

# **PEDIGREE MATCHING GLOBETROTTER**

## **PRESENTS**

### **THE 2018 YEARLING RATINGS**

Yearlings by the top sires in North America are rated for pedigree and performance potential including all yearlings at all major sale venues.

The tables in this report identify all yearlings for sale and rank them according to a Performance Rating (PR) based on the earnings and speed in their immediate family. An estimate is also given for three year old record on a mile track as part of the rating. The PR number is used to prioritize the inspection process for yearlings that can be expected to be top performers based on pedigree. It is very possible that a yearling with a rating in the 60-80s can turn out better than any of the top rated yearlings as a result of conformation and other factors such as something special in the pedigree that cannot be quantified. A PR of 60 for pacers and 45 for trotters is usually the minimum required to produce a performer capable of earning \$100K lifetime. The maximum possible is 150.

Many of the top rated yearlings are full or half brothers to top performers and as such will command premium prices. Full siblings to great horses have a one in seven chance of being as good or better. The risk / reward ratio is very high considering the price you have to pay unless the conformation is outstanding.

In sales such as Harrisburg and Lexington the yearlings are seeded by the sales companies both on pedigree and conformation. The ratings provided here are based strictly on pedigree and should be adjusted based on conformation accordingly. A suggested conformation rating of + or – 50 points should be applied.

Deweycheatumnhowe was rated as 78 - 51.3 when sold as a yearling, the 37<sup>th</sup> pick in Kentucky. A +40 on conformation would have put him among the top 10. Similarly Somebeachsomewhere rated 83 - 49.2 (56<sup>th</sup>) but his conformation put him amongst the best pacers in the same sale.

The top earning trotter to date from the sales in 2017 is Dont Letem rated at 85 - 1.53.0 and selling for \$85,000 in Lexington sale, the top pacer to date is Bronx Seelster with a rating of 99 – 1.51.1 sold for \$22,000 in the Forest City sale. This demonstrates the need for close inspection since these two must have been exceptional physical individuals to make up for their relatively modest ratings. Indeed many of the yearlings from last year with ratings over 100 have so far not shown up to race - you can find out why in the following excerpts from my book Queen Among Queens.

## INTRODUCTION

The horse racing world is full of pedigree theories, beliefs, old wives tales and opinions when it comes to making the most important decisions that breeders or buyers must make – What to breed and what to buy with respect to pedigree. The success or failure of an investment in a race-horse hinges on these crucial decisions and a wrong decision can be at the least very expensive.

One fact that the reader should be aware of is that the pedigree of the horse, once chosen and delivered in the form of a foal, cannot be changed. The breeder can change the environment within which the foal is raised using best practices, the buyer can retain the best trainer available and protect his investment in other ways. The end result, however, if the pedigree is incorrect, is that best practices in breeding and ownership cannot reverse a bad stallion choice, making that decision the most important one a breeder can make, and the buyer recognize.

A breeder has limited opportunity to make correct stallion decisions for each mare since after several failed matings the damage to the mare and to the breeders reputation is essentially done and the future success of both is compromised. Success is the result of all of the confident decisions you make. Confidence comes from knowing the facts and being able to sort out fact from fiction.

Another fact that is indisputable is that less than 5% of the foals produced in North America will pay for themselves over their lifetime based on the ability to earn \$100,000 or more. Such a return on investment is clearly inadequate to sustain the interest in both breeding and buying standardbreds. It is little wonder that we see that the number of industry participants is shrinking.

Like any other serious investment your chances of success are greatly improved when you understand the fundamentals of the business and make use of all the tools and information at your disposal to improve your percentages.

If, as someone once said, the pedigree is only 18% of what makes a great horse is true, then also consider the fact that it is the first 18% and if it is incorrect the other 82% is a waste of everyone's time, effort and money. The most important percentage in the purchase or breeding of a top performer is the first 18%, the correct pedigree.

In the words of John Wallace, compiler of the first Standardbred Register “ *It is in no spirit of banter or bravado that I invite criticism in a gentlemanly and courteous way. I am just as liable to be wrong as other men, and when wrong it is for my own good as well as for the public, that I should be set right.*”

I welcome your comments and suggestions and wish you well in your future purchases.

Norman Hall  
Pedigree Matching

## BUYING A YEARLING

There are many horses that have high speed but make little or no money. Similarly there are many horses that judging by their parents should be world champions but are complete failures on the track and in the breeding shed. An examination of the pedigree will allow you to avoid such horses and focus on the ones with true earnings potential. Pedigrees can be presented in several ways and indeed can also be interpreted in different ways. Most people who attend harness racing are probably familiar with wagering on the races and the variety of ways there are to handicap the horses and try to pick the winners. Evaluating pedigrees is much the same process. Numbers, statistics and patterns are what you look at and the relative importance you put on these in combination is a very individual thing.

The pedigree page in a typical sales catalog is much like the page in a race program only the time lines are extended back several generations. Instead of racelines you are looking at bloodlines with performance numbers attached which show the speed and earnings of individuals in the family. At the top of the catalog page is the pedigree tree that typically lists the first three generations of the ancestors. Quite often, however, it is important to dig deeper into the family tree to look for pedigree patterns that may exist but for now let us look at what we can see on the page.

This is a basic representation of a sale catalog pedigree. Catalogs vary in form and content and additional information usually provided includes the order of sale or hip number, consignor, sex, birth date, an owners statement and stakes engagements if any. While all of this additional information is needed in making a final purchase decision we must first concentrate on the most important facts presented, how fast and how much money. Due to space limitations it is not always possible to show every individual in the immediate family, in fact most catalog pages are of interest as much for what you don't see as for what is printed on the page. Not all sales companies provide data on the number of previous foals especially the ones that did not race.

Sales pages feature what is called "**BLACK TYPE**" where the horses that have gone fast, made money or won a stake race are shown in bold capital letters. There is a difference, though, between one black typed individual and another. To be eligible for such prominence a horse has to have a record of 2:00 or better, have made \$100,000 or more lifetime, or has won a minor stake race anywhere in North America. These are modest standards indeed in today's market and badly in need of revision. Clearly it is very easy to be blinded by the black type at first glance. A closer look can reveal the true value of the horse in question. One way to do this is to assign a value to the pedigree based on a rating scale that takes into consideration the speed and earnings in the family just as some trainers use a similar point scale to rate the individual on conformation.

Before going through such calculations, however, which could take some considerable time for a catalog with several hundred horses, let us look to see if there are other ways in which we can confidently screen the list down to a more manageable number.

We will deal with what is perhaps the most important screening tool, the correct pedigree, later but there are other factors that are commonly used to reduce the number of horses to be physically inspected? Here are some of the most common.

1. Previous production of the dam
2. Racing or breeding jurisdiction
3. Consignor reputation
4. Birth month
5. Colour
6. Patterns of success
7. The Golden Cross
8. The flavour of the day

There are likely other such factors but do any of them have any merit ?

### **Previous Production of the Dam**

In the example pedigree the horse for sale is a first foal. This is a situation that has stirred much debate. If you do a statistical analysis of first foals you will find a surprisingly large percentage turn out to be the best of the mare's lifetime production. You can verify this by taking any random number of pages of the USTA Sires and Dams book and doing the math. There is indeed a bias in favour of first foals but it is largely influenced by first foal colts – not fillies.

First foals tend to be smaller than average and fillies smaller still, was one veterinarians explanation for this bias against first foal fillies. Factors that seemed to exclude fillies from the risk inherent in their birthright are early foaling dates and mothers that themselves showed early speed. All of this, however, is strictly conjecture based on random impression and, in the absence of a study that shows the facts, is not the sort of thing on which to shorten the list early. If at the end of your analysis of all factors you have to choose between a first foal filly and one that is from a dam that has already produced something then it may become important to the final decision.

In the case of a mare that has already produced there are a number of things to watch for. First of all are all of the previous foals identified in some way? If they are not on the page you can get this information from other industry sources. It is important to know since there is another bias at work in the breeding industry and that is foal order based on how many foals the mare has already produced. Just as there appears to be a success bias towards early foals in birth order there also appears to be a failure bias towards later foals. Again you can test this out by looking at the production of mares with long breeding records and you will see that after the sixth foal there is a definite drop in success rate in producing significant performers.

Before you start putting lines through the catalog pages of late birth order foals, however, you should be aware that Gallo Blue Chip, the winningest pacer of all time was a 10th

foal and there are others such as Grinfromeartoe who was an 11th foal or even Muscles Yankee who was a 7th foal and might have been eliminated on a six foal rule.

As a rule of thumb, rather than a rule based on fact, however, the use of birth order as a screening tool can dramatically reduce the number of horses that you end up looking at. You should look at the exceptions to see why they might have beaten the apparent bias they face. Sometimes it is a case of the mare finally getting bred to the right stallion, or the mare shows a high percentage of successful previous foals. Foal order decisions without caveats are fine provided you are prepared to miss out on the odd great horse.

### **Racing or breeding jurisdiction**

Whether buying yearlings or broodmares there is clearly a need to have an objective in mind with respect to where you want to race or breed. It is important for long term success to have a strategy that allows you to be competitive within your means. There are opportunities in every sale that allow you to do this.

In the larger yearling sales you will find horses from several jurisdictions and it is a relatively simple process to eliminate those that don't fit your racing objectives. The same can be said for the sex and gait of the yearling since there are selective shoppers who are only interested in trotting fillies or pacing colts.

Buying yearlings to compete at the highest level usually means paying premium prices if you rely strictly on the face value of the pedigree page. There are, however, individuals in every sale that fit your objectives and your pocket book that you may miss out on by being too selective on what may be considered non critical factors.

### **Consignor reputation**

This is another subjective screening tool that can see you missing out on good opportunities. It is clearly an important consideration since consignors are very conscious of their successes and not shy in making them known. The issue, however, goes beyond just having some successful previous consignments. Many of the yearlings are consigned through agents and you never get to know much about the actual breeder or the farm where the yearling was raised. The larger farms can be assumed to be operating with best practices but how about the smaller breeders? To the extent it is possible it is a worthwhile exercise to find out the facts ahead of the sale either through a farm visit or a conversation with someone who has been there.

### **Birth month**

This is another of those controversial issues that pops up in the trade magazines when someone does a random survey and finds another bias that may or may not be significant. Because of the racing environment in North America, with its emphasis on big purse, early stakes for two year olds, there is a general concern regarding foaling date. It is based on possible maturity issues for foals born late in the season from mid May on.

There are many ways to look at the results of various studies that have been done and there are so many factors involved other than the date of birth that no clear rule is possible to identify with confidence. One thing is sure, however, and that is such situations can present bargain opportunities when the right horse comes along with the “wrong” birth date.

## **Colour**

Like foaling date, the colour of the yearling is the stuff of “old wives tales” when it comes to making a purchase. You either like a certain colour or you don’t but there is no significant bias that I am aware of other than the old saw about chestnuts and white feet, that is worthy of comment or consideration. Since both chestnuts and white feet are rapidly being bred out of the gene pool there is little to fear from a color bias and certainly little use for it as a screening tool.

## **Patterns Of Success**

A Pattern of Success can be as simple as the position in the pedigree tree of certain ancestors or as complicated as counting up the number of times the pedigree traces back to some obscure ancestor that you consider important. You will hear horsemen talk about Speedy Crown being 3x4 in a pedigree or Adios 4x5 with the numbers referring to the generation where the individual occurs in a generational pedigree chart. Such patterns often have significance but are by no means failsafe or consistent from sire to sire.

In fact when you get familiar with pedigrees you will find that, just as in handicapping the races, the patterns of success inevitably have exceptions. It is important to remember, however, that success in owning Standardbreds, like all other sports, is a game of percentages and those who play the percentages in their favour will be the ones to succeed.

To play the percentages you have to know them. One key measuring stick to use in assessing pedigrees is the percentage of performers by a sire that earn \$100,000 or more. Typically a successful sire will average 15% or better. Within that statistic, however, are certain matings with a much higher chance of success resulting in what the industry calls a “golden cross”. Close analysis of this golden cross information shows, however, that such statistics can be misleading as we shall see.

A yearling is clearly much more than just a combination of a sire and a broodmare sire and indeed every sire has a profile, or pattern, in relation to the mares with which he has most success.

## **The Golden Cross**

It is a favorite saying of many knowledgeable breeders that “*the best sires of yesterday are the best broodmare sires of today*”. This makes eminently good sense since it is a natural extension of a similar vein in the phrase “*the best race horses make the best*

*sires*". There are, of course, rare exceptions but again the percentages of breeding favor those who follow these mantras in general but there is a caveat.

The broodmare sire, alone, does not make the mare any more than the sire, alone, can make a top performer. Nor is it wise to assume that the sire needs only a top broodmare sire to work with, as the followers of the "golden cross" would have us believe.

Occasionally you will see top performers by a sire that are so much better than any others by the same sire or that have the same sire – broodmare sire combination. Such is very definitely the case for Gallo Blue Chip.

Gallo Blue Chip earned almost \$4.3 million and is the richest performer from an Albatross mare and this makes Magical Mike, when crossed with Albatross mares, the sire with the highest average earnings per performer at \$90,000 on the USTA golden cross list.

There are, however, 82 horses of racing age, other than Gallo Blue Chip, with the Magical Mike – Albatross cross that collectively have made an average of \$40,000. Indeed of the ones on the list as of this writing only eleven have made over \$100,000 for a percentage of 13.2% versus the average for all sires with Albatross mares of 18.9%. Clearly Gallo Blue Chip was a unique individual but what is it in his pedigree that makes him so?

The key lies in the combination of sire lines that make up the full pedigree of Camatross, the dam of Gallo Blue Chip. The sire profile of Magical Mike shows that the presence of Albatross is indeed a common feature in his top performers but there are other sire lines that combine with Albatross to complete the pattern of success for Magical Mike.

Gallo Blue Chip has a second dam by Bye Bye Byrd and, apart from his five full brothers and sisters, is the only one of the 84 by Magical Mike from Albatross mares that is bred that way. There are three others that have second dams by sons of Bye Bye Byrd but they did nothing special. Gallo Blue Chip had a unique pedigree that fitted into the general profile of success of his sire but at the same time his dam was one of a kind among the Albatross mares bred to Magical Mike.

By now we are getting a sense of how important the broodmare as a total package is and how the sire is only part, although an important part, of any one mare. The Standardbred of today is truly a "*sum*" of its parts and not just "*some*" of its parts. A yearling or broodmare is much more than just a combination of a sire and a broodmare sire and indeed, as has already been noted, and cannot be over emphasized, every sire has a profile in relation to the mares with which he has most success.

### **Flavour Of The Day**

Who is the hot sire this year? It is amazing how fickle yearling buyers are in their pursuit of a champion and indeed how naïve they are in thinking that because a certain sire has

had one very good, perhaps outstanding, performer that his offspring this year at the sales will be the ones to buy.

Buying anything based on such a rationale is both expensive and very often futile. Buying a yearling or breeding a mare based on the attractiveness of a sire alone is not enough. If all there was to buying a yearling was selecting a fashionable sire then why do we need a full catalog page listing the pedigree and accomplishments of the family?

Screening factors such as the ones discussed have one obvious flaw and that is the possibility that there is another Gallo Blue Chip among the yearlings that have been rejected by their use before checking out the one thing that really matters – the correctness or otherwise of the pedigree. Many of the factors used by buyers to justify their purchases have no real rationale founded in fact and are merely impressions drawn from a cursory look at the information listed on the catalog page.

Like any other serious investment your chances of success are greatly improved when you understand the fundamentals of the business and make use of all the tools and information at your disposal to make the confident decisions needed to improve your percentages.

The most important percentage in my mind, however, is the first 18%, the right pedigree.

The only factor that can be used with confidence is the correctness of the pedigree – does it fit the stallion's profile - the proven or predicted pattern of success?

It is a relatively easy process to find out once you have learned how to do your homework. In today's world of computers, high-speed communications and the Internet, we have a wealth of information upon which to make better, smarter, more confident decisions. Homework has never been easier and failing to do yours guarantees failed decisions.

## **PEDIGREE AND CONFORMATION**

In any decision on breeding it is important to distinguish between the characteristics you can see, the physical, from those you cannot, the metaphysical. The former are straightforward and include the many aspects of what is called conformation. It is an established practice in breeding to breed away from perceived faults that you can see in an animal such as large or small size, short legs, long pasterns, and even coat color by going to a sire that offers the opposite in the hope that the problem will be bred out of the offspring or in some cases averaged out...

An important consideration in gaited breeds such as trotters and pacers is of course the ability to trot or pace with a certain degree of ease and efficiency of motion. You might even include disposition or manners, which are attributes that are visually evident although not strictly physical in nature.

The metaphysical side of breeding is not as controllable since it involves both the mental and internal workings of the horse, factors that are perhaps more kindred to the “genotype” rather than the physical type. The desire to compete and win is, to my mind, an inherited trait that is metaphysical in nature. Intelligence and willingness to learn are other metaphysical attributes that can occur sporadically in the offspring of any one sire and dam.

In many ways the ultimate breed type for the performance horse has the components of a fast car. You want the best possible structure (conformation) with the least amount of drag or resistance (gait) and then you need the most powerful motor you can put under the hood (heart and lung function). A successful pedigree is one that recognizes the contributions of both the sire and the dam in providing these components.

From the sires (fathers) come many of the physical and conformation attributes of their offspring as demonstrated by the racing prowess of the sires involved. Speed, manners, conformation and gait are essential characteristics in a top sire in today’s world along with a demonstrated ability to win at the top levels of the sport

From the dams (mothers), in addition to complementing the contribution of the sire with respect to conformation, it would appear, based on my own and other research into maternal pedigrees, that there may be a mysterious genetic component we can call “*heart*” that lies dormant until it finds a matching component in the maternal lines of the sire. Finding and using this genetic key can be the difference between success and failure as a breeder or buyer of a top performer and the pedigree is the only road map we have to help us in that search.

Siring success is predictable based on identifying the principal sire lines at work in the dam and breeding to sires that carry the same maternal connections. This appears to occur regardless of the sex of the offspring. It is, therefore, possible to predict which mares are most suitable for which sires regardless of the names of the sires involved but based strictly on which maternal lines they carry.

## **BREEDING OR BUYING THE BEST**

It seems to make sense that breeding the best to the best could result in producing the best. Not everyone, however, probably 99.9% of us, is able to own the “best” mares or can either access or afford the “best” sires. Such a proposal then is not only impractical it is also not grounded in fact. Now everyone is entitled to their opinion but opinion alone is not sufficient. It is fact that counts.

The results of breeding the best to the best and hoping for the best are reflected in the overall lack of success by the breeders in North America in producing fewer than 5% of their foals to make enough money to pay for themselves over their racing life. We can do better. We must do better if we want to still have people interested in buying and racing horses. 5% is not an attractive return on investment in today's world.

## **TAKING THE ADVICE OF TRAINERS**

I am a great fan of the great thoroughbred breeder Tesio and also of Marg Neal, a famous Canadian pedigree researcher, who was quoted in Hoofbeats as follows –

“There are a great many people out there today that will tell you there is no reason to look beyond the grandparents of any animal. I thoroughly disagree. It is, however, a handy position to take for those unwilling to do their homework”

“There is a model of breeding that is like a pattern, and the pattern persists over generations, although, of course, the names change. I like to see a mare that is inbred, and a sire that is not.”

I can confirm the wisdom of Marg Neal since it is my own experience that the vast majority of breeders and buyers of Standardbred horses have little knowledge or interest in the “pedigree” beyond the first generation. It is seen to be something to be read, as a page in a catalog, circled, marked and ultimately discarded. More often than not the circles and marks are the result of popular name recognition or association rather than reflecting any understanding of the significance of the individual horses involved. This is particularly true of trainers in general who tend to approach pedigrees with the blinkers on. A client of mine once passed up on the opportunity to buy Bettors Delight because his trainer advised him that “all Cams Card Sharks are lame” – clearly not a true or objective statement to make. It is, however, typical of the kind of advice that owners will be faced with. The ability to sort out truth from fiction and keep an open mind is key to any purchase and trainers, albeit very good at managing horses, are not automatically so blessed.

## **FULL BROTHERS AND SISTERS TO GREAT HORSES**

Yes, Virginia, there is a Santa Claus but it looks a lot like a lottery when it comes to producing a million dollar winner, even a \$500,000 winner.

Albatross was the first of 13 foals from Voodoo Hanover and was the best by far of the 9 foals by Meadow Skipper. He is not alone, however, in being the only million dollar winner from any particular mare. In all of North American standardbred history there have been only 11 mares that have two or more in that category.

The first million dollar winner was the trotter Fresh Yankee, bought for \$900 as a yearling by Duncan Macdonald of Cape Breton, Nova Scotia, and who was driven to her record by Joe O'Brien of Prince Edward Island. The first mare to produce two such individuals was Spiked Byrdie with Division Street in 1980 and Silver Almahurst in 1988. She also has the record of being the first mare to produce two \$500,000 winners. There have been only 136 mares that have produced multiple \$500,000 winners.

Production of million dollar winners took a jump to 16 in the 1982 foal crop from the previous year's record of 6. It would be ten more years before the 1991 crop managed 18

and another 8 years till the current high for any one crop year was set in 1999 with 26.

What does all this mean? Clearly the odds of getting one of these superior performers appears lottery like although the odds at 1 in 1235 (390 millionaires from 482,000 horses of racing age since 1960) are much better than the one in 30 million chance of typical large lottery wins here in Canada.

Many have speculated on the reasons why we have horses like Albatross and the failure of full siblings. Clearly we are not dealing with absolutes when breeding horses. As correctly noted by others there is too much opportunity for "luck" to intervene in the long road from conception to racing success or failure. Tesio, recognized as one of the greatest of all time horse breeders, was convinced that if you had the perfect match you would get, at best, one in four such breedings to result in a champion. Albatross was one of nine. On the other hand Lady Hathaway was 2 for 7 with full siblings, Rich N Elegant was 1 in 5 with Western Hanover and 3 in 5 when you consider \$500,000 winners.

My own pet theory on the failure of siblings is what I call "Murphy's Law of Great Expectations" which seems to apply to situations where the first one of a series of full siblings is the best one. Then the trainers take over and train the subsequent ones with great expectations and run them into the ground trying to meet those expectations.

Whatever the reason, we are dealing with a percentage game as in all sports and whoever plays the percentages best wins the prize in the long run. Doing your homework on sire or yearling selection is one way to improve the percentages in your favour - 25% is much more attractive than the 4-5% that luck gives you and I'd happily take 1 in 9 if there was another Albatross among them.

A friend of mine has won several decent sized lottery prizes while I have seldom won more than a free ticket and the occasional \$5. The difference? He researches the frequency and patterns of successful numbers and buys his tickets accordingly. Even in a lottery you can improve your odds if you want to take the time to do your homework. The same applies to handicapping the horse races. Then again you can sit back, play the guessing game and get what fate allows.

There is one very simple way to improve your percentages in buying successful standardbreds and that is to buy yearlings that are "outcrossed on sire line and inbred maternally" and especially those whose dams are similarly bred. A review of the top performers by all current sires shows that 100 % show maternal inbreeding to a significant individual in the 3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> generation and over 85% are outcrossed on sireline.

Percentages – Patterns – Profiles. Know them – Recognize Them – Buy A Winner