



## **Crossbreeding Tips when using Montbeliarde Bulls**

**By Steve Snowdon, Breeding Advisor/Crossbreeding Specialist**

With the rapid increase in the use of the Montbeliarde breed for crossbreeding both worldwide and within Australia, it is important to keep pace with the pros and cons when using the breed. It is particularly important for the commercial dairy farmer to build their knowledge of the Montbeliarde breed and what to look for when selecting bulls.

We are still in the unfortunate situation that very few resellers/ breeding advisors have adequate knowledge on the Montbeliarde breed, in order to give the correct advice when selecting bulls for their clients to use.

The Montbeliarde breed need to be viewed differently to the normal assumptions we make when selecting Holstein or Jersey sires. For this reason it is important that you, the breeder, gain the knowledge required so you can ask and seek the correct answers regardless of which reseller or AB Company you choose to purchase your semen through.

As each season progresses, Auzred Xb will continue to add to "Tips when using Montbeliarde Bulls" in order to help you build your knowledge on the breed and how best to use them within your crossbreeding programs.

When selecting Montbeliarde bulls the main areas to increase your knowledge are;

- **Calving Ease**
- **Mating maiden heifers**
- **Muscle Body Condition Score**
- **Production**
- **Type and Body Composite score**
- **Udders & Teat placement**
- **Temperament**

**Calving Ease; The rule is simple never, never, never select a bull with a calving ease rating below 88.** Unfortunately there are bulls available in Australia with calving ease ratings below 88, some as low as 80!!!

Within breed, the Montbeliarde ratings are 88-89 average calving ease, 90+ easy calvings and 87 or less are difficult calvings. The French scoring system is much different to our APR for calving ease, please make yourself aware of this!!

It is important to know that the heterosis effect when crossbreeding, gives a plus for most genetic traits, and some bulls will throw bigger calves due to this when used for crossbreeding compared to within breed.

Also the Montbeliarde breed is the same as the two other "Alps" breeds, the Brown Swiss and Flechvieh, in that, on average they have a 7 day longer gestation length than other breeds. Data is currently not available on the gestation length of individual bulls, but it is now being investigated by Coopex Montbeliarde in France.

For these reasons, it is important that you should select Montbeliarde bulls with a calving ease rating **above 88**.

### **Mating Maiden Heifers.**

Provided you use Montbeliarde bulls that have been proven both here in Australia and in the USA to use over maiden heifers with no reported problems, then you should be OK. In Australia, SOLSTICE, RUSTY and PAPAYOU have been used over maiden heifers with no reported problems. Sexed semen is now becoming available, this gives you the opportunity to use a larger range of sires over your maiden heifers.

### **Muscle Body Condition Score;**

The Montbeliarde breed has been selected for Muscle Body Condition for over 20 years. It is important to recognise that this is a score for muscularity **NOT BODY FAT**.

**Genetic body condition** will result in a cow stripping off less weight in the early part of lactation than a cow that has **nutritional body condition**. From both a health and economic perspective, Genetic body condition is a big bonus.

**Did you know;** The average muscle body condition score is **100** for the Montbeliarde breed. The best Holstein bulls would only be **15** if rated on the same scale. The ability of the Montbeliarde breed to add Genetic Body Condition to the Holstein cow is one of the big strengths when using this breed for crossbreeding.

**Tip;** A Montbeliarde bull with a Muscle Body Condition score below 100 will still **add plenty of genetic body condition** when used in crossbreeding. It is not necessary to seek bulls with a high Muscle Body Condition score.

### **Production;**

**Tip;** Select bulls with the highest Protein kg's and % components, particularly protein%.

When crossing over Holstein cows, make sure you only use bulls with + deviations, there are bulls available with big negative % deviations. Please check and avoid these bulls.

### **Type & Body Composite scores**

Overall type of the breed is excellent. They are rounder and heavier than we are accustomed to. The rounder shape is very beneficial, as it provides more room for the internal organs, particularly the heart and lungs than cows that are narrow and angular. They also have possibly the best rump structure of any breed at present, the tail head can be level or high, yet the pins run down hill. This has the effect of opening up the pelvic area and makes for better calving ability. This is a trait that has a high heritability when used in crossbreeding.

**Body Composite scores;** Are a physical measurement, the higher the score or the further to the right the lines go on the linear graphs, the bigger the bulls daughters are compared to the breed average.

Bulls with a very high Body Composite score, particularly those with extreme stature and chest depth and width will result in extremely large animals. The majority of cross breeders are also seeking efficiency of production, these bulls may not suit what you are trying to achieve. Rule of thumb is that if a bull has a Body Composite score of 120, then his progeny will be on average 20% bigger than the breed average for size, hence if a BCS is 80, his progeny will be on average 20% smaller than the breed average.

For mating over Holstein cows, don't go higher than 107 for BSC and you should be right. For those with semi or fully TMR systems, I would still not go above 120 for use over HF cows.

If you plan to use a bull with a high Body Composite score above 120, seek good advice before you order him. There are no medals for breeding elephants!!

**Tip;** Don't be dictated by Type, you need to look at both the overall Type and Body Composite Scores. A body composite score below 100 and an Overall Type score above 100 generally means the animal produces daughters smaller than the breed average and with good Type.

**Be careful;** Some glossy sire guides start the linear graphs at 80 and run to the right, not breed average of 100. Very deceptive.

#### **Udders & Teat Placement;**

The best advice is to select for above average Udders and with front Teat Placement above 100 and with internal orientation.

#### **Temperament;**

The Montbeliarde breed is noted for its placid nature. Even so, selecting bulls at breed average or above is recommended. There are Montbeliarde bulls currently marketed in Australia and the USA with Temperament ratings as low as 79. Please make sure and ask when selecting a bull.

If you require any assistance when selecting Montbeliarde bulls, please don't hesitate to contact me.

Cheers  
Steve Snowdon

Breeding Advisor & Crossbreeding Specialist

Mob 0417 138 508 Email [snowdon4@bigpond.com](mailto:snowdon4@bigpond.com)

