

Kingston hog breeder leads in achievements

Experience at the all-Canada swine show at Brandon, Manitoba, in 1957 where he took a reserve grand championship and was the third highest point winner was perhaps the highlight in the career of Sterling Willis, Kingston, but this successful breeder of purebred Yorkshire swine has had many interesting experiences, and has many achievements to his credit.

Right now he's the first Island man who has ever become the president of the Canadian Swine Breeders Association. He has been a director on the national association since 1957.

With the Brandon exhibit from this province, in addition to Mr. Willis, were Harrison Green, Kingston and Russell Buell, Abney.



STERLING WILLIS

Hogs shown from the herd of Almon Boswall, Dunstaffnage, also placed well up, both men had only one animal that was not in the money, and they sold practically every hog they took west. Stirling showed 13 pigs. Competition at Brandon was tremendously strong with 70 to 80 animals in mostly every class.

The Brandon show was an all-breed affair though they were Yorkshires, Tamworths and Landrace for the most part. The reserve grand champion for Mr. Willis was daughter of a pig he had purchased from Preston Hooker, Ormstown, Quebec, who was killed in a highway accident about a year ago.

There are three in the Willis family. Mrs. Willis is the former Florence Beer from the Bannockburn Road. Their daughter Lillian is a student at Prince of Wales College.

It's about 20 years since Mr. Willis started to show pigs on his own, but he had gained a great deal of valuable experience prior to that, showing with his brother Charlie Willis who lives now in O'Leary. The fall show circuit lasted about six weeks in those days before the Second World War.

The Kingston man purchased two boars in Ontario seven years ago which were not related to each other. Litter-mate gilts of the two went grand champion and reserve at the Royal Winter Fair in 1961. One boar — he bought him from Dr. Jim Pickney, Cookville, Ontario — was first in his class at the Royal. The other animal didn't place. The first animal proved successful in the Willis herd but the other one didn't.

It was the first boar Mr. Willis crossed with an imported Scotch sow with rather spectacular results in "days to maturity," and feed conversion in the ROP testing. The test litter matured in 142 days, and this compares to the average of 170 days. The feed conversion was 297 and this compares with the average in this province of 344. (This means that it took 297 pounds of feed to register 100 pounds of gain live weight).

The provincial average on days to maturity is 170. The average feed conversion is 344. So the litter from the Scotch sow represented rather sensational improvements in both of these categories.

SCOTCH CAN HELP

Mr. Willis would like to get some of the Scotch breeding in to his hogs, perhaps one-quarter. "Ontario men tell me," he said, "they like a hog with 25 percent Island breeding, 25 percent Large English White and 50 percent Ontario breeding." He thinks 25 percent of the Scotch breeding might help, particularly if the feed conversion and days to maturity figures he got are indicative of what could be expected from that type of hog.

The Scotch sow is a "Large English White" which corresponds in the United Kingdom to the Canadian Yorkshire.

And this brings up a controversial subject which relates to slaughter test scores in advanced registry (ROP).

When a breeder wants to test a litter, to put a slaughter test score in his sow, the standard practice is to take two gilts and two barrows for the test. But four extra points are allowed if an additional barrow is put in for test, instead of gilts. It means that eight extra points are allowed if all four test pigs are barrows.

That makes a possible score of 108, instead of 100 which is available if the two gilts and two barrows are put in. Many breeders, including Mr. Willis, are unhappy about these "free" points as they term them, and would like to see them eliminated. Several scores of 107 have been recorded which is nonsense. The standard of perfection traditionally is 100.

There have been several scores turned in of 107, which is completely ridiculous, the critics believe. A national swine conference was called for Ottawa on April 29 and 30. Mr. Willis was attending, and he hoped something might be done about this, among other things.

There have been several sows in Canada qualify with a perfect score of 100 with the two gilts and two barrows litter. One of them was in Saskatchewan, another in Alberta and there have been either one or two in Ontario. Mr. Willis believes. Practically every month now, Mr. Willis said, a score of 100, but this is with the margin of the "free" points.

About 20 years ago a slaughter test score of 90 was a rarity and this province led all the rest by a wide margin in scores of that magnitude. The margin was so great that 45 to 50 years ago this province stood almost

by itself in the matter of scoring 90s.

To the uninitiated the slaughter test scores in advanced registry are based on the points which the test litter carcasses score on a rigid bacon hog standard. With the actual slaughter test, though, no two other figures which discerning hogmen watch carefully. They indicate the number of days it took the test litter animals to reach maturity, and the feed conversion, how many pounds of feed were required to register a pound gain in body weight.

Highest score record on this Island has been 99 John Colwell, New Haven, for example, had a Yorkshire score 99 points, and W.A. Moase and Son, Kensington, have had Landrace sows score 99.

OWN ASSOCIATION

Incidentally the Landrace and Lacombe hog breeders have their own national association. All of the others are with the Yorkshires in the Canadian Swine Breeders Association, which Mr. Willis heads.

The Prince Edward Island swine breeders association put up a challenge trophy, The Harold W. Clay Memorial Trophy, which goes, annually to the breeder with the highest scoring sow in advance registry. In the scoring for this trophy the points for additional barrows are not allowed. The test litter score is based on the standard of the two gilts and two barrows.

The feed conversion also is considered in the scoring for the Clay trophy award. The standard feed conversion is taken as 315 pounds. One point is subtracted from the score for every additional 10 pounds of feed required. One point is added for every five pounds less feed consumed.

Woodstock Duke 14A is remembered as the sire of so many test litter that hit slaughter test scores of 90 for their dams that he became nationally famous. The boar that was bred by Almon Boswall was sold for \$600 to a Western province, and that was a record price at the time.

That was about the time Stirling Willis was starting in hogs and he had purchased from Heber MacPhail, New Haven, he lives now in Cornwall, a sow Mr. MacPhail had purchased from Mr. Boswall.

Mr. Boswall was later looking for some young gilts and the late Harold Clay saw four in the Willis litter that looked really good. Stirling was keeping one of them for himself and agreed to sell the other three. All four sows were bred to "14A" and all of them farrowed litters that qualified them with slaughter test scores of 90 and more. That

of 82 from him. Other breeders used him but the scores were not available at the time this was written. The animal was sent to the packers.

There's a most interesting story linked with the Scotch sow Mr. Willis still has in his barn. Look for the Farm Column next week for the interesting details. A part of the story is completely unique.

The Scotch boar was an unusually long animal — length is sought in bacon hogs — but his pigs for the most part were short, thick and junky Mr. Willis said.

Most people regard pigs as stupid and stubborn animals, hard to handle and almost completely devoid of understanding. Mr. Willis doesn't agree.

"I think a pig is one of the easiest animals to train," he said. "Once you have trained a young gilt for a show ring, for example, you find she is easy to handle later when her time comes to farrow a litter."

There are many bits of evidence to back Mr. Willis's thinking. A bunch of pigs, for instance, always choose one end of their pen in which to make their manure and urine. The rest is kept clean for their eating and living quarters.

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TRAVELS BOAR

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It was an experiment to test the effectiveness of such a cross with Island Yorkshire — The "Large English White" as they are known in Britain are the same as the Yorkshires of Canada.

ADVERSE REACTION

As is fairly generally known a long period of breeding exclusively from Island stock reacted adversely when undesirable characteristics started showing up in some Island herds. Some Island breeders — like Mr. Willis and Almon Boswall, Dunstaffnage, for example — brought in breeding stock from outside the province, and kept their herds strong as a result.

But Stirling emphasized to me he never brought in boars that were a complete outcross. There was always some of the Kingston breeding in their pedigrees.

The Scotch boar, as he is generally referred to, did not sire good litters here. One young breeder with excellent reputation for producing high scoring stock used the Scotch boar on a sow and the slaughter test dropped from a most creditable 87 to a disastrously low 57. Mr. Willis fared better and he had one test litter of 86 and another

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The man backs his truck up to the barn the boar jumps into it himself and when the servicing job is completed, the boar jumps back into the truck for the trip back to the home farm.

And here's an interesting theory. Athol Roberts, Southport told Stirling "you can't learn about animals out of a book. You either have the ability or you haven't. It's inside of you."

And here's an even more interesting idea from Mr. Roberts: "If man knows one class of livestock well, he can pick out good animals in other types of livestock too." Mr. Willis agrees with that idea. "I've noticed good horsemen come into my hog barn, for example, and pick out some of my best pigs," the Kingston man reports.

The breeding of registered Yorkshires was a good paying business in this province when sales were being made regularly to outside points. But there is no money in it now, Mr. Willis reports. "I haven't made any money in it for the last two or three years," he said.

They get really big prices in the Old Country, he said. Prices of from \$600 to \$1,000 each for good breeding stock is common, he reported. And that would be attractive — Boars run to more than \$1,000.

The Kingston man does make sales of breeding stock outside the province. He sells some in the province too. But it's not like it used to be, he emphasizes.

With all of his stock pure bred from dams and sires resulting from the most careful culling and selection over the years, it would be natural to expect the Kingston man would have some excellent boar hogs for market. He does feed many for the commercial market.

The range "A" for top carcasses is in the 80's, he said. But it would be considerably higher if he could control the animal's feed intake.

For example he fed and marked 21 barrows last fall in one lot, and he had 20 "A" carcasses out of the 21. "But you can't do

that on hopper feeding" he observed.

In hopper feeding the animals eat as much as they want. With a controlled feeding the hogman can give the animals as much or as little as he thinks they need.

When he was slop feeding, for example, he could and did control the feed intake and get higher "A" percentages. He got 96 percent of "A" carcasses in 1958, for example, when he marketed 150 pigs.

But you can't slop feed when you have as many pigs as he has. There's something like 250 animals in the pig barn present. He's not exactly sure. The number keeps fluctuating as pigs are sold and other litters are born.

Swine breeders in this province urged classification be adopted when they discussed the problem at their annual meeting a few months ago. The idea is discussed in detail elsewhere in this edition.

Island swine breeders showed many hogs in the market classes at the Royal Winter Fair 10 to 15 years ago. At that time the animals favored in the breeding classes were unlike the Island Yorkshire. For the most part the short-nosed type of hog went to the top of the class.

But Island swinemens have done a great deal for the Royal's swine show, for the breeders in Ontario and other provinces, Mr. Willis suggests.

After seeing Island hogs and seeing them consistently top market classes — on the rail — the others started breeding similar traits into their animals. It's a really good show at the Royal today, the Kingston man observed with conviction.

There used to be about three Royal. The judge who was doing the placing would put at the top the type he liked best. Types of hogs showing at the now there is one type, and it's good, he added.

A proof of the shift in emphasis away from the short-nosed animal is what happened to a Willis boar at the Royal last



CONSTANT FEMALE CHAMPION

Heather Matheson, Hunter River is holding Miriam's Lass, the Hereford cow that was the senior and grand champion Hereford female here for the last several years. Lass is now in the shed acre Hereford farm establishment owned by Island Development Company.

year. He's of Ontario breeding and has a short, rather chunky nose. The boar placed eighth in his class. 10 to 15 years ago he would have won the class. Stirling observed, for the animal's conformation is otherwise really good.

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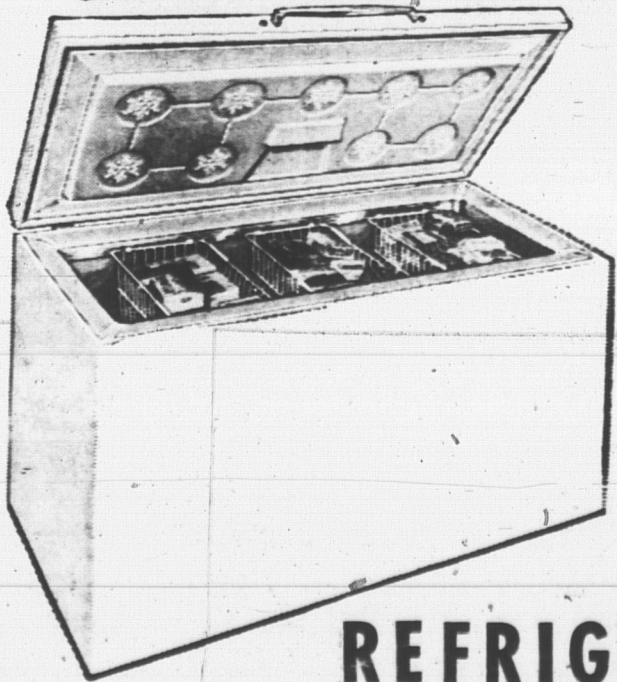
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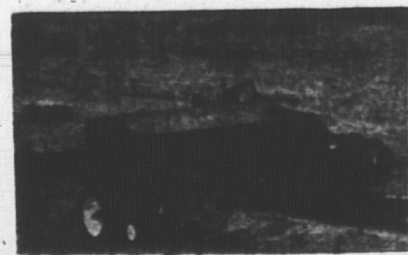
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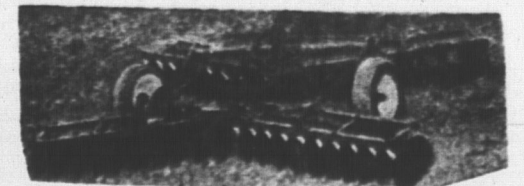
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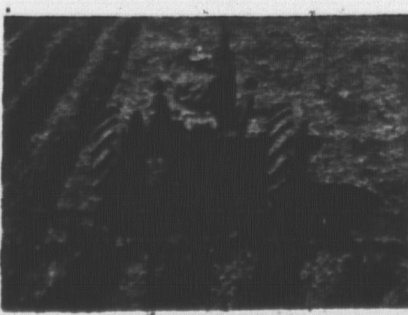
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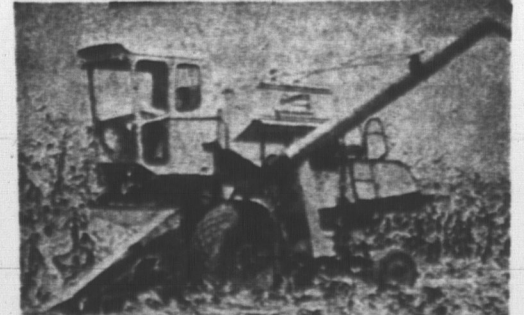
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