

Sweden Holstein National Herd Competition 2023

Canadian Stickhandles Swedish Competition



Sisters Amanda and Jeanette Sjöland of JB Holstein were thrilled to win the Top Group overall. L-R: JB Atwood Bubbles EX91 2E 4th calf; JB Braxton Gerd EX92 3E 5th calf; JB Lauthority Roxette EX92 2E 6th calf.

SIRES OF GORD'S OTHER TOP 5 GROUPS:

2. EH Holstein, Kylie – Silver, Crushabull, Doorman
3. Per Larsson, Öxnamossa – Doc, two Crushabull
4. Martin Gramh, Skredsviks Prästgård – MVP, Five Star, Alligator
5. Matilda Sonesson, Gunnaröds Gård – full twin sisters by Diamondback, Exotic



Steepled in remarkable history, there are some 92 historic churches on Gotland Island, built over 200 years beginning in the 11th century! Extraordinary!



EH Holstein was awarded second place Top Group, which included Gord's Top third calver on the right, sired by Doorman



One has to stop and smell the roses – or take in the incredible views from this ancient castle site overlooking fields and the ocean beyond.

Tars Cheema

There was no hockey involved when Canada met Sweden for an 11-day competition in late November 2023. This was in fact Sweden's National Herd Competition – the annual on-farm cow judging program conducted by the Holstein Association of Sweden. Previously, judges from UK, NZ and US have judged the competition, and for the first time, the extensive (and intensive) program was judged by a Canadian – Gord Vande Burgt.

Sweden's dairy cow population is just under 300,000, averaging just over 100 cows per herd on a land mass about 5% the size of Canada. Holsteins make up just over half at 56%, Swedish Reds come in at 30%, Jerseys about 1%. Swedish Hornless Mountain cattle, crossbreds and other breeds make up the balance of the country's dairy cattle.

Gord's Farm Team Background

While Gord grew up a dairy boy in Dewdney, BC (Vandeburg Farm), his career followed many paths to distant locations that connected to farming in one way or another, including banking to DeLaval sales. He currently does Marketing and Sales for Klop Equipment in BC, but in his somewhat distant past, he was a 'cow guy.' Following his degree at Dordt University, he went to work for Trans Ova Genetics in Iowa for four years developing the dairy side of their business. From 1994 to 2002, Gord operated his own 'Genetic Connections' business, exporting dairy livestock genetics globally, including to Sweden. "Twice a year I was invited to Sweden by breeding centres or maybe an ET vet, and I'd put on meetings and market Canadian ET genetics," Gord explained his early connection with the Swedes. While not an 'official' judge, Gord knew cows, pedigrees and had an eye for the good ones. He had clearly left a good impression back in Sweden, and they contacted him in late 2022 to gauge his interest in judging this national high-

profile event. "I was a bit hesitant at first – I have been away from the genetics side of dairy for a while." When he finally made the commitment, June Petrali of Oroby Farms (their neighbour and his 4-H mentor) was the first one he told of the honour! "June contributed to my passion for genetics and judging through 4-H; I showed Oroby heifers too," he reminisces.

And the Puck Drops

"I arrived in Malmo, Sweden, on a train from Copenhagen airport crossing a bridge spanning water separating both countries. There was an orientation of the daily trip agenda that first night by Gill Zeilon, Sweden Holstein Association, over dinner," Gord starts. There would be 45 herds to visit, with 43 of them presenting washed/clipped groups of three lactating cows to judge. Categories included Lactations 1 to 8, Overall Type, Udders, Feet and Legs, Presentation, Rookie Herd and more. "I took a lot of pictures and made a lot of notes to help me with this project," Gord recounts.

"It is considered a real privilege for farms to participate in this competition, and establishing a professional, positive rapport with everyone was important. I was not allowed to ask about the sires or classification scores, but I enjoyed getting to know the farmers and it was natural to take an interest in their dairy operations," Gord shares. On the first day, Ramshill Farm, milking 1000 cows in a 2x20 BouMatic parallel parlour, was just a soft 'introduction' farm visit before the actual judging would commence.

Intermission Observations

He saw a wide range of farmer ages and farm types over his two weeks. A bit surprising was seeing recent Dutch immigrant farmers, like Gunshill, a 24-year old who had taken over from an older farming couple, with their financial assistance. Boniteko was another Dutch family who had established 180 milking

cows with three Lely robots. "There's a strong trend towards robots, but there are still cows milked in tie-stalls – 30-50 cows, but large herds (300+ cows) are milked in parlours." Gutenid is one exception – they milk 360 cows with eight Lely robots.

"Stame Holsteins were milking 320 cows in a DeLaval parlour. They had lots of imported North American genetics." Olasgard is Sweden's highest organic production herd, milking 150 cows in a GEA parlour. The very nice 120-cow Norrabyn herd had imported ETs from Canada.

Highlights Reel

On day five, **Gord went to prison** – a men's prison farm milking 60 cows in a tiestall. The female warden, dressed in black, led Gord to the cows, while a few armed guards stood watching. They are constructing a new freestall barn and milking parlour. "I was so impressed by Nastgarden – 760 cows in a DeLaval parallel parlour, 14,600 kg average. It was an outstanding large dairy with one of nicest new freestall barns ever seen globally," Gord expresses.

At one farm he encountered a Roxie descending seven generations from an ET Gord sold many years ago!

It took a three-hour ferry ride at the end of day seven to reach Gotland Island – a place of great history and of great cows. Two days of judging here yielded the Top Udder overall for a young couple just getting started. One evening, Gord enjoyed a lovely dinner in historic Visby town with the local dairy farmers and their spouses.

From Stockholm on day ten, he flew to a northern region reminiscent of the Yukon, Gord says! Minus 25C, cold and snowing, they were delayed on the drive by a moose-roadkill!

Back to Stockholm, Gord's final visit was at Riala, a 55-cow Lely robot herd that

sells milk through an automated bottle-filling machine at their on-farm store. Due to their close proximity to Stockholm, they can't keep up with demand for their fresh milk.

"My fifth Top Herd featured a pair of full sisters – one B&W and one R&W. The young lady was so humble – she had just returned from Italy where she had won a fitting competition!"

Post Game Wrap-Up

With multiple groups, multiple categories and multiple herds, it took Gord some time to analyze all his notes to narrow down the Top awards with great care. "I selected the Top five groups from the entire competition and ranked them 1 to 5, in addition to selecting the top first to 8th calvers from all dairy cattle seen."

Other award categories include:

- Top Type Herd
- Top Feet & Legs Herd
- Top Udder Herd
- Top Production Herd
- Top Presentation Herd
- Top Rookie

All awards will be presented at the annual mid winter meeting in February 2024 by the Swedish Holstein Association.

"It was really encouraging to witness so many enthusiastic young people! I shared with the Association that I saw a vast improvement in udder attachments from 20-25 years ago and they appreciated the observation. I saw a lot of outstanding modern dairies with great genetics. I enjoyed wonderful hospitality, traveling 5200 km through most of the dairy farming regions (500 +/- km daily), over an incredible two weeks," Gord beamed.

There's no question this will be a career highlight for Gord Vande Burgt!