

It is possible to have it all

Ray Kitchen

Region: Western Australia

Topic: Balanced Performance Index, conformation

Breeding for profitability does not mean sacrificing conformation. That's the message from Western Australian dairy farmer Ray Kitchen.

The two-time Master Breeder has again demonstrated it is possible to "have it all" in terms of breeding high genomic values with superior type. His 3-year-old Holstein, Carenda Jeronimo Vista, was judged first in her class during the WA State On Farm Challenge (OFC) in November, and ranked No. 6 position on the Australian Balanced Performance Index (BPI) in DataGene's December 2022 ABV release.

Ray, with his wife Donna and son Doug, milk 430 registered Holsteins on 480 hectares at Boyanup, south-east of Bunbury on Western Australia's south coast.

Australia's No. 6 Holstein cow for BPI and OFC winner, Carenda Jeronimo Vista VG87



The Carenda herd has held a position among the top index herds in Australia for more than three decades, currently ranked No.4 on the national rankings with a herd average BPI+292.

After the December 2022 ABV release, the No. 1 and No. 6 genomic BPI females both stem from the Carenda herd. The release also saw impressive performances for popular AI sires Carenda Pemberton, Carenda Sondalo, and the 2022 genomic best seller at Genetics Australia, Carenda Varley.

The popularity of the Carenda sires comes from their ability to combine favourable type and high levels of production with farmer pleasing workabilities. Their popularity has also been bolstered by the success of their family members at shows and the OFC, headlined by cows like Vista and the WA OFC Champion, Carenda Mainevent Vanda.

If you ask Ray what his 'ideal' cow looks like, he immediately responds – Vanda.



“Vanda is the stand-out cow of her generation,” Ray said. “She does well in all aspects of breeding – from conformation and production to reproduction.”

Ray said his breeding goals closely aligned to what the general farmer wanted.

“I’m after a moderate-statured cow with a reasonable amount of strength,” he said. “Cows that aren’t too extreme, but with good udder quality, good rump structure and good feet and legs.”

He attributed his success to an established base of strong maternal bloodlines, complimented by the highly-ranked sires he uses strategically to introduce specific traits.

“I look for bulls at the top of the BPI list that I have confidence in,” Ray said. “Bulls that have the right combination of conformation, production, and health and wellbeing traits.”

Ray believes good conformation is just one part of breeding healthy and efficient cows, and said successful breeding was not just a matter of studying numbers, but also finding the right combination of desirable traits.

“Effective breeding is about making genetic gains for health and longevity, while maintaining the qualities that make the Holstein breed unique,” he said.

“Having good conformation allows you to put the other traits into place to create animals that are sustainable in the future.”

While his ultimate goal is improving efficiency and profitability, Ray admitted competitions such as the OFC were an enjoyable social event, and a way of comparing his breeding program against others in the region.

“It’s nice to receive recognition for breeding a nice type of cow, and having cows that others can appreciate,” he said.

For Ray, Vista is a great example of a correctly structured and profitable cow, praising her for her correct type and appealing style.

“Vista is a pretty special young cow with amazing production potential,” he said, highlighting Vista’s first lactation record had averaged 3.7% protein and 5.3% fat, and a calving interval of just 11 months.

Early genomic testing allowed Ray to identify Vista’s potential at a young age, with her superior conformation reflected in her genomic breeding values – most notably her +107 for overall type and +105 for rump composite.

Capitalising on her superior numbers, Ray flushed Vista as a yearling to the leading homozygous polled sire Vogue CFP. The combination introduced new traits to the pedigree including the polled gene and the highly favoured A2 protein.

The resulting bull calf, Carenda OMG is ranked third for homozygous polled sires available in Australia on BPI. Now standing at Genetics Australia, OMG will continue to disperse the Carenda influence in herds across Australia.

When asked about the secret to his success, Ray humbly said he didn’t know, and was simply grateful for the opportunity to work with his beloved ‘V’ family. The famous bloodline has been with the Kitchens since the mid 1960s, with the matriarch Carenda Ella Vanish and her daughter Carenda Harrier Vogue, taking huge leaps forward in their genetic progress and thrusting the bloodline into the spotlight as a consistent source of superior genetics.

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