



Executive Secretary
David Kendall

THOUGHTS

From The Secretary

Last week I drove home from another great All-American Dairy Show in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. Snickerdoodle reigned as Supreme Champion of both the Premier National Junior Show and the All-American Open shows. Further, this was also the fourth time in five years that a Brown Swiss was Supreme Champion of the Premier National Junior Show. However, this article is not about the show but rather about driving in Chicago.

Growing up in the greater Los Angeles area, I always had the smugness that I knew how to drive in traffic. Driving through the Chicago freeway system has been a very humbling experience for this Southern California boy. No-look, rapid lane change with blind on ramps and short approaches, in addition to interminable uneven and pothole-riddled road surfaces, with never-ending road improvements to remove said potholes, makes the Santa Ana freeway at 5 in the afternoon a comparable breeze. I also believe that Chicago drivers are driven by some unseen force from the Loop to drive faster and faster the closer they get to downtown until the entire driving experience is nothing but a blur requiring blind folds and prayers to survive.

Coming through Chicago last week was a bit of a different experience. Once again, it is the repair and construction season on the pavement. In general, this means lower posted Speed Limits combined with flaggers, big, heavy pieces of equipment and lane closures that in other areas of the USA cause people to slow down. This is, however, Chicago where additional obstacles are simply viewed as provocations to increase speed and raise blood pressure. Until I had passed onto I-294 North Sunday, the normal routine of Chicago driving was in place. Suddenly, however, traffic ground down to a non-nail biting 45 MPH, the posted limit and usually a sign of something bad up in front.

Oddly, the reality was that ahead of the pack I could see clear, open lanes with no traffic or other impediments to bring about such a sudden conversion to polite, non-confrontational driving. There appeared to be a solid line of cars four abreast that were all driving that 45 MPH. My first thought was back to college days when a group of

students decided to drive in all the lanes at the then national speed limit of 55 into the Bay area on I-80 and that perhaps it was the same thing. It was then that I noticed the car in the right lane.

While Chicago's residents normally look at traffic laws as an affront to their God-given right to self-determination, one force that residents uniformly respect is the Highway Patrol, one of who was in that right lane. For nine or ten miles, we drove in an ever-expanding pack of cars that extended far behind me (I could not see the back end of the congestion). Slowly, a few cars started to pass, nothing fast maybe 48 or 50 MPH, but enough to move beyond the Trooper who seemed content to drive along at the posted limit. I pulled into an Oasis for some fuel. Driving out, I passed the officer who had pulled over a person who was doing a fair amount of yelling with exaggerated movements of his arms. I could read his lips (well I imagined I could) that were expounding "other people passed you, why did you pull me over!" The Trooper had a great big grin on his face.

We can come up with a lot of reasons for the decisions we make in life. We can see the posted speed limit, the signs that warn to slow down in construction areas, the no left turn on red light notice and ignore them; until we get caught. No matter the rational, if we are caught our excuses, including that others get away with it so why do you/we have to pay, do not matter.

As a breed, we cannot ignore genetic realities. The genotype of an animal is the immutable speed limit, the unchangeable maximum law of what a cow can produce or that a cow or bull can transmit. In the last 20 years, we have taken great strides in the management of Brown Swiss cows. No one can deny that the modern Brown Swiss cow can milk and produce high quality, high solids milk. The problem is that we have often confused rapidly advancing understanding of ration balancing, improved cow comfort, dry cow handling, along with other parts of increased knowledge of modern management practices, for genetic improvement.

Other breeds have also benefited from the development of modern dairy management practices. We can find this phenotypic

(actual production) improvement for the three largest breeds for cows born in 1990 and cows born in 2005 on the USDA-AIPL web page. We (BSCBA) have converted the numbers to Energy Corrected Milk (ECM) to compare: (1) Brown Swiss 5,576 ECM (2) Holstein 5,567 ECM and (3) Jersey 5,079 ECM. Those are numbers to be proud of as Brown Swiss managers; you have led the industry in improving production of the Royal Brown Swiss cow over all other breeds. However, this phenotypic expression has two components, management and genetics. How have we fared in the second part of the equation?

Again using the tables for Phenotype and Genetics Trends from USDA-AIPL, and with BSCBA conversion to ECM the following levels of genetic improvement for the three breeds has been derived (these are the rate numbers for the cow population): (1) Holstein 2,647 ECM; (2) Jersey 2,531 ECM; (3) Brown Swiss 2,215 ECM. What these numbers illustrate is that the improvement of management of Brown Swiss is even more significant than the phenotypic production increase shows. On the other hand, what the genetic ECM highlights is that our rate of genetic improvement is lagging behind the other breeds.

There is still much room for improvement of daily management for all breeds, including Brown Swiss. We, along with the other breeds, will continue to see breed averages rise simply from these changes. Further, it is not impossible that we will continue to lead the other breeds in actual pounds of increase for ECM in the foreseeable future. Personally, I am willing to venture that we have not reached the genetic limit for production of Brown Swiss cows. However, there is a danger lurking here, the danger of confusing improved management with ultimate genetic potential. At the moment we are falling behind in the race to increase our genetic speed limit; and the smiling Troopers of genetic law enforcement are driving along slowly just waiting for us to try and pass them. The great news is we can change this. Till next time with the Brown Cow with the low somatic cell...Dave