

# **HORSES IN MY LIFE**

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## Introduction

Life is a series of firsts from the first time you take a breath to the first time you get carried out feet first. Not all firsts are memorable and most are soon forgotten as points in time such as your first tooth or your first kiss. When it comes to your first horse, however, most horse owners will agree that although it may not have been memorable financially it made a lasting impression.

I think it was Winston Churchill who said “the outside of a horse is good for the inside of a man “ (or person to be politically correct) and my own experience is that horse ownership, specifically of standardbred race horses, has been a rewarding experience indeed. Not so much from a financial standpoint but rather as a lifestyle choice that has brought pleasure, excitement and direction to me and my family over the past thirty years.

There is no better place to indulge a passion for horses than on Prince Edward Island – the Kentucky of Canada.



The Kentucky of Canada

## Chapter One

### The Ministers Son

As a teenager growing up in Musselburgh, Scotland, I first laid eyes on a pacer at the Musselburgh races, held on the Commons, a large park like expanse down by the seashore where the track was laid out over the top of the Musselburgh golf course. To this day you can still play golf on what is the oldest course in Scotland if you don't mind having to hit the ball back and forth over the railing that defines the track.



At first, race meetings were held on the sands at Leith but in 1816 they moved to Musselburgh. The course offers flat racing, harness racing and National Hunt meetings (though it only introduced jumping in 1987) and is 2 km long. In the middle of the course is a nine hole golf course, dating from at least 1672.

Standardbred racing was conducted then on two Sundays per year as part of the racing circuit that still exists in Scotland and Northern England. The races were contested over the same turf track used by the thoroughbreds and were a big event in the sporting year. There was no grandstand or parimutuel betting

back then in the 1950's but you could patronize the bookmakers whose stands lined the fence near the finish line. Threepence each way (about five cents win and place) was our favorite bet and was quite an investment when you consider that the going rate for working all day Saturday as a delivery boy for the local grocery store earned me about 60 cents.

My father was the minister of the Church of Scotland in Musselburgh at the time so I had to be careful not to be spotted by one of the elders. Luckily my father chose to come to Canada before a scandal erupted as he took a United Church charge in Hunter River, Prince Edward Island. Our family of parents and five children sailed across the Atlantic to Quebec City on the maiden voyage of the Cunard liner Sylvania and then boarded the train for the Island and the village of Hunter River. We arrived in Canada the day of the Springhill disaster in October, 1958. Some would say that was not a good sign.

Hunter River in the late fifties was a hotbed of harness racing as I was soon to find out. One of the first of my age that I met was Albert Bernard whose father Emmett was a local legend in harness racing. There were also the Smiths, Alan and his son Earl, and Cyril and sons Clarkie, Neville and Elmer and there were many others in the surrounding communities.

My first direct contact with a horse was working for my future father in law, Lem Craswell, a livestock dealer and proprietor of the original Massey Harris dealership on PEI. My first summer on PEI was spent learning how to muck stalls for two very large work horses as well as the various animals that passed through the livestock barns. Lem also kept a few cows that had to be milked seven days a week on top of the sixty hours or so of my regular work tending to the animals and "setting up" farm machinery. All for the princely sum of \$30 per week.

I learned to hitch and drive the horses to the manure sleigh without incident. That was probably because both horses were over thirty years old and long past thinking about running away or indeed running period. Blackie and Dolly had been in the family for as long as anyone could remember and while Blackie never saw the pasture because of an over fondness for grass and a problematic digestive system, the two were almost inseparable. It was the first time I realized that horses had feelings too, just like the humans that tended them. Blackie died the next year of old age and Dollie followed him within days – broke hearted as Lester the hired hand said.

Going to the Charlottetown Driving Park for the Saturday races was a must for many in the village especially since so many of their own were participating. The boys would take the train in or hitch a ride with a neighbor and we would sit up in the box seats like the big owners did during Old Home Week and second guess the drivers and their strategy. The races in those days were all double dashes and my favorite bet was the daily double. Not that I was particularly adept at handicapping or had any amount of money to risk but I used to watch for horses in each end of the double that had a connection through their names. One such combination turned out to be part of both a joy and a tragedy.

My father in law was in hospital suffering from prostate cancer and had only a short time left according to the doctors. I visited him on my way to the races one Saturday and he surprised me by asking if he could send in some money to bet on a horse. Lem had never shown an interest in racing, never mind betting, but I said I would invest his money wisely. I bought a daily double coupling Princess Mark and Countess Alice, a “royal” double, and it came in paying about \$30 as I recall, a big sum that was equivalent to a week’s pay for me. My joy at the big win was dashed abruptly when I got home and found out that Lem had passed away that evening without knowing the outcome of his first and, as it turned

out, last wager. Nobody ever knew about it but I slipped the money into his casket at the wake when nobody was looking.

As a student at university I did not have the money to invest in a race horse much as I was tempted. I was also a married man with new responsibilities including a first child on the way. After graduation I went west, in the Island tradition, to seek my fortune in the oil fields of Alberta. There I found the “Islanders Club”, an often times boisterous group whose spring lobster parties were famous, or should I say notorious. As a family man, my first son was born shortly after arriving in Calgary, I made sure that we ate and left the party early before the inevitable fight broke out between the Proctors, Bernards, Fords, Gallants and Smiths. It was just like being back home. The annual family picnic for the Islanders was also a predictable event. Held in Bow River Park it consisted of the ladies entertaining the kids with three legged races and ball games while the Islands finest lined the banks of the Bow River, tossing empty beer bottles into the swirling waters, then throwing rocks at them as they bobbed off downstream.

I was still able to indulge my growing passion for horse racing by attending both the standardbred and thoroughbred racing in Calgary and Edmonton and was never short of Island company as we flew between the two cities on the airbus to attend the races even in the dead of winter when the temperature was minus 30.

It was seven long years in the west before we decided to go back home to PEI. It was a hard decision but Phyllis and I both felt that the Island way of life was worth it, besides we now had four sons and having them grow up as city dwellers was just not an attractive option. We never looked back and for me it was the end of a chapter that had put me into position to realize my dream – owning a racehorse - my first horse and what an experience that was.

## Chapter Two

### Hooked From The Start

When I returned from the “West” in the spring of 1974 I had two big priorities to take care of before even thinking about horse ownership – buying a house and getting a job. We had left Calgary with no specific plans other than to get back home. My preference for a house was one in the country but my smarter half suggested that a few years in “town” would be a better way to adjust the kids to Island living – so we settled for an older house with lots of room and close to the park and schools. Phyllis was, as always, right, and a job soon followed as I hired on with the Provincial government to oversee the drilling activity just getting started off the North shore.

A friend of mine in university, Ewen Taylor, had set up shop after graduation as the pharmacist in Hunter River and had bought a small acreage from my mother-in-law upon which to build a home and a small barn for his horses. Ewen came from a long line of horse owners and his father Lee was a noted breeder and trainer. I remember watching Lee’s horse Armand’s Buddy win a free for all event early in Old Home Week and getting an invitation to be in the Gold Cup and Saucer –then and now the most sought after prize in Maritime racing. Ewen tried his hand at training and driving too and another favourite memory was watching him race his newly acquired mare, Haven Barmin, one night at the CDP. We were sitting in our favourite spot in the box seats when the race began. Ewen was parked to the quarter outside of a horse driven by the legendary Francis McIsaac. There was a big hole behind Francis but despite his urging Ewen kept pointing straight ahead, never to see the rail. She was one tough mare to survive that and other similar trips and her performances made an impression that was soon to return in another way.

Through astute broodmare purchases and stallion selection, Ewen quickly gained a reputation for producing stakes quality offspring. His great mare Rose Tree was the corner stone of his broodmare band and another of my favorite memories was seeing her first born of sixteen foals, Darn Good Rose, win the Atlantic Sires three year old stake in Charlottetown with Clarkie Smith driving for owner Leith Clarke of Summerside. Rose had twelve that raced and nine of them were stakes winners. In later years I remember being at the Meadowlands on the first night in history that all races went in 1:55 or better. Darn Good Rose, now 10 years old, was racing in the \$10,000 claiming class. He finished out of the money in sixth and was race time in 1:56.2 as I recall. At the time he was the fastest Maritime bred ever, race timed that is. As a result of the performance of her first foal Rose Tree’s offspring were sales toppers at the PEI Colt Stakes sale and Ewen’s other consignments were seldom far behind.

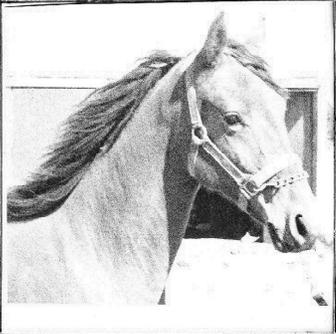
When the 1978 sale came around the consignments included a filly from Haven Barmin by local stallion Scioto Star. I knew nothing about bloodlines but having seen her mother race, and trusting in Ewen’s judgement in breeding I also knew that this was the horse I had been waiting for. Her name was Enersave. Cagy as he was Ewen had even named the filly after the Provincial Energy program for which I was responsible.

Faced with the likelihood that the price would be high it was clear to me also that I needed to look around for a partner or two to share the costs and the risks involved. A consortium was soon formed that ended up with ten people each putting \$500 into the pot. The N R Stable was born, to be jokingly referred to as the Norman and the Rest Stable by the local horsemen who thought that ten people sharing a horse was a nutty idea at best – just imagine having ten owners under your feet every Saturday morning.

Most of the stable members were fellow workers and included five engineers with myself among them, an accountant, the electrician husband of my secretary, and three other civil servants with no previous horse ownership experience. We were not entirely without expertise on board since the initial group included Mike O'Brien, nephew of the legendary Joe O'Brien, Professor, small breeder Don Gillis of Mermaid, and Richard Gallant of Dieppe who trained and raced at the Moncton track.

quickly establishing himself as a trainer of young horses under the watchful eye of his father, Emmett "Cowboy" Bernard.

Enersave was what you might call a willful filly, prone to kicking over the traces early in her training to the extent she was nicknamed "Buckaroo". After seeing her destroy the shafts of two jog carts the group was, to say the least, a little nervous about our investment. Like most new owners we were not really prepared for the facts of life – training a horse is not an overnight proposition, it takes time, patience and money. We had monthly luncheon meetings of the N R Stable in the lounge of the Charlottetown Hotel to keep everyone up to date on developments and the early news was usually not very positive. By the second month Albert had solved the jog cart problem by borrowing "Iron Bessie", a jog cart fitted with iron bars by tack shop owner Don MacNeil. "She can bend them but she can't break them", Albert reported. You could say that about Enersave's will as well as she continued to challenge Albert at every opportunity.



NEW PURCHASE IS POTENTIAL MONEYMAKER.  
by U. Will Pay

Norman Hall, Director of Project Enersave, has announced the recent purchase of a new piece of equipment with some unusual energy conserving features.

Code-named Mascot Enersave, it does not require the infusion of gas for its operation but instead produces its own, with a modicum of air pollution; it requires only occasional oil and does not rust. It also produces great quantities of a material which can be collected, reused and is said to be very conducive to the propagation of succulent tomatoes.

"Once we have determined its efficiency and potential pay-back we may consider further purchases," said Mr. Hall. "Should it be feasible we may look into the possibility of joint Federal/Provincial funding under the BETS program, (Better Expect to Shellout).

ENERSAVE

Sciota Star 2.00'	—	Thorpe Hanover 1.58.2
	—	Adioland 2.02'
Haven Barmin 2.04	—	Greentree Adios 2.00.4
	—	Chiefs Dream 2.04

The memory of the sale is blurred but I do know we bought the filly for \$3,300, a big price in the late seventies but still less than we expected to pay. She was a smallish filly with a definite attitude, both of which traits probably held the price down. We had agreed earlier to turn her over to Albert Bernard who was



Enersave hitched for the first time – ears back and ready

By the spring our group had dropped to six when it became apparent that Enersave would not likely race as a two year old despite the fact that she continued to improve in terms of manners and performance. We soldiered on and occupied our time at the track with a rebuild of her stall including a new window in an effort to improve her outlook on life.

Towards the end of July Albert thought she was ready to try to qualify. She was showing speed now and although she was still hot tempered we had hopes that a trip or two behind the gate would improve her manners. On the day of the qualifier, just before Old Home Week, we had a previous commitment to dinner out at Cavendish. Ewen was also going to be there. Much to the chagrin of the ladies we decided we just had to go to town for the big event and leaving the steaks in the fridge till we got back we headed to the CDP just in time to see her go. The time was modest, around 2:16, but she did behave herself and hope was temporarily restored.

The next big test was the Atlantic Sires stake scheduled for Old Home Week and once again our hopes were dashed as an uncontrollable Enersave did her thing all over the race track. It was time for hard decisions and Albert was relieved to hear that Enersave was to be turned out to “mature”. He also had a proposition for us to soften the blow. He had an owner who wanted to sell his horse for \$1,000 and he was in to race the next day with a chance to win. The temptation was too great and we became the, hopefully, proud owners of an eight year old gelding called Northern Clutch.

Now we had two horses but Albert quickly eliminated any second-guessing by winning the next day as hoped.



First win for the N-R Stable with Northern Clutch, Old Home Week 1979

We had a winner – it wasn't a stakes race, just a \$250 purse in the cheapest class on the card, but it was a win and the winner's circle was an experience that every new owner should get to savour early in their horse owning life, especially before the biggest crowd of the year. It certainly changed the thinking of the N R Stable. It did not hurt either that the winner of the stakes race in which Enersave had flopped, was a filly called Radiant Star, also by Scioto Star and owned by Ewen's father Lee Taylor. She would go on to be Atlantic Canada's Horse of the Year. We were hooked. Now all things were possible. Bring on the next yearling sale. There's always next year.



Emmett Bernard was from the harness racing hotbed of Hunter River and was part of an extended family of excellent horsemen. Emmett got the name “Cowboy” for his fearless ability to take on any and every bad actor that no-one else would drive. Son Albert became a top trainer of young horses. Albert's son Shane also won a Colt Stakes race with Scarlet Hussy in 1996 for owner Norman Hall to a rare three generation record of stakes wins for a family.

# Chapter Three

## Stakes Winners At Last

With Enersave on the shelf until next year and the game Northern Clutch picking up cheques and winning the odd race the N R Stable was of two minds as the annual yearling sale approached in 1979. The remaining six members held a meeting in the bar at the Charlottetown Hotel and after reminiscing on the good times we had in the past year along with several rounds of Moosehead's best the decision was made – full speed ahead and damn the torpedos ! This time we would buy a colt.

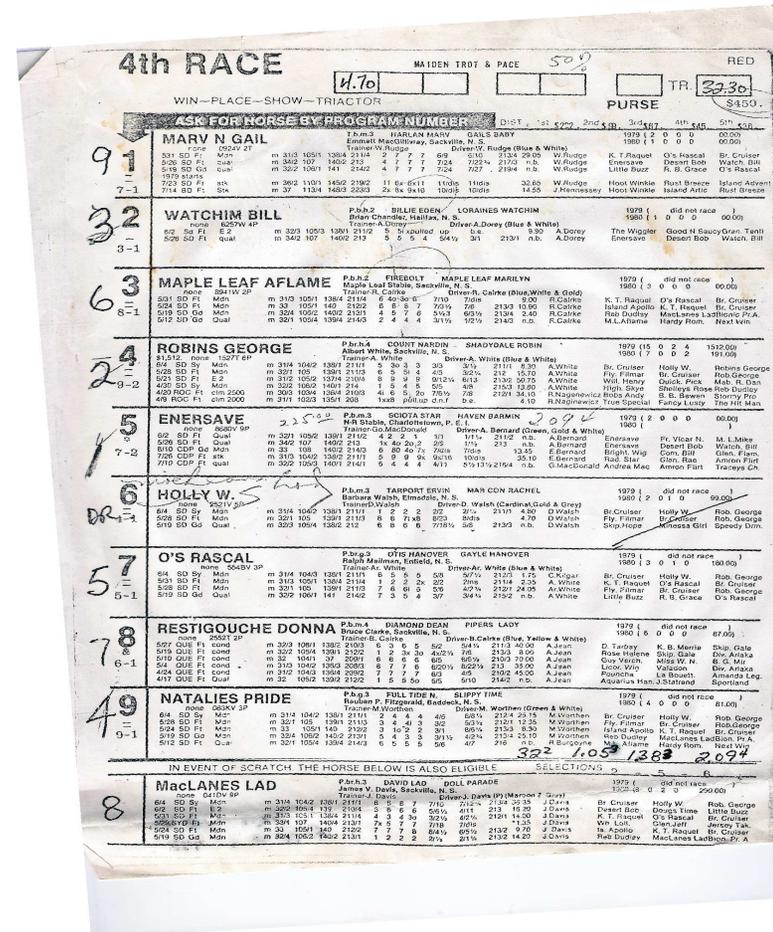
The 1979 sale presented yearlings from the first crop of AC's Dandy brought to PEI by Dr Bob Webster of Hollylaine Island Farms. Stirling Lane, Richard Gallant and I had visited Hollylaine Farms and were attracted to a smallish colt with a great attitude called Island Brandy. His dam was Armbro Kora, a mare that had raced locally and was owned by Frankie Roper. This was her first foal so we thought he may be reasonably priced.

We managed to buy him and still had some money left from our \$5,000 budget but not for long. I had no sooner stepped out of the sales arena to look for a beer at the canteen than Sterling decided to bid on a big colt that we had not looked at called Alex C W, a son of Newport Robbie, at the time one of the top Maritime sires. Now we had four horses in the barn. Poor old Northern Clutch was carrying a lot of responsibility on his shoulders to pay the keep or Enersave was going to have to come through big time to bail us out the next year.

After the racing season was over at the CDP our trainer, Albert Bernard, decided to move his stable to Sackville Downs in Halifax since he was having trouble making ends meet racing in

Charlottetown and the track was no more than fit to train on in the winter. The yearlings stayed in Charlottetown but Enersave and Northern Clutch would go to Halifax.

By the first of June, Enersave was ready to qualify at Sackville Downs and did so in fine fashion winning two qualifiers with ease. On June 9<sup>th</sup> she made her first start and won going away in 2:09.2. I remember that race in particular because I was in Ottawa at the time and called the track to find out the result only to find the race had been held up and was about to start. The lady in the office offered to let me listen to the race call on the phone which I did. She also sent me the program and I have the page with her first race in my album.



Enersave followed that up with another win in 2:08.1 and it was time for the stakes circuit. The first Atlantic Sires race was in Sydney and Stirling Lane and I set out for our first ever road trip on the stakes trail.



Stirling Lane was an original member of the N-R Stable and worked in the same department of the Provincial government as I did. He was one of the most enthusiastic members and branched out on his own with some success. In addition to his day job he also owned and ran the Wax Museum in Cavendish.

As we pulled into the motel in Sydney, Stirling spotted the liquor store and headed over to get some supplies. He came back with a bottle of champagne and a bag of ice to keep it cold. “We’ll drink this after we win the race” he pronounced. Sterling was the perennial optimist who thought you should finish first every race. I was still waiting for Enersave to show her darker side even after her early victories.

We didn’t have to wait long to find out which way the pendulum would swing. We watched as she warmed up and it was clear that Albert had his hands full. In the race was Radiant Star, last years champion filly, so the outcome was definitely in doubt. Enersave boiled off the gate to a half in 1:02.2 with Albert just a passenger. The field rallied past her in the stretch and local favourite Kyla Express won the race in 2:10.2. No champagne that night.

Back in Sackville Albert took her off the pace in an overnight event in a half of 1:05, this time coming her last half in 1:02 to win by four lengths in 2:07. Then it was off to Fredericton for the next stakes race. Stirling and I arrived at the track with the champagne cooling in the trunk only to be sent home dry again as Enersave was nipped at the wire in 2:06.4 by Steelette Lady. Next week it was Dieppe and the Dieppe dip in the first turn claimed another victim as Enersave went offstride and out of the money.

The champagne bottle was looking like a big Albatross around our neck and the next stakes race was coming up soon in Summerside. Albert decided to enter her into an overnight race four days before the stakes race to give her a look at the track. She was in a race against older foes so we had little expectation she would win. She crushed the opposition with a 6 length victory in 2:07.

Stirling and I were ecstatic, finally we had broken the losing streak. Stirling headed up to the stand to get the winners photo and shouted for me to get the champagne out of the trunk. I ran to the parking lot and retrieved the well traveled bottle. Arriving back in the barn Stirling was not back yet with the photo but Enersave was back so we decided to open the bottle and start the celebration. Champagne bottles have big corks that are sometimes hard to remove. I didn’t want the cork to go flying off and scare the horses so I had a good grip on the cork. Unfortunately the same could not be said for the bottle. As the cork came out the bottle slipped from my hand and landed spinning violently on the barn floor, spewing its contents in all directions. By the time we grabbed it there was little left in the bottle but the dregs. That bottle was definitely never intended to be drunk. Stirling was not impressed.

Enersave won the Atlantic Sires race in Summerside over Glengyle Rae and Robbies PJ in a new record of 2:05.3 and started on a streak that saw her win nine of her next ten starts including a two heat win against the colts in the Duck Acorn, and a win in the Battle of The Sexes in Moncton when she beat Tranquility Jim, the top colt of that year. Her post stakes season summary showed twelve wins in eighteen starts and earnings just under \$13,000.



Enersave with driver Albert Bernard, son Shane holding and N-R Stable member Stirling Lane

She went on to race as a four year old with a big win in the Nig MacDougal at Truro, a track where she was never beaten in five starts. Enersave ended her racing career at five with \$30,077 on her card and a record of 2:03.1 taken in the preferred ranks at Charlottetown.

Enersave was, in retrospect, a once in a lifetime horse. She didn't make a fortune but she paid her bills and gave everyone concerned a full measure of thrills. Her tough grinding style earned her the respect of the opposition and the admiration of the fans.

Remember that she made her money when \$30,000 was worth something and the Atlantic Sires races averaged about \$2500. To have a horse like Enersave as your first horse is both a privilege and a challenge. How do you find another one like her ? Maybe she can produce one herself. Unfortunately her career as a broodmare was as much a failure as was her success on the track.

She had five foals bred to the top stallions in the region and the best she had was a colt called Burn It Up that made just \$730. Such is the mystery of standardbred breeding.

She was, however, our first horse and her achievements on the racetrack, although modest by today's terms, were sufficient to embark upon a lifetime search for that world champion that everyone dreams of.



Enersave wins the Nig MacDougal in 2:04.4. Norman holds the horse driven by Albert Bernard. On Albert's right are Malcom MacPherson, a family friend, and Angus Gallant, father of N-R Stable member Richard Gallant.

## Chapter Four

### A Dandy Tale

While Enersave was doing well on the stakes trail at three we had another potential star in training in the form of Island Brandy. His early training was effortless. He was a great gaited colt and showed quick speed when asked. After winning his maiden in 2:10.1 he looked like he had a big future but such was not to be the case.



Island Brandy maiden win in 2:10.1 at Charlottetown

His small size and relative immaturity resulted in a short season and he was turned out to give him a chance to grow.

Island Brandy came back to the races at three and although he did not win many races he was very much a “cheque” horse and earned close to \$10,000 picking up minor shares in stakes races. We sent him to Montreal to Mike MacDonald after his three year

old year and he continued to pick up cheques on a frequent basis. Mike would tell everyone that he was a great “follower” and that he could probably race him in the top class at Bluebonnets and still get a cheque. Brandy did not get a chance to prove that one way or the other since he was claimed after the new year and went on to race for ten more years at the smaller tracks in Quebec. I was in Quebec City to see him take his record of 2:01.4h later that year. He made almost \$62,000 in 199 lifetime starts and was in the top three 102 times. He was a real Dandy and was well worth his purchase price.

In the meantime Richard Gallant, one of the N R Stable members had bought a Dandy of his own and had some success with it on the stakes trail. His name was Kilmuir Dandy and he went on to take a record of 2:05h at three and earn just over \$25,000 in a short career.

Richard and the N R Stable between them accounted for five of the top ten performers by that sire, all plucked from the Island yearling sale. His best was Dunachton Dandy with a record of 1:59.3h taken in the PEI Colt Stakes at three. At the time it was the fastest mile ever in that stakes program and those that were there probably remember it well.

Mike MacDonald had been racing a Maritime bred three year old in Montreal and brought him to the CDP for the PEI Colt Stakes. He was a short odds favorite to win based on his times over the bigger Montreal track. As he left the gate and shot to the lead the saddle pad came loose and was flapping against the side of the horse. Mike was straight back on the colt as Richard dropped in behind him to follow through a rapid first half. There was no way to rate the colt on the lead and Richard and Dunachton Dandy were able to catch the tiring front runner and pass him in the stretch for the record victory. Dunachton Dandy never improved on his record but went on to earn over \$119,000.



Richard Gallant with Dunachton Dandy after becoming the first horse to break 2:00 in the PEI Colt Stakes. Joined by father Angus Gallant on left with breeder Don Smith and groom Jean Louis Arsenault.

In the same year as Dunachton Dandy, Richard also had Wind Warning, another Dandy with quick speed who took a record of 2:00 at three and made \$45,000. His most memorable moment came in an Atlantic Sires race in Charlottetown when he won the race with his hobbles on backwards. That was the engineer in Richard coming out as he constantly tinkered with equipment and shoeing to improve the gait of his horses.



Based on their success Richard went back to the sale in PEI and bought three more Dandys, two colts and a filly.

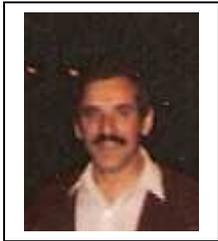
E & R Dandy was a grey colt who liked to trot and never hit the pace training until he was down to 2:25. He also was a stakes winner and was the fastest of Richard's Dandys with a record of 1:58.3f .

The other colt was Dicks Dandy, a smallish colt that I owned jointly with Richard. Little Dickie as Albert used to call him was a typical Dandy, small, competitive and with a quick brush of speed if you kept him covered up long enough. His biggest race was in a division of the PEI Colt Stakes racing against the mighty Glengyle Express owned and trained by James (Roach) MacGregor. Swinging off the turn Glengyle Express was leading the way with Little Dickie in hot pursuit when suddenly Express bore out off the turn opening up the rail for Dicks Dandy to slip through and outbrush Glengyle Express to the wire. Emmett Bernard summed it up for all to hear when he called out to Roach after the race "What happened to your horse Roach? It looked to me like he had a foal on the turn and the foal beat him home."

Dicks Dandy would go on to further fame when he was entered in the ice races in Dartmouth the next winter and won the 3/16ths mile race in what was reported at the time as a world record . Then again it was Sandy Fraser who was keeping time so who really knows ?

The filly that Richard bought that year turned out to be in foal. She trained fine but by January she was starting to show signs of either eating too much or something more serious. A check by the vet confirmed the worst – in the family way by an unknown but obviously precocious colt. Bob Webster, the consignor of the filly, offered to take back the wayward filly and gave Richard the choice of any of the yearling fillies he then had for the next sale.

The result of taking up that offer was Maritime Champion Island Governess, who won just shy of \$96,000 and was virtually unbeatable in her Maritime racing career.



Richard Gallant was born on the family farm in Oyster Bed Bridge where his father Angus had horses that he raced for fun at Covehead and on the ice. Richard was an engineer by trade and settled in Moncton just down the road from the track in Dieppe. Among his many stakes winners as an owner, trainer and driver, was Dunachton Dandy, the first sub 2:00 Colt Stakes winner as well as Colt Stakes events with Wind Warning, Island Hustler and Atlantic Champion Island Governess in a Colt Stakes record for two-year-old filly pacers driven by Wally Hennessey.

The same could not be said for our impromptu purchase of Alex C W, the big colt that attracted Stirling's attention because of his size and early birthday. He turned out to be every bit as awkward and un-athletic as you would expect from an overgrown yearling and never did make it to the races.

We learned a couple of valuable lessons, though, from our experience with Alex C W. Number one was don't make impromptu buying decisions at a yearling sale. You should save your impulse buying for the chocolate bars at the grocery checkout counter – much less expensive and at least you have some sweet moments to remember. The second valuable lesson is that bigger is not always better, especially when it comes to buying yearlings that have to be trained and compete over the half mile tracks in the Maritimes.

Every year we see large, shiny, good looking yearlings bought for correspondingly large prices as novice buyers repeat the mistake of “buying by the pound”. The same applies to good looks in a yearling. I have yet to see a beauty contest winner win any kind of athletic event. Beauty and speed do not go hand in hand, or should that be hoof in hoof.

I got caught up in the “looks” of a yearling that was brought to my attention by Bennett Carr who used to drop in to our barn on occasion. Since the yearling in question was just down the road we went to look at him. He was an outstanding individual by Horton Hanover. We promptly bought him and liked him so much we entered him in the Old Home Week yearling show where he won the Premiers Plate. He literally was head and shoulders over the other yearlings in the ring. That was to be the highlight of his career. We called him Exhortation and he was well named because despite a lot of praying and paying he never did amount to much. He did eventually race for someone else, as we had the sense to cut our losses early, but his \$435 in lifetime winnings was certainly not proportional to his looks.



Exhortation by Horton Hanover, winner of the Premiers Plate in a yearling class at the Provincial Exhibition but no money. Bennet Carr holds the beauty contest winner.

## Chapter Five

### Tracer Or Potter

By the fourth year of the NR Stable the interest was waning and the partners were getting involved in their own horses or with other owners. Enersave was going to be retired and the last two yearlings, Prudentia and Gotta Winner, although they both raced and earned stakes money, did not live up to our expectations.

By this time I had become a good friend and disciple of Richard Gallant, a fellow engineer and a very successful horseman in his own right. Richard was different, to say the least, from most trainers I had met up with. He kept meticulous records of diet, shoeing changes, and other factors that contributed to his success. When a horse of his won a race he immediately recorded the circumstances in terms of type of shoe, length of toe, toe angle, what the horse had eaten and its water intake and in particular he took blood samples and had them analysed.

It was Richard's contention that the levels of various components of the blood were the key to a healthy and successful horse. It was also his finding that every horse was different with respect to what levels were right for it and he knew exactly what he had to do to maintain or restore those levels with respect to nutrition or supplements. This was in sharp contrast to the approach of many trainers who operated on the basis that more was better. His success as a trainer of stakes colts in the Maritimes proved his point.

In the summer of 1981 he stopped by on his way to look at a weanling he had been offered. The filly named Kilmuir Jewel was out of the same mare that had produced his first good stakes horse, Kilmuir Dandy. We set off to see Kilmuir Jewel at the

Hicken farm in Kilmuir and liked what we saw. Jewel was a well grown and correct foal and the price was right. She was by Moldau from a mare by some horse called Dear Old Pal. Not that the breeding meant anything to me or that I really cared one way or the other. As long as Richard liked the filly that was good enough for me. As I said the price was right and we had our first horse in partnership.

I took Kilmuir Jewel to my new home on the farm and soon realized that one lonely weanling on her own was not necessarily the best way to raise her. We already had a pony, a retired race mare, another retired trotter in the form of Chicken Man N, and a broodmare owned by a friend to deal with, so another young horse to keep Kilmuir Jewel company would probably not have been noticed, by me at least. My growing herd, however, had caught the attention of my better half and I decided on another option. I would exercise her myself. Richard showed me how to operate with a lungeing line and with a circle of sand laid out in the small paddock I was all set.

Kilmuir Jewell took to the exercise with enthusiasm, trotting one way then wheeling on command to go the other way. We soon built up to thirty minutes a day and so we continued all of that winter even through the heavy snowfalls when I would blow the snow out of the circle. By the spring she was in great shape and ready for breaking early. I broke her in June and jogged her down through the fields before turning her out for the summer.

She went into training with Albert Bernard in the fall and was perfect in every way, free of health or lameness issues, seemingly happy with her work. She was pacing bred so we trained her down that way and she qualified in June on the pace. She won her maiden race first time out in 2:12.2 and was ready for the first stake race of the season in Woodstock. Sent off as the favorite she was leading coming off the final turn when Albert decided to

give her a tap or two with the whip and in the process got the snapper caught in the thimble on the sulky shaft. He tugged and tugged to no avail and as he did Jewel drifted out until we could almost touch her as she passed the grandstand. Up the inside came another filly driven by Boyd Tremere to nip Kilmuir Jewel at the wire.



Kilmuir Jewel's maiden win on the pace with breeder Lee Hicken behind (white cap) Son Andrew Hall behind driver Albert Bernard, son Philip and friend Kent Nicholson to the right.

The experience seemed to have affected her in some way because the next week in Fredericton she got "sour" as Albert related it and would not try in the race. Albert thought it was the hobbles she was fighting so decided to train her free legged. I remember the day well. I was in my office in Charlottetown when I got the call. "Did that mare ever show any trot before?" he asked. "Well she always trotted when I lunged her as a weanling" I offered. "I'm going to try her on the trot" was Albert's reply, "that's all she wanted to do this morning."

The next day, fitted up with some brace bandages behind, Kilmuir Jewel trained her first mile ever on the trot in 2:24 and loved it. The scramble was on now to get her trotting eligibility papers and

three weeks later, just before Old Home Week she qualified on the trot. Two weeks after that she won her first race trotting, an Atlantic Sires event in Saint John, thus becoming not only the first horse ever to compete and win money at both gaits in the Atlantic Sires program (and still the only one) but also became the only two year old in North America that year to take a record at both gaits.



Kilmuir Jewel wins the two year old trot at Saint John. Held by Shane Bernard, driven by father Albert Bernard. Hugh Fitzpatrick to the right of Albert, then Heather and Richard Gallant, co-owners with Norman Hall.

She was not through yet as the story gets even stranger.

After a successful two year old stakes season on the trot, Kilmuir Jewel was brought back on the trot the next year and picked up where she left off, winning a couple of stakes races before Old Home Week. There was a break in the schedule for the trotters until the stakes event in Saint John so I asked Albert half jokingly "You don't suppose we could race her in the Anne Shirley on the pace during Old Home Week?". We still had her pacing eligibility papers and she had been paid into the stake as a

yearling so all we had to do was qualify her on the pace. Perhaps by now she would have forgotten her dislike for hobbles, at least long enough for this one race. The purse, after all was a good one, over \$8,000 estimated.

Albert trained her once in 2:12 easily then qualified her in 2:07. We were ready to make history again and although Kilmuir Jewel did not win, finishing third in 2:05, the \$1,200 or so she made was cause for celebration. Two weeks later, after requalifying on the trot she beat the three year old trotters again in Saint John.

After her three year old season Kilmuir Jewel was sent off to Montreal to Mike MacDonald where she raced successfully in a series for three year old trotters. As the year ended she was dropped into the claiming ranks where she beat the \$15,000 class twice before year end. Nobody claimed her since her allowance would drop after the new year so after the new year we bumped her price up anyway to \$18000 and beat them twice more before someone decided to take her. By that time she had accumulated over \$27,000, a very good return on her \$1000 purchase price, not to mention the claim.

I dropped into Montreal on my way to Ottawa the following weekend to pick up the claiming check and while there I went to see the new owner-trainer at Bluebonnets. He was obviously pleased with his purchase and proceeded to tell me how she was going to be a free for all mare when he got finished "improving" her. In the week since he claimed her he had injected every joint, changed her shoeing to what a "real" trotter should wear and was all set to unveil his makeover in the \$25,000 claiming ranks the next day. I decided to stay over to see the results.

Kilmuir Jewel looked great in the post parade but I thought there was something funny about her gait until I realized that she was pacing. They swung behind the gate and the race began and she

was still pacing despite the efforts of her driver to swing her over. She pulled up on the back stretch and from that day never trotted a step in another race. In fact she ended her days in the bottom claiming ranks in Riviere du Loup where she made just another \$1200 or so to add to her lifetime total. It must have been the Dear Old Pal in her breeding.



Kilmuir Jewel wins on the trot in Charlottetown as a three year old

## Chapter Six

### A Boy And His Welsh Pony

Not all of the horses in my life have been race horses and there is one in particular that in many ways shaped both my future and the future of Charles, one of my four sons.

We were still living in the house in Charlottetown that we had bought upon returning from the West. The boys were all involved with hockey and soccer, that is all of them except Charles. He was not into team sports and in addition was a bit of a rebel in other ways. He was the only one of the boys who was interested in pets and spent hours training his gerbils and hamsters to do tricks. He had a passion for anything that flew or walked on four legs and this extended into an interest in horses. From the time he was six he would join me at the track on Saturday mornings and was absorbed with their care and training. He liked nothing better than to sit on the jog cart beside Albert and go around the track and was soon jogging horses on his own.

I saw an advertisement in the newspaper for a pony and after consulting with my better half we set out for a drive in the country with Charles and the rest of the kids in the car. We did not mention the pony till we got to the farm in Crapaud since it was Charles' birthday and the pony was to be a surprise. The first thing he said when we walked up to the paddock was "Can I have a pony some day?" That took care of that.

Aunt Jemima was a black Welsh pony of undetermined age. A true miniature horse, she was unlike most ponies in that she was perfectly proportioned. There was no big head or legs too short for her body. She also had a mind of her own as we were soon to find out.

We found a stall for her at a farm in Winsloe and then began a daily routine of feeding, caring for, and riding that we were little prepared for. I thought that running all over town with three kids playing soccer or hockey was hectic enough – it was nothing compared to being responsible for this new member of the family.



Aunt Jemima and Charles out for a jog

After a couple of months of commuting twice daily, seven days a week, between the farm and our house in town it was clear that something had to change and it was also clear that this did not mean the pony had to go, since Charles clearly was developing a strong attachment and responsibility for Aunt Jemima.

We have a cottage in Cavendish that had belonged to my wife's parents and one day on our way back to Charlottetown after opening it up at the end of May we spotted a real estate sign that said "Property for Sale" and made a detour to see what it was. It was just what I was looking for. A house, a barn and enough land to make a couple of small paddocks. We moved in a month later and Aunt Jemima had her new home.

That fall the NR Stable, buoyed by the success of Enersave and Island Brandy decided to buy both a colt and a filly at the Island yearling sale. The sale featured the first crop of Sultros Rainbow, a full brother to Royce, and therefore his yearlings highly anticipated. We settled on a black filly called Prudentia and had to pay \$6,600 to get her. Our colt purchase was from the consignment of George Riley whose yearlings always came to the sale in great condition. Gotta Winner, a son of Tarport Ervin, was no exception. He was not a tall colt and was built much in the mold of Island Brandy.



Gotta Winner

From the start Gotta Winner looked like he was well named and showed quick speed in training. I even got to train him one day the next spring and that led to another memorable moment. Albert had a two year old filly called Filet of Seal that we had bought privately after the sale. She was fast and free legged and a bit on the hot side so Albert opted to train her while giving me the reins for Gotta Winner. The instructions were simple enough. Just follow Albert until the second time around on the back stretch then come up alongside and finish the mile together.

Albert set a quick pace leaving and Gotta Winner and I were back a ways at the quarter with Albert roaring over his shoulder for us to keep up. By the time we got to the back stretch the second time around I had Gotta Winner in position to move except there was a problem. Jogging in by the rail and coming the opposite direction was Don MacNeill who had a habit of doing this and never seemed to feel he should get out of the way. I had to sit in till we got into the last turn and past Don. By this time Gotta Winner was charged up on Albert's back and when I plucked him he shot straight out. I forgot to pull on the left line in time and we ended out by the outside fence before I got him turned down the stretch much to the amusement of the guys on the "knockers bench" at the head of the stretch. Thus I became known forever as "Five wide Hall". Albert was not amused.

By June Gotta Winner looked like a future champion until suddenly he blew a curb overnight in his stall. No racing for him as a two year old was the vet's recommendation and so we had to turn him out. I wanted to keep an eye on him over the summer and be able to work on his hock so we arranged to paddock him at Ira McCoubrey's farm in Cavendish just up from our cottage. It was a fateful decision that would have some unusual consequences.

We always spent the summer at the cottage from the time school was out till early in September. That first summer we had Aunt Jemima, she stayed home in the paddock and I would take Charles in every day on my way to work and pick him up in the afternoon to go back out to Cavendish. Charles spent his day riding and caring for Jemima as well as a couple of other boarders we had at the time. The next summer Charles wanted to take Jemima to the cottage and it seemed like a good idea since he could ride her in the National Park and even down on the beach in

those days. We built a small pen with rope and posts and she seemed quite contented there.



Aunt Jemima at the cottage with sons Michael, Philip, Charles, and wife Phyllis.

As I mentioned earlier Aunt Jemima had a mind of her own and when she was turned out she was hard to catch. She could dodge and weave like a football half back in the open field. It was one Sunday morning when the inevitable happened. Charles forgot to fasten the gate tight enough and Jemima was off, down the lane and along the Park highway heading for the village of Cavendish.

We were soon in hot pursuit in my Volkswagen with the four kids leaning out of the windows urging me on.

Aunt Jemima didn't have to stop for the red light at the intersection but we did and by the time we got close to her again she was heading down the highway for Hunter River when suddenly she decided to take a tour of Marco Polo land.

Striking through the campgrounds with the Beetle full of yelling kids on her heels she made it into the woods and disappeared from sight. There was a road on the other side of the woods that would take her back in the direction of our cottage, assuming she turned left instead of right, so we doubled back to pick up the scent. Sure enough, here she came trotting down that road, across the highway and up Ira McCoubrey's lane.

Gotta Winner was in the paddock by the lane and upon seeing the first horse to cross his path in several weeks he leapt the fence and joined in the chase. They carved a swath in Ira's grain field which was compounded by the Beetle together with several adults as well as the kids. Collectively we got the two escapees turned in the direction of the paddock and Ira closed the gate on them to the great relief of all involved. Ira was not amused.

"You might as well leave them be till the morning." Ira said. "We'll be able to catch them when they get hungry". But it wasn't oats that Gotta Winner was hungry for unless they were wild ones it appeared. The next morning we were wakened by a phone call from Ira's wife, who seemed more that a little out of sorts. " You better come up here and get that mare out of the paddock right now. They are up there by the road putting on a show for the tourists."

Sure enough Gotta Winner was having his way with the dainty and accommodating Aunt Jemima. Several cars had stopped on

the road to watch the show and sitting on Ira's front porch, glued to her binoculars, was Ira's maiden sister taking in all the action.

There was no way to catch them now. Milled oats was no substitute for the wild variety and we would just have to wait for nature and exhaustion to take its course. In the meantime I set out for Charlottetown to get some powdered tranquilizer to help in the roundup.

By the time I got back, Gotta Winner was ready to eat and the tranquilizer worked perfectly although I'm not sure if his staggering was entirely due to the powder or to his other recent indulgences. We walked him up to the shed and Aunt Jemima, defiant to the end, followed, but still would not let us catch her. Once in a confined area, however, she gave in and Charles was able to ride her bareback down to the cottage, seemingly none the worse for wear.

In the fall I had occasion to have the mare checked just in case there might be "consequences" to her one night stand with Gotta Winner and everything seemed in order. We had learned our lesson, however, and the next summer Aunt Jemima stayed put on the farm and we resumed our daily drop off and pick up routine for Charles. Aunt Jemima did seem to be putting on weight but we attributed it to good feeding by Charles and a contented lifestyle on the farm. Then one day I dropped Charles off and was turning the car in the yard when he came running. "Jemima has a foal" he shouted and sure enough out from behind the barn came Aunt Jemima at full speed followed by a light bay colt we promptly named Flapjack.

That was our firstborn foal and neither of us had been there to see the event. In fact over the next few years there were several other foals born in our barn and I never did witness any of the births despite sitting up many a night in the barn in expectation.



Charles and Aunt Jemima out for a stroll with Flapjack and Licorice the Lab, all in perfect synchronization.

I remember Enersave's first foal. I had waited up for four nights because it was her first and I wanted to be there in case she had problems. It snowed overnight on the fourth night and about five o'clock I decided that I would blow out the lane as it seemed like Enersave was going to wait another day. It took me about one hour to find out otherwise. There to welcome me after the snow was cleared was Enersave with her newborn foal already up and nursing. Horses are, to say the least, unpredictable.

## Chapter Seven

### One Horse Leads To Another

#### One Horse Leads to Another, and Another

Its funny how, when you own a horse, everyone seems to think you need another one, usually one they are trying to sell. The same sort of thing happens when you get your first barn and you have only one horse and there are six stalls. It seems every one of your “friends” needs a stall to turn out their horse.

Over the years I had many such offers, most of which I ignored, but occasionally in a moment of weakness, I found myself with an extra mouth to feed, and water, and to clean up after. I had Charles to help me with the chores though and he pitched in enthusiastically whenever his schoolwork allowed. One horse that came along early in my new role as a horse farm manager was a retired New Zealand bred trotter called Chicken Man. He had been owned by Albert Bernard and was the personal pet of a girl that worked for Albert called Maggie.

When Chicken Man had to be retired there was no way that Maggie would let him go the way of most standardbreds in those days before the Standardbred Retirement movement was born. Maggie had a hard exterior and could curse like a trooper but when it came to horses she was as soft as a kitten. As long as Maggie minded her manners around the barn I was happy to accommodate Chicken Man especially since he was used to being ridden and Charles was outgrowing Aunt Jemima.

Charles and Chicken Man quickly became attached and it was not unusual to see them tearing through the field with Charles clinging on bareback with only a handful of mane to hold on to.

Chicken Man learned to go over small jumps in the paddock, which came as no surprise to Albert who gruffly asserted that “ he always jumped as a trotter anyway.”



Charles helps his friend Matusa from Kenya climb aboard Chicken Man

We bought an English saddle for Charles on his 12<sup>th</sup> birthday and it was a proud day when he saddled up Chicken Man for his first formal ride under saddle. He did so well that Charles decided he wanted to take him to riding classes and so another horse experience was begun.

The atmosphere in a riding stable is somewhat more sedate and genteel than that in a typical racing stable. No cursing or spitting here unless it’s the spitshine you are applying to the saddle or your riding boots. Charles and Chicken adjusted well though and after several weeks of basic training in walking, trotting and doing various maneuvers in the arena it was time for graduation day.

Chicken Man looked resplendent in his shiny leather tack adorned with a fluffy white underpad and martingale. Charles too was all decked out in his riding gear, boots and hard hat. We settled into the seats to await the performance and suddenly there they were, Charles and Chicken proudly entering the ring with heads held high, momentarily that is.

In preparation for the big day the dirt floor of the arena had been covered with a coating of fresh smelling wood shavings. It was too much for Chicken Man to resist as he promptly flopped down and began to roll as Charles jumped out of the way. One disaster led to another as Chicken Man, after getting back to his feet and shaking himself off, seemed to forget everything else including how to trot. To which Albert afterwards gruffly noted "He never could trot much anyway".

Needless to say Chicken Man's future as a show horse had been severely compromised and Charles rode him home the next day to resume his duties as a family pet. He stayed with us for a couple of years but eventually his love for chewing everything wooden, including boards that were coated with pine tar, would lead to his demise. Maggie had left the Island for work in Ottawa shortly after we took Chicken Man to the farm and it was a sad day shortly after Chicken Man died when Maggie showed up on the doorstep looking for her beloved horse.

I ran into Maggie many years later at the annual Harrisburg auction where she was working with one of the consignors, still caring for horses, still cursing, and still burning with love and pride for the horses in her charge. I learned early on about the bonds that are created between horses and people and watched it first hand in the development of my own son into a compassionate horseman and ultimately into a skilled equine veterinarian.

There were others that came along that made their mark on our lives and one of those was Romeo Del Rae. He was five years old when I got him from a horseman in Halifax. He wasn't much of a race horse but Charles was ready for the next step and wanted one to train on his own. I said fine but Romeo was going to be his responsibility and he had to pay his own way never really intending that to be the case. Charles took me seriously.

Every day at 6.00am he was up and ready to go to the track. I would drive him in, go for a coffee and come back after he jogged Romeo. Then it was back home to get ready for school. He took the bus into town and after school would take whatever school bus was heading in the direction of the track where he would feed Romeo and put him away for the night. Then it was back home to repeat the cycle the next day. It seemed I had done this or something similar before, several times.

Romeo raced well that winter under Charles' care and aided by Albert's oversight and Charles learned to shoe him, train him and eventually drive him in a race – and that was quite an event. At fourteen he was not old enough to get his license so Charles decided he would take Romeo down to the matinee track at St Peters to race with him driving. He enlisted the help of Buddy Campbell, who had taught him how to shoe horses, as well as a couple of his barn buddies, and off they went with two horses in the trailer. The other horse was an old clunker who had seen better days but he was to be the secret edge for Charles in his first racing foray.

The racing at St Peters is all for fun and although some take it quite seriously the whole experience is one of civil one-upmanship. Romeo was a decent horse and would have to start in the top class, whereas the clunker would fit in with others of his same lack of ability. The two horses, however, looked alike, and since there were no papers checked or racing lines kept, nobody

in St Peters would likely know which horse was which. The switch was on.



Charles puts the disguise on Romeo while "The Ringer" stands ready in the next stall

Charles was clearly nervous as he prepared the horses and got his driving suit on. He was a forlorn sight sitting on the back of the truck, dressed in a suit twice too big for him, as the rest of the boys from Charlottetown raucously anticipated victory with a case of cold ones.

The first heat for Romeo was a near disaster as one over eager participant dressed in a yellow Tonka hat for a helmet, proceeded to run Charles into the infield in the first turn. The next heat was different as Charles laid back off the gate and let the field settle before making his winning move to the top. You would have thought the race was for a million dollars instead of a bag of feed by the uproar in the winner's circle. In the midst of the celebration Charles sat surprisingly quiet as I asked him if he was going to be harness racing driver now. "No way" he said "this is away too dangerous" and he never drove in another race.



Romeo del Ray leads in the stretch with Bodie (Tonka Hat) Dixon on the outside



## Chapter Eight

### The Grinders

Most periodicals tell the stories of the stars of harness racing. The fact of the matter is that the vast majority of race horses are not stars yet each one of them has a story worth telling and it is not always one of success.

Over the years I have been, like most owners, involved in horses that have been less than successful but each one has contributed to the experience of horse ownership in a unique way and left lasting memories that far exceed their cost in terms of value.

Northern Clutch was the first horse that I had the experience of being with in the winner's circle. As exciting as that was there were other moments in our association with Northern Clutch that were just as, if not more, memorable for a horse that made all of \$12,260 lifetime.

The Clutch, as we called him, had been racing the winter of 1980 in Sackville Downs in Halifax and after a so-so winter was sent home to PEI to rest and get ready for the summer season there. Our trainer, Albert Bernard, had a groom known by all as Shack, probably because of his unpredictable and erratic nature a la Eddie Shack of Toronto Maple Leafs hockey fame. Shortly after his return from Halifax the Clutch was ready to be trained when Albert was called up to the track office and Shack as a result got the call to take the Clutch out for his training mile.

Albert and the Clutch got back to the barn about the same time and Albert was concerned to see Northern Clutch puffing and blowing as he stood in the cross ties. "What did you train him in anyway" asked Albert "and where are his knee boots, you know

he needs knee boots." Shack was nonplussed as he assured Albert "Seemed to go OK without the boots, went around 2:05 pretty easy". Considering that Shack never carried a watch and could not tell the time anyway this was quite a stretch to say the least.

The Clutch had been entered that day in the \$1000 claimer class and Albert had been called to the office because the class was filled and his only option was to enter him for \$1500 where there was an opening. Reluctantly he did so. You can all guess what happened. The Clutch, leaving from the outside post seven, and showing nothing against \$1000 claimers in Halifax, proceeded to trounce the opposition at long odds and superstition being what it is in racing, he did it without his knee boots. It was Shack's crowning moment as an "assistant" trainer.

That same winter I was offered a horse called Amber Jeff for \$300. It seemed like a good deal since he was "Ohio" bred and therefore presumably a cut above the local stock. My son Chuck took over the training and apart from his tendency to do U-turns in the middle of training sessions he seemed to be a nice horse. Charles took his time and cured him of his errant ways and finally had him ready to qualify when disaster struck. His final training trip prior to qualifying he pulled up lame at the end of the mile with a broken coffin bone. They don't call it the coffin bone for nothing. This was the end of the line for Amber Jeff and it was a heart breaking decision for Charles to make to put down his pride and joy. Situations like this bring home to you the realities of harness racing. It is not all what they show in the movies by any stretch.

Undeterred by the tragedy of Amber Jeff, Charles undertook another project by the name of Hunterhill Vision. He was a beaten up old claimer that belonged to someone in the same barn. Knowing how badly Charles felt about Amber Jeff the owner gave him Hunterhill Vision. It may have seemed to me like

jumping from the frying pan into the fire but to Charles it was a new challenge. He decided that all the old horse needed was a few weeks on the grass and so off he went to our farm. Unhitched for two weeks the old warrior seemed to relish his new surroundings and the next week he won his first start in almost two years. Claimed shortly afterwards for \$1500 the old horse put Charles in a position to branch out at the ripe age of fifteen into greater things.

The next project was a claim of a horse called Black Jack Brat. Charles took his money for Hunterhill Vision and put down \$1000 to claim Black Jack Brat in Summerside. Two days after getting him home he was confronted by the local USTA director and judge at Summerside who arrived in the yard to take the horse back to Summerside. According to him the horse was entered into another race prior to the claim and had to go back to Summerside to race. A quick check of the claiming rules showed that Black Jack Brat's entry was invalid since no horse can be entered in another race while already entered for a claiming price. So much for the wisdom of USTA directors and judges.

Black Jack Brat was entered for \$1500 in Charlottetown and won handily and the next week was claimed back by his former owner for \$2000. Not a bad transaction for a novice trainer.

A month later the annual yearling sale was underway in Charlottetown and as usual I was involved in the management of the sale. My wife was handling the receipts and during the sale she came over to show me a sales slip with a curiously illegible yet familiar name scrawled on it. Sure enough it was Charles and he had bought a filly named Mormac Effie.

This was the first yearling that Charles had ever been involved with and with the help of Paul MacDonald, brother of noted horseman Mike MacDonald, he managed to break her without

incident. She was a small filly, just about what you would expect for the \$900 purchase price, but to Charles she was the next World Champion and he treated her accordingly. Effie was the topic of conversation and the center of his life.

It was about the time when interval training was introduced and my partner Richard Gallant was dabbling in it with some success. Charles was quick to try new things and the local training fraternity was treated to the spectacle of Effie walking, jogging and going one eighth of a mile sprints as the first interval trained horse on PEI.

Effie had knee problems as a two year old and despite her obvious ability it was decided to wait for her three year old season. The next summer Charles took Effie over to Moncton to stay with Richard and get ready for the races and indeed won an Atlantic Sires stake in Moncton before her knee problem returned. Entered into a \$1500 claimer in Charlottetown she was quickly snapped up but never raced again.

Another horse I remember was Jericho Noc, alias "Frenchie", that I bought from a horse trader for \$1,500. He turned out to be a nice consistent horse once I found a solution to his sore ankles. It was around the time when glucosamine was being touted for joint problems and a legal medication became available that just seemed to be the answer for Frenchie's problems.

The highlight of his career occurred at the matinee races at Alberton. I had put together a memorial display on Joe O'Brien and it was located in the Alberton museum. Joe's stepson was coming up from Chicago to visit Alberton and since he was a trainer/driver he wanted something to race at the Alberton Exhibition races during his visit. Jericho Noc got the call and I was responsible for getting him to Alberton and caretaking a horse for the first time. The first heat was a disaster as I forgot to

put on his tongue tie and had the hopples on the wrong height. The second heat Jericho, fitted out the right way, won handily to make the day for the O'Brien family.



Jericho Noc wins on the occasion of the visit of Ted Smith of Elmira, Ontario, for the annual meeting of the PEI Horsemen's Association. Driven by Shane Bernard.

Joe O'Brien was perhaps the most famous harness racing trainer/driver from Canada and certainly the Maritimes to train and race subsequently in the United States. His father Harry O'Brien was one of the founders of the PEI Colt Stakes in 1934, now the oldest stakes program in Canada. Their home base was at the Alberton track which is one of eight matinee tracks still active in Prince Edward Island.

Joe was famous for his driving style, which made him the top driver in North America and included a world record with Steady Star in a time trial at Lexington, in addition to winning virtually every top stakes race on the continent. Perhaps his most famous horse was Fresh Yankee, the first millionaire trotter, or Armbr Flight, one of the few fillies to win the Hambletonian.



The O'Brien barn at Alberton track in the 1930's



**Joe O'Brien** was one of three sons of Harry O'Brien. Claude, Lloyd and Joe, all took up the call and made their marks on the history of the sport. Claude drove Nita Volo to a heat win in the third running of the Futurities and his son Mike O'Brien, a member of the N-R Stable, would also have an Island stakes winner in 1984. Lloyd won with Paddy Aubrey in 1935, and Joe O'Brien would become the greatest trainer/driver of his generation. He would go on to fame in the United States, winning virtually every major stake race and blazing the way for Island horsemen to compete and succeed anywhere. It is no wonder that the annual awards in Canada are named after him, the O'Brien Awards.

While none of the horses in this chapter that I owned or was associated with were in themselves memorable for what they achieved on the track they are indeed memorable for what they taught a young man about horses and racing. Charles has gone on to be a horse veterinarian with a practical experience that has stood him in good stead as the farm veterinarian at Armstrong Brothers for five years and now as a practitioner in Ontario with his own practice.

## Chapter Nine

### Three Star Fillies

Our first big winner was Enersave, a daughter of Scioto Star. That sire was brought to Prince Edward Island by Brad Murray of Charlottetown. As a racehorse he had a decent record for his day of 2:00.1 taken as a two year old and was a full brother to Keystone Andy who made over \$480,000 when that wasn't sneezing money. He was from the Tar Heel line and like his grandsire he was much more noted for his daughters than his sons. He wasn't much of a sire with only 14 foals and 3 in 2:05 but all three were fillies and I had a share in all of them.

Three years after the NR Stable bought Enersave from the consignment of Ewen Taylor, I was approached by Ewen's brother Armand about another filly by Scioto Star called Hillcrest Star. Armand had missed the chance to sell her in the yearling sales and did not want a whole lot for her. At the time I was involved in a consultant contract with the local track to look at ways in which they could produce their programs faster and more efficiently and the consultant firm was headed up by Doug MacArthur. He promptly agreed to get involved and a new partnership was formed.

It was February and the filly had not been broken and besides she had not been staked so the price was modest. She got to the races late in her two year old year and by the spring of her three year old season she was on a tear having won several races and now competing as a three year old in the Preferred ranks in the Maritimes. A trip to Sackville Downs in Halifax after beating the best the Charlottetown track had to offer was in the cards. It was her first road trip and when she was turned loose in her strange new stall she reared up and caught her front foot in the water

bucket, bringing it to the ground with a crash. Albert checked her over and she seemed fine and indeed she went on to win her race that night.



Hillcrest Star wins in Halifax for Albert Bernard and co-owners Norman Hall and Doug MacArthur, despite an incident with a bucket

The next day she seemed to be resting her front foot, the one she caught in the bucket, but the vet could not put his finger on the problem. Back in Charlottetown she had the week off and seemed to be fully recovered from whatever her problem was. She was entered in the Preferred class that Saturday and it was a terrible night with rain and a track that was at least ten seconds off. In retrospect we should have scratched her but that is not the Island way.

We were sitting at our table at the Top Of The Park, myself, horse trader Collins Wood, breeder Bob Connelly and money-bags and horse owner Alan Ford, eagerly awaiting another pay day for

Hillcrest Star. Going past the three quarters she made her move to the top and was pacing away from them when all of a sudden she threw her head in the air and went sideways. “She’s broken down” offered Collins in his matter of fact way and sure enough she had cracked her pastern bone between the ankle and the hoof of her front leg that had been in the bucket. It was what they call a green stick fracture, cracked but not broken off entirely.

Taken to the local Veterinary clinic she was examined and prepped for surgery and I was sent out for a most unusual shopping errand. “Go to Canadian Tire and get me two stainless steel screws” the Vet ordered. Who was I to question his wisdom and two sterilized screws later the fracture was under control.

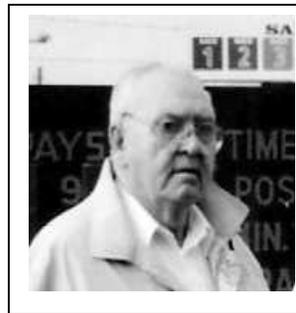
A six month layoff and a lot of TLC and Hillcrest Star was ready to go back to the wars only this time it was in the claiming ranks where the competition was not as tough. She quickly asserted herself as the Queen of the claimers, so much so that we decided to send her to Mike MacDonald in Montreal where the pickings were greater. She had one more race, though, to compete in before she got on the truck the next day.

The day of the race was reminiscent of the situation the year previously, cold, wet and muddy, so we decided this time to scratch her. What we did not know at the time was that even if you scratch a horse it can still be claimed and such was the case. Even more to our surprise the persons doing the claiming were my table mates Collins Wood and Alan Ford. What could I do but to wish them well. At the very least they had saved me a trucking bill to Montreal.

Her first start in Montreal was in a class that she could not handle and Mike opted to enter her in Rideau Carleton where the going was, presumably, easier. She fell down in the race and smashed the new bike that Collins and Alan had sent up with her. Justice

was served. They sold her shortly after and she went on to race modestly at Rideau.

Several months after her sale we were sitting at our table at the Top Of The Park when the hostess, Wilma, came over and said there was a phone call for Collins Wood from someone in Quebec. In deference to Collins’ age and lack of the French language I offered to answer the call. It turned out to be the new owner who had been treating the mare’s leg with magnetotherapy only to find she was getting worse. “She got two screws in her ankle” he said “Why not you tell about this?” I believe the answer is “Caveat Emptor” better known as buyer beware. I’m not sure what the equivalent is in French.



**Collins Lea Wood** was a livestock dealer and a horse trader from an early age. He also took up harness racing as a boy and remembers his first race on the ice of Charlottetown harbour in 1940. His interest in horses led him to breed his own under the CL’s name and he did so with considerable success. His greatest impact on the breeding industry on PEI, however, has been as a result of the many mares that he brought in from sales in the United States. There were many stakes winners raised from such mares including Dunachton Dandy, the first sub 2:00 two-year-old Colt Stakes winner. He was named PEI Horseman Of The Year in 2002.

The third of my Scioto Stars was from the same mare that produced Exhortation, that beautiful but talentless colt, but this was a filly and by Scioto Star and she was downright ugly. When Albert, our trainer, saw her for the first time he almost threw a fit. “ That is the most slab sided, homely mare I ever laid eyes on” were his comforting words. Realizing that Albert had no love for the prospect of training her she was promptly taken over to Moncton to one of my partners Richard Gallant.

Her name was Demand Control and like the other Scioto Star fillies I was involved with she was as tough as they come and lived up to her name. She was a grinder of a mare that would

wear down the opposition and then drive on. She won a couple of Atlantic Sires stakes at three but in typical Maritime fashion never developed much past her three year old year.



Demand Control wins an Atlantic Sires Stake in Moncton. Standing with me is co-owner Angus Gallant. Driven by Albert Bernard. To his left is John Maclean. To his right are Reg Weatherbie and Richard Gallant. Also in the picture are sons Philip and Michael.

Despite this she had her moments including a scary experience when she first arrived on the Moncton scene. To get her to Moncton I had to borrow a half ton truck with a horse box and it was the early winter and we had a lot of snow around. The trip over was fine until it came time to unload her at the track. The horse box did not have a tailgate that you could use as a ramp so I backed the truck up to the nearest snowbank and proceeded to unload by jumping her off the back of the truck into the snowbank. Unfortunately I forgot to get out of the way and ended up stuck in the snow with a 1000 pound horse on top of me. Luckily she could not move any more than I could and she managed to miss me with her hooves.

A couple of years later, back in Moncton, I witnessed the proper way to unload and load a horse without a tailgate. Joe MacRae was a rough and ready horseman from PEI who turned a stick legged \$1000 claiming mare called Barn Talk into a pretty nice broodmare. He had another nice horse in Fort Augustus Boy that he trucked around the Maritimes in his one ton truck that also had no tailgate. But as long as he could find a couple of bales of hay handy there was no problem loading Fort Augustus Boy. One foot up on the hay bale and on to the truck he went. Getting off was even simpler. He just jumped.

The episode with Demand Control was not my first “near death” experience with a horse. You have to realize that horses are creatures of habit and when you put them in situations that they are not familiar with then anything can happen.

When Enersave was retired and on my farm as a broodmare I would turn her out every day by opening the back door to the barn, opening her stall door and then she would go out the back door on her own. One particular day she stopped at the back door and I reached up to tap her and she reacted by kicking backwards – right on my shin. The pain was excruciating and I collapsed on the floor while Enersave continued out the door, quite unaware of the damage behind her. The upshot was a bad bruise and a valuable lesson learned. “Expect the unexpected” when it comes to horses.

## Chapter Ten

### Bob

Bob is a pretty ordinary name but Bob the horse was anything but. His real name was Norwegian Star. He was by Albatross and according to the horse trader that sold him to me for \$2,500 he was a six figure yearling at the sale in Kentucky. Turns out it was \$90,000, pretty close to the truth for a horse trader.

I was standing out in front of our trainer's barn talking to Bob Craswell, a local auctioneer and a relative of sorts on my wife's side. Along came "Snork" Morton trailing behind him a rather despondent looking gelding for which he wanted to find a new home. "Take a look at him boys" he said" this fella sold for six figures in Lexington – he's an Albatross" Albatross was the magic word, after all how many horse owners in Charlottetown ever had the opportunity to own an Albatross ? There was no dickering on the price and Snork promptly wheeled him into the barn and left with cheque in hand and in what appeared to be a bit of a hurry. Closer inspection showed why, since Norwegian Star had a front ankle that was obviously not the one he was born with. Our trainer, Albert, returning from lunch at the track canteen, which is never guaranteed to improve your outlook on life, took one look and asked the inevitable question – "What were you guys drinking for lunch ? "

Not wanting to appear as stupid as we felt Bob and I offered in unison " He's an Albatross" to which Albert responded "looks more like a turkey". After his first five starts and not a nickel made we were beginning to think that for once Albert was right. We even nicknamed him Bob, after his jovial co-owner, to see if that would improve his attitude but to no avail. Finally even Bob,

the auctioneer, got tired of waiting for the Albatross genes to show up and tossed me his papers duly signed.

I took Bob home to the farm as a last resort to see if green grass could change his lack of interest in being a racehorse. I turned him out with a broodmare I was boarding and they hit it off right away. Despite his lack of equipment he suddenly developed an "I'm the King of the Castle" attitude with no indication, as he pranced around the paddock, that he had any ankle problems or otherwise. I hitched him up and jogged him down the back lane and through a couple of fields – he was a different animal. Despite the fact that he had not been trained or raced in three weeks I entered him in the \$2,500 claimer and – well you can guess the outcome. He won like a thief in the night. That was the beginning of a twelve race streak that saw him almost unbeatable as he worked himself up to the \$5,000 level. The routine was the same each race. I never trained him, just turned him out after he raced then jogged him two days before his next race. He spent the rest of his time in the paddock with the Nero mare that was the love of his life.





Bob and Arrochar Velvet with her foal by Ambro Acton

On race day I would take him out to the end of the lane and waited for our ride into town to arrive. The trailer would stop on the road and we would load Bob on and head for town. After the races we would be dropped off at the end of the lane and I would turn him into the paddock and take his harness to the barn. On one particular day I got a call as I was getting him ready to go to town. Our ride was not able to pick us up. With no other option the only way was to hitch him up to the jog cart and head to town, just like they did in the old days. Bob was used to traffic since I had jogged him along the road several times on the shoulder. This time was somewhat more of a challenge since we had about five miles of highways and streets to navigate to get to the track.

Bob and I headed out along the Trans Canada Highway to town and for the most part it was straightforward until we had to make a left turn across traffic at Belvedere Avenue. As bad luck would have it we hit a red light and rather than trust Bob to stand in the turning lane until the light changed I wheeled left into the

entrance to the Subway drive-thru and swung onto Belvedere without stopping.

Then came the railroad tracks across Belvedere and with one bound Bob cleared the tracks with me holding on for dear life. Only another mile to go and at every driveway Bob was looking to turn in thinking he was nearly home. We finally pulled into the CDP barn area and up to Albert's barn and instead of the triumphant welcome we deserved for navigating our way through traffic, we were welcomed by Albert with what could be called a mixed reception. One hour later, though, without the benefit, or need, of a warm up, Bob stood triumphant in the winner's circle once again.

Then I got greedy. There was a \$5,000 claimer series in Truro that offered a \$10,000 final. It was too good to ignore and Bob won the first leg easily. I decided to leave him with the only trainer I knew at the Truro track rather than truck him back the next week and gave him explicit instructions not to train him but to turn him out in the paddock. The trainer's son decided that he should do otherwise and one brisk training trip later Bob was scratched from the series with a bad ankle. So much for tempting fate. Bob was now a retirement project.

But that is not the end of his story – in fact it is just the beginning. After a couple of months in retirement just hanging out in the paddock, Bob looked like he needed a little more exercise and his ankle seemed to be much better. My son Charles suggested we try him with a saddle so we dug Chicken Man's English saddle out of the tack room. Chicken Man was a previous retiree that Charles had broken to saddle but that was another story.

Bob took to his new role as a saddle horse with enthusiasm and although he insisted on pacing at first Charles eventually got him to canter and even trot. We also had an old mud cart with high

wheels and a dash board that we could use winter and summer for his daily exercise. Bob was very patient and well behaved but he would get a little anxious if he was away from his paddock mate, Arrochar Velvet, for very long.

One spring morning a car came into the yard and a lady and a young girl got out. They had just moved into the area and Brooke, the daughter, was interested in riding and they wondered if we had anything for her to ride. The mother confided in me that Brooke was a special education student with a learning disability that resulted in her being very introverted and mentally immature for her age. She thought that caring for a horse might help her daughter develop responsibility and confidence – it sounded like a good idea.

Brooke was twelve with the mind of a six year old but physically she was normal size for her age so she had the ability to handle barn chores such as feeding, mucking and grooming. Bob and Brooke became instant friends – it was as if Bob knew he had a role to play in Brooke's future.

Brooke learned to ride him around the ring in the small paddock, going over small jumps, and developing her technique. She came to visit every day to exercise and groom Bob and the riding sessions got longer and more adventurous as they went down through the field, although always in our sight. There were the inevitable bumps in the road when Bob suddenly decided he had enough for one day and he either balked or on a couple of occasions kicked up his heels and unseated Brooke. That was his way of saying he was ready for some paddock time with Velvet.

One fine summer's day, a little more than a year after Brooke arrived on the scene, she asked if she could ride Bob up to her parents house so that she could exercise him in the field below their house. Her parents came down with their car and followed

her the short distance along the Upton Road to their sub-division while I stayed back at the barn to do some chores. An hour or so later I was surprised to see Bob, riderless, trotting down the lane. Hot on his heels were three cars and I was relieved to see that Brooke was in one of them, apparently none the worse for wear.

Bob stopped outside the barn and looked around for someone to take off his saddle quite oblivious to the uproar he had apparently caused. After an hour of continuous riding he had decided he had enough, flipped Brooke off, and headed for home, through the sub-division, down the Upton Road and down the lane to his beloved Velvet.

Brooke had learned her lesson that all things have limits. She continued to visit with Bob and ride him over the next two years and in the process she did indeed come out of her shell. Her new found confidence and responsibility was soon to be tested.

It had been over three years since Bob had seen a racetrack and a friend of mine was looking for a horse for his son to jog and learn the basics of caretaking a standardbred. Brooke had gone on an extended family vacation and Velvet was no longer around so I decided to send Bob on another mission. Once again he took to his new circumstances with enthusiasm, so much so that his new caretaker was just itching to train him down to see if he could get him back to the races. I was hesitant at first but when Brooke came home in September she thought it would be "neat" to see him race again and offered to help with his training – and so the deed was done.

I was President of the track that year and we were looking at various promotions to interest families in coming to the track. Each year we held a special day in conjunction with the Horse Owners Association, with an open house at the track, a driver's competition, pony rides for the kids, all the usual stuff. Someone

suggested we stage a race under saddle and of course I immediately thought of Bob – would it be possible to get him to pace under saddle ? There was another girl at the track that had a trotter that she exercised under saddle and perhaps they could stage a contest of some kind. Brooke was thrilled at the prospect and so began a new education for both Bob and Brooke.

We had to figure a way to fit a saddle and pacing hobbles onto Bob and after a few trial runs came up with a workable solution. With Bob trained down to around 2:30 it was time for a trial run under saddle. Brooke had never trained a mile before so she had to learn to time herself and Bob accordingly. The first try they were all over the track as Brooke had difficulty keeping him in a straight line down by the pylons but about a week before the big event they managed a mile in 2:40 with no real problems.

Open House day saw a big crowd on hand for what was billed as the first race for standardbreds under saddle ever conducted at the Charlottetown track. Then disaster struck. The trotter that was to be Bob's competition came up lame with a gravel in its foot. Brooke was devastated but with her new found confidence she insisted that she could do it alone, just she and Bob, and it would be a time trial just like Moni Maker had done at Lexington.

The goal was a mile in 2:30 but without another horse to keep him interested there was no telling what Bob would or could do. And then there was the crowd, including Brooke's parents and friends, adding to the pressure of the moment.

Bob and Brooke paraded in front of the stands for the introduction and turned at the head of the stretch to score down. Just as he reached the starting line Bob made a break, something he never did before, and once again Brooke rose to the occasion. She pulled him up and came back to the head of the stretch to where I was standing. She was obviously shaken by the incident

but undeterred. A quick check of his hobbles showed that the front hangers were too long and his knees were catching on the loops. The adjustment was made and Bob and Brooke were ready again. A cautious start meant that they were behind schedule getting to the quarter in 40 seconds and as they came around the second turn I called on Brooke to pick up the speed. Bob responded to the urging and as they paced home off the final turn the announcer excitedly called out the three quarters in 1:55, urging Bob and Brooke on to the roars of crowd. Mile time 2:30 – amazing. The smile on Brooke's face was worth everything as she received a bouquet of flowers and a trophy from CDP for her efforts.

Brooke continued to work with Bob on his comeback and he did indeed get to race again although his old injury resurfaced and he retired once again to our farm – this time for good. The next year Brooke was sixteen and all on her own she applied to work on a horse farm in New Zealand for the summer. The transformation was complete. Bob had done his job well.

Bob was not done, however, as he still had time to give. I was renovating our barn into rooms for our Bed and Breakfast operation and soon there would be no place for Bob. I found a new home for him in Kinkora with an elderly man who wanted a horse to hitch and drive. He also had two grandchildren who lived across the road. It was quite a sight to see the two kids sitting on Bob's back as he contentedly ambled along through the woods with his new friends.

All things come to an end, however, and it was a sad day indeed when Brooke and I went to see Bob and found out that he had been put down as a result of cancer. He was in many ways my favorite horse, not for what he accomplished on the track but for the positive effect he had on so many young lives.

## Chapter Eleven

### The Little Horse That Could

There was a story I used to read to my children that has always been an inspiration to me personally and that is the story of “The Little Engine That Could”, a tale of determination and grit that showed that physical size did not matter if you had the will to succeed. As a vertically challenged youth in my own right I had come to appreciate the moral of the story and my favorite lines – “I think I Can – I know I can.”

Little did I realize that some day I might have a horse that epitomized the struggle to succeed in a society, and an industry, that puts such an emphasis on “the bigger the better”. Nowhere is this more obvious than in the sales ring at any yearling sale.

A friend of mine, and one of the most successful small breeders on Prince Edward Island, was selling a colt called Paris Triumph at the annual PEI yearling sale in the fall of 1998. I was attracted to him for a number of reasons. The breeder, Ewen Taylor, had raised the first horse I ever owned and that one turned out to be the top three year old filly in the Maritimes and in addition this colt was the result of a breeding recommendation that I had made. He was one of four colts that Ewen had for sale and was truly the runt of the litter to the extent that Ewen almost withdrew him from the sale. The colt was a survivor, though, having been chased around by his bigger stablemates and knowing what he had been through to get this far was also a large factor in my interest in him.

I was reading the pedigrees at the sale from the auction stand when he entered the ring. At the time the sale had a \$1500 minimum bid or the yearling was passed out if no bid was

received. There were no takers in the crowd probably because of his size and late foaling date. Not wanting to see the colt passed through I warned the crowd that if they did not want him I would take him home for the \$1,500 minimum bid, all along praying that someone else would advance the bid, since I already had a couple of horses and another one might not have been welcomed on the home front. I made the first and only bid and I got “stuck” with him. The rest is history, as they say, and the final chapter has now been written as the little horse renamed as Hussy Chaser has defied his size shortcomings to become number three on the all time Maritime bred money list.

Hussy Chaser got his name as a follow on to another \$1,500 yearling I had bought under similar circumstances two years previously. That filly, Scarlet Hussy, went on to set a couple of track records at two in the Maritimes and then set a Canadian seasonal record at four on a half mile track.



Scarlet Hussy sets the track record at St John in an elimination of the Maritime Breeders

The similarities between the two were remarkable. Both were June foals, on the small side, with one “white” eye and other superficial physical “blemishes” that tend to turn off the buyers seeking perfection in looks. They were both trained conservatively and started their racing careers in the middle of their two year old years, became stakes winners at two, qualified impressively in their three year old seasons then fell victims to lameness that plagued their three year old seasons. Hussy Chaser developed a foot separation that resulted in a long recovery involving rebuilding one front hoof to allow him to at least be exercised. Scarlet Hussy became mysteriously lame behind and it took four months of searching by several vets to find the problem, a separation of a ligament on the inside of her hock. Both made their returns to racing in spectacular fashion. Scarlet Hussy, off a qualifier, whipped the best fillies in the Maritimes twice in one week during Old Home Week stakes racing and Hussy Chaser, in even more dramatic fashion, parked through the three quarters to draw away from his foes in the lane to the rousing race call of Roger Huston, guest announcer at the 1999 Old Home Week. I can remember it well as Roger yelled “ O’Brien has got them by four and he’s looking for more” as driver David O’Brien hand drove him home to a 20 length victory.

Exciting finishes were to become the trademark of Hussy Chaser’s races. Always a lazy trainer he demonstrated the same laid back attitude behind the gate and invariably was last to the first turn. As the race wore on Hussy Chaser would make his move and start to advance and with each quarter he went faster. Here was a horse that, despite his size, would love a large track and so he was sent up country to stops in Montreal, Flamboro Downs and finally the big time on the Woodbine-Mohawk circuit where he continues to race.

Not that the going was easy for him as he overcame several episodes of atrial fibrillation along the way as well as constant

problems with his aching feet. That did not stop him from becoming the most popular claiming horse on the grounds changing owners several times as he climbed his way up the claiming ranks at Woodbine. There were no fewer than eighteen claims entered one evening for this little horse with the big heart who never stopped trying. He rose to compete with the top claimers on the circuit, taking his record against the \$40,000 class with a typical come from behind rush pacing his final half in 55.3 in a 1:52.1 upset win.

Retired as an eleven year old Hussy Chaser recorded 45 lifetime wins, to go along with 46 seconds and 39 thirds in his 285 starts. His lifetime earnings stand at \$529,000 making him the second richest Island bred of all time. The little horse that could has done so in fine style and in so doing has proven to all that size only matters when it comes to the heart. His legendary racing style may well live on in the form of his first and only foal, a colt called Scarlet Chaser, combining the names of my two fastest horses, Hussy Chaser and Scarlet Hussy. In his retirement Hussy Chaser was bred to Lucky Hare, a three quarter sister to Camluck that I obtained from Prince Lee Acres, home of Camluck and the great Cam Fella. The colt is now racing and so far is living up to his daddy’s reputation, buck knees and all.



Scarlet Chaser at two days old.

## Chapter Twelve

### It All Comes Together

It is now 54 years since I first set foot on Prince Edward Island and it is amazing to me, in looking back, to see how the results of all of the events experienced and friendships made and lessons learned have come together in a single individual, a colt named Scarlet Chaser.

As I noted in an earlier chapter my first experience as a breeder as part of the N-R Stable was an exercise in futility. It did, however, arouse my engineering interest in finding out why success eluded me. After all I had followed the suggestions of knowledgeable and successful breeders by breeding to the best sires available in my area, but to no avail. There had to be a reason why, other than “bad luck”. The search for answers lay dormant for a while until I became involved as manager of the PEI Colt Stakes and ended up with the responsibility of preparing the pedigrees for their annual yearling sale. As I became more familiar with the pedigree patterns of standardbreds I began searching the literature to improve my understanding of what it takes to produce a special horse based on pedigree.

The search took me back to the earliest documentation of the breed in the first edition of Wallaces Trotting Register, published in 1867. That book, and subsequent editions, contained essays by Wallace on breeding theory which are still valid today. My expanded knowledge resulted in the publication of my own version of Wallace’s admonition to “return to the sire the best blood of his dam”. That book was self published and called Pedigree Matching, and was noticed by a writer for the USTA Hoofbeats magazine and a subsequent article in that publication resulted in considerable public interest.

I was not prepared, however, for the flood of requests for breeding recommendations that resulted and quickly found out that writing out pedigrees by hand or trying to create them with a typewriter was not the answer. I turned to the Canadian Trotting Association for help and found they had a basic pedigree program in house that could be accessed over the phone to allow pedigree charts to be printed off. That was when my path crossed that of Marg Neal, a pedigree researcher in her own right, who had worked in the CTA library and maintained their database of horses.

Marg had compiled a historic report on the maternal families of the sport, tracing back every standardbred that had trotted or paced in 2.00 back to their maternal roots in one of the many (over 1800) known maternal families. This was a turning point in my understanding of pedigrees. Suddenly the “return to the sire” quotation began to make sense in a factually based report.

Further investigation of the importance of maternal lines led to the writing of a second book, again self published, called Queen Among Queens, a documentation of the history of the maternal lines of the standardbred. That book also has gained a level of notoriety since it ran contrary to the long held belief of many breeders that the sire line was the only important part of any pedigree, a belief that I had already tried and found to be less than successful.

In the last ten years since I made the book available I have developed a reputation of sorts as a “pedigree expert”, in part because there are very few people that I have encountered that have any real interest in the topic. In the process one question has often been asked. “If you know so much about breeding successful standardbreds why is it that you have never bred one yourself”? My standard defense was to compare myself to the great golf instructor, David Leadbetter, who, as I understand it, never won a PGA golf tournament but is in demand as an

instructor by many of today's top golf professionals. The retirement of Hussy Chaser was my chance to finally show that I could also walk the walk. It has also turned out to be a coming together of influences that seems almost spiritual in nature, as though it was meant to be.

Hussy Chaser was bred by Ewen Taylor, a longtime friend of mine, whose farm is in my early stomping grounds of Hunter River. Ewen was the breeder of my first horse Enersave as I noted in an earlier chapter, the same Enersave that had failed so miserably as a broodmare and started me on my search for the "perfect" pedigree. Hussy Chaser's dam, Armbro Jantilly, was by Cam Fella and Ewen was interested in breeding her to an Ontario sire. Armbro Jantilly herself was an Ontario bred having been bred and raised at Armstrong Brothers in Ontario, the farm where my son Charles started out on his veterinary career. Just a couple of coincidences or were they ?

I recommended he breed Armbro Jantilly to Paris Dexter instead, a sire that his brother Armand was standing on PEI. The subsequent foal was a bit of a runt alongside the other three yearlings with which he was raised and Ewen was seriously questioning the breeding decision. No-one bid on him at the yearling sale so I bought him for the \$1,500 minimum bid. He earned over \$520,000 in a ten year career and at one time was the winningest PEI bred ever in terms of earnings.

The key thing I saw in Hussy Chaser's pedigree was the doubling up maternally of both Tar Heel and Volomite, two individuals that are special in broodmares or at least were back in 1996 when the mare was bred. Both his sire Paris Dexter and his dam are inbred maternally to Tar Heel (Billy Direct).

When Hussy Chaser retired late in 2008 I got him back to PEI and started looking for a mare to breed. I wanted to take

advantage of the strongest elements in his maternal lines which to me were Cam Fella and the Tar Heel crosses so my immediate search focused on Camluck mares since Camluck was by Cam Fella and also carried the Tar Heel/Volomite cross.

I went to Ontario in March 2009 to visit Charles and also to look for a couple of Camluck mares. It just so happened that Charles' best friend, Doug Simon, was also the farm manager at Prince Lee Acres, the farm that owned Cam Fella, sire of Camluck – another coincidence ? A call to Doug resulted in a farm visit. They did not have any Camluck mares available but Doug had one just as good, a three quarter sister to Camluck called Lucky Hare. She was not much as a racemare and was having problems producing to date but the price was right and she was the right type of mare based on her physique. Hussy Chaser was small and fiery and his front end was far from perfect. Lucky Hare was a large mare, very correct and very well mannered. When I put the pedigree up on my computer the deal was sealed. Lucky Hare had the Tar Heel/Volomite combination as did her sire, Precious Bunny, who was also by Cam Fella. In addition the maternal lines of Lucky Hare gave a maternal double in the foal to both Cam Fella and the Adios line in the dam of Hussy Chaser, just the sort of thing that Marg Neal promoted with a comment I have always valued. Her exact words were as follows –

"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 had what I considered the perfect pedigree match as well as a physical compromise that should produce a hopefully correct foal from a physical standpoint. It was not going to be automatic however. After all I was breaking the conventional rules of breeding by using a beaten up old claimer as a sire and a failed broodmare as a dam for this "perfect" offspring. This was

definitely not what most breeders are told to do and would certainly not qualify as a “breed the best to the best” scenario. Now we had to get the mare to PEI and prepare for the “nuptials” of this improbable duo..

Lucky Hare arrived at Windemere Farm in North Wiltshire in late May. In the interim I had arranged for Hussy Chaser to be taken to the Atlantic Veterinary College to be test bred to see if he had what it takes to get a mare in foal. Hussy Chaser was his usual irascible self, proving difficult to load and subsequently scaring the assembled students and staff at the College with his antics which included attacking the breeding dummy with his teeth and front legs. It was a fiasco of major proportions and when the veterinarian in charge told me he was unfit for breeding, not just because of his attitude, but because of his obvious front end conformation problems, it seemed that the perfect pedigree on paper was to be undone by Hussy Chaser’s less than perfect qualities in the flesh.

Since I had already paid him up as a stallion in the Maritime breeding programs I decided to forge ahead regardless and with the assistance of my trainer, Earl Watts, we embarked upon a “behaviour modification” program with our would be stallion. Ten days after Lucky Hare arrived on PEI she came into heat and it was time to put his retraining to the test, and what a test it was.

Since he had proven impossible to collect for artificial insemination we decided that we would try it the old way by live cover. Our first challenge was obvious since Hussy Chaser was much smaller than his prospective mate and reaching his goal was clearly going to be difficult if not impossible.

Harkening back to my early experience with livestock, working for my future father-in-law Lem Craswell, I remembered a similar situation.

Lem always kept a few cows around and one in particular had been around for several years. She was due to be bred and on the appointed day Lem was having trouble finding the local AI worker, known locally as “Charlie Bull” even though his real name was Danny. Perhaps it was Danny who was making himself scarce after past struggles with the same old cow. The solution arrived in the yard on the back of a farmers truck The farmer was bringing in several cattle for weighing prior to shipment and among them was a young Hereford bull. He wasn’t much to look at but the price suited Lem and he decided to breed the cow then and there. It was a similar situation to the one we faced with Hussy Chaser. The bull was short in stature and the cow, a Holstein, was considerably taller. Lem had an earthen ramp at the end of the barn that he used to load and unload smaller trucks and without hesitation he brought out the old cow and backed her up to the front of the ramp. The extra foot of elevation was all that was required as the young bull, who had a bit of experience in what to do, quickly took care of business. Could that be the solution – it was worth a try.

Earl had a machine shed with an asphalt apron in front of the door. It sloped down from the door and there was a drop of around a foot on either side. I backed the mare up to the side of the ramp, close to the door and Earl brought out Hussy Chaser. After a bit of squealing and prancing around he was manoeuvred into place and two of the farm hands encouraged him to get his front legs up onto the mares back. What followed was worthy of one of those viral epic fail videos you see on YouTube.

In his efforts to get closer while standing on his hind legs gravity took control and his feet began to go downhill resulting in Hussy Chaser at right angles to his target. In the process he stepped off the tarmac and landed upside down with all four feet and his suddenly shrinking member pointed skywards.

But Hussy Chaser, just as in his racing career, was not that easily defeated. Shaking himself off he was soon ready for another try and another and another but gravity was just not cooperating. We were about to give up for the day, after all it had been over an hour and Hussy Chaser was showing the strain although throughout his embarrassing failures Lucky Hare had stoically remained in place in anticipation of better times.

In a last ditch attempt we decided to replace the two farm hands with something more substantial and two large round bales of hay were positioned on either side of the mare. Hussy Chaser responded with a reasonable imitation of a drunken sailor in a sloped floor bawdy house and somehow got the job done. To make sure we repeated the process the next day and this time Hussy Chaser, re-energized, had got the message. He was, however, quite a bit more aggressive and subsequent attempts to breed him to other mares saw that aggression escalate to the point that the mares were at risk. Lucky Hare was to be his first and last opportunity. I waited anxiously for the veterinarian to confirm that she was indeed in foal. The answer was yes – the journey was now beginning that would hopefully lead to a healthy foal.

To make sure the mare had every opportunity to carry and deliver successfully I turned to another longtime friend, Roddy MacLeod, a successful small breeder with a farm not far from Windemere. Roddy happened, coincidentally, to be the breeder of Scarlet Hussy, another yearling that I had bought under similar circumstances to my purchase of Hussy Chaser. That filly was by a pacing sire out of a trotting mare by Horton Hanover called Scarlet O'Horton. In another bit of deja-vu coincidence the first stakes winner owned by my trainer Earl Watts, was also from Scarlet O'Horton. Small world – isn't it.

The bay colt soon to be named Scarlet Chaser was born in late May and as if wanting to get at it as soon as possible he arrived a

little earlier than expected being born in the pasture where Roddy found him up and running and off to a fast start. I chose his name as a combination of my best two horses, Scarlet Hussy and Hussy Chaser, both horses that no-one thought would be any good. I suspect the many who laughed at my plan to create Scarlet Chaser had similar thoughts.



Look mom I Can walk on water. Scarlet Chaser at four days old.

Now two year old Scarlet Chaser is already bigger than his sire, his front end is far from perfect but his manners are just fine. Two out of three conformation issues solved and he has such a great gait that the front end problems are unlikely to slow him down. Now as he begins his racing career we will find out if he has inherited his daddy's guts. Already he is showing a remarkable similarity to his sire Hussy Chaser both in his development as a race horse and his racing style. In his racing career to date he has been a model of consistency earning a cheque in every start. He is not a champion yet but has shown that he has the guts and speed to become one. I am happy to wait for the day when I can say – told you so.

# Scarlet Chaser (2010)

