number-five sire ABS Crimson (De-Su Spectre), with a PLI of £853, also caught James' eye. He is the highest weight of fat transmitter in the top 20 at a massive 47.9kg and, again, he's from a good cow family and offers a good outcross. “He's certainly a possibility and warrants a second look.”



## James Tomlinson: “There's a trio of genomic sires that really caught my eye”

Paternal brother to Crimson, ABS Outback, is in sixth place and he has a high Lameness Advantage at +3.0 and excellent daughter Fertility Index at +12.5. His PLI is £847. But James is put off by his teat-length score of -1.14. “Our teat length is OK – I wouldn't want it to get any shorter and a score like this could be a risk.”

James has been most taken by a sire who's much further down in the ranking, but still has an impressive PLI of £712 – Wilder Bestman. “He has a solid cow family behind him and offers 2.91 for Type Merit and is plus on teat length. He ticks all the boxes for us – he's got a good linear. He's not up near the top of the list, but that doesn't put me off.”

There are lots of sires to choose from further down the list that will tick all the boxes, according to James. “I think that a PLI of £600 is more than enough and still impressive. It will certainly take your herd in the right direction, without compromising other traits.”

He says that he also believes (and certainly hopes) that things may 'calm down' a little for the next run. “Just two runs ago there was too much choice and it was difficult to pick between the sires. I could have used them all and it was a case of digging down into the detail and looking at sire stacks and cow families. Hopefully this will be the case come April's run.” |

Table 1: Top 10 genomic and top 10 daughter-proven sires available in the UK ranked on PLI (source: AHDB Dairy and Holstein UK)

| name                      | sire     | mat. grandsire | supplier             | production  |       |        |          |       |          |            | functional traits |     |          |                |      | conformation |       |       |
|---------------------------|----------|----------------|----------------------|-------------|-------|--------|----------|-------|----------|------------|-------------------|-----|----------|----------------|------|--------------|-------|-------|
|                           |          |                |                      | reliability | milk  | fat kg | prot. kg | fat%  | protein% | £PLI       | maint.            | SCC | lifespan | fertility ind. | dCE  | F&L          | udder | TM    |
| <b>genomic sires</b>      |          |                |                      |             |       |        |          |       |          |            |                   |     |          |                |      |              |       |       |
| Pine-Tree Cw Legacy       | Frazzled | Yoder          | WWS                  | 67          | +913  | +43.4  | +31.8    | +0.09 | +0.03    | <b>906</b> | -6                | -32 | 0.7      | 9.0            | 0.3  | 1.57         | 1.73  | 0.51  |
| Denovo 7921 Atrium        | Achiever | Delta          | Genus                | 67          | +723  | +45.1  | +27.0    | +0.19 | +0.04    | <b>878</b> | -12               | -22 | 0.6      | 12.5           | 0.4  | 1.88         | 1.17  | 1.48  |
| De-Su Frazzled Rome 14192 | Frazzled | Yoder          | WWS                  | 67          | +856  | +45.0  | +31.4    | +0.13 | +0.04    | <b>874</b> | 0                 | -30 | 0.6      | 8.6            | -0.1 | 1.45         | 1.19  | 0.92  |
| Peak Alta Leap cd         | Quantum  | Alta Spring    | Alta/Global Genetics | 67          | +803  | 32.4   | +32.9    | +0.01 | +0.08    | <b>871</b> | 7                 | -31 | 0.8      | 8.7            | -0.9 | 2.35         | 1.91  | 1.21  |
| ABS Crimson               | Spectre  | Rubicon        | Genus                | 67          | +912  | +47.9  | +31.5    | +0.14 | +0.02    | <b>853</b> | 7                 | -19 | 0.6      | 9.9            | 0.6  | 1.57         | 0.91  | 1.18  |
| ABS Outback               | Spectre  | Troy           | Genus                | 67          | +783  | +35.1  | +29.6    | +0.05 | +0.05    | <b>847</b> | -4                | -17 | 0.7      | 12.5           | 1.4  | 1.80         | 1.41  | 1.50  |
| Wilra ABS Amplify         | Achiever | Hotshot        | Genus                | 67          | +654  | +41.7  | +28.8    | +0.19 | +0.09    | <b>844</b> | 1                 | -22 | 0.7      | 9.8            | 0.0  | 2.13         | 1.20  | 1.37  |
| VH Balisto Brook          | Balisto  | Denim          | Viking/AIS           | 69          | +507  | +41.2  | +24.8    | +0.25 | +0.10    | <b>842</b> | 2                 | -37 | 0.7      | 8.7            | 0.6  | 1.31         | 0.78  | 0.66  |
| Bomaz Alta Cabot          | Topshot  | Cabriolet      | Alta/Global Genetics | 67          | +691  | +44.2  | +28.6    | +0.20 | +0.07    | <b>839</b> | -5                | -24 | 0.5      | 5.7            | 0.8  | 2.00         | 1.44  | 1.43  |
| Melary Frazzled FYI       | Frazzled | Balisto        | WWS                  | 67          | +936  | +37.6  | +34.8    | +0.01 | +0.05    | <b>835</b> | 7                 | -30 | 0.6      | 5.0            | 0.0  | 1.51         | 1.24  | 0.79  |
| <b>proven sires</b>       |          |                |                      |             |       |        |          |       |          |            |                   |     |          |                |      |              |       |       |
| Larcrest Commend          | Balisto  | Robust         | Genus                | 89          | +519  | +38.9  | +25.7    | +0.22 | +0.11    | <b>777</b> | 0                 | -16 | 0.3      | 12.1           | 0.0  | 1.73         | 1.45  | 0.78  |
| Weigeline Jacey Tabasco   | Jacey    | Bookem         | Bullsemen.com        | 83          | +1054 | +28.3  | +34.5    | -0.15 | +0.00    | <b>734</b> | 9                 | -21 | 0.3      | 13.9           | -0.5 | 1.36         | 0.98  | 0.62  |
| Mocon                     | Morgan   | Snowman        | Bullsemen.com        | 82          | +840  | +24.8  | +29.3    | -0.10 | +0.02    | <b>726</b> | -18               | -22 | 0.8      | 6.8            | 0.5  | 0.84         | 0.93  | 0.26  |
| Hoanster Zanzibar         | Armitage | Bowser         | Semex                | 97          | +635  | +31.4  | +23.7    | +0.07 | +0.04    | <b>708</b> | 10                | -21 | 0.3      | 16.3           | -0.1 | 0.13         | 0.19  | -0.41 |
| Cookiecutter Harper       | Balisto  | Epic           | Genus                | 89          | +686  | +31.5  | +30.0    | +0.05 | +0.09    | <b>694</b> | 4                 | -19 | 0.4      | 5.6            | -0.1 | 1.32         | 1.06  | 1.03  |
| S-S-I Headway Alltime     | Headway  | Supersire      | WWS                  | 78          | +461  | +23.6  | +21.6    | +0.07 | +0.08    | <b>694</b> | 7                 | -29 | 0.5      | 10.9           | 0.5  | 1.83         | 1.86  | 0.61  |
| Co-Op Robust Cabriolet    | Robust   | Planet         | UK Sires Direct/AIS  | 98          | +619  | +38.3  | +23.0    | +0.16 | +0.03    | <b>691</b> | -19               | -11 | 0.3      | 3.7            | 0.7  | 1.84         | 1.06  | 1.35  |
| Teemar Shamrock Alphabet  | Shamrock | Ramos          | Genus                | 83          | +575  | +16.8  | +18.1    | -0.07 | -0.01    | <b>681</b> | -19               | -3  | 0.8      | 20.5           | 2.2  | -0.03        | -0.39 | 0.72  |
| EDG Rubicon               | Mogul    | Robust         | Cogent               | 91          | +662  | +46.5  | +23.5    | +0.24 | +0.02    | <b>676</b> | 16                | -15 | 0.5      | 4.7            | -0.4 | 3.36         | 1.81  | 2.71  |
| View-Home Littlerock cd   | Cashcoin | Robust         | Semex                | 89          | +798  | +20.1  | +26.9    | -0.13 | +0.01    | <b>676</b> | -10               | -16 | 0.5      | 11.6           | 0.7  | 1.04         | 1.17  | 0.81  |