



THOUGHTS ON BREEDING

FROM A HALL OF FAME BREEDER

By Kim Skipton

Dr. Alan Raun needs no introduction as he is revered in both the American Saddlebred and Hackney worlds. His contributions to the Saddlebred are innumerable as he has touched the lives of many in his roles as a veterinarian, owner, trainer, judge, mentor and most importantly, as a breeder. Dr. Raun and his wife Doty have raised six children at their Reedannland Farm in Des Moines, Iowa and Dr. Raun has seen the Saddlebred breeding industry go through many changes over the years. I had a wonderful phone conversation with Doc shortly before he went off to the UPHA American Royal National Championship where he drove his home bred Reedann's Coronation to win the Three-Year-Old Fine Harness Stake. He also bred and showed Reedann's Dark Mystery to reserve in the Two-Year-Old Fine Harness Stake and then drove the Hackney Pony Steely Dan to win the UPHA Harness Pony Classic Grand Championship. In case you don't know, Dr. Raun earned these great titles at the age of 90! Among his many accolades, Dr. Raun was the first recipient of the ASHA C. J. Cronan Sportsmanship Award in 1986. He not only was awarded ASHA Breeder of the Year in 2011, but also was inducted into the ASHA Breeders Hall of Fame at the same time. In 2015, he received ASHA's Lifetime Achievement Award. Honored and respected by his peers, Dr. Raun has always been one of my heroes and I was thrilled that he so willingly shared some of his wealth of wisdom with me. Following are his takes on the Saddlebred breeding world (questions are in bold, Dr. Raun's answers in regular type).



Dr. Alan Raun & former stallion Que Pasa

First off, how many mares are you currently breeding each year and how many stallions do you stand? At Reedannland we are breeding anywhere from 40 to 50 mares a year, including those belonging to the farm. The farm owns the four stallions that we stand at stud.

Is that number down from past years? Oh yes, back in the heyday of our breeding program, Stonewall's Main Event sometimes had 75 to 80 mares booked to him in a year. He was syndicated and I feel like all of those investors did pretty well, plus we raised some very nice horses by him.

How many foals do you expect in 2018? We have about 20 due to foal this spring. Many of them are ours and we will train them and

hopefully sell them. We don't have a lot of outside training horses as our main income source. We breed our own mares to our own studs and market their offspring. That is how we have been most successful in recent years.

Does Reedannland show in the in hand division? We used to but not so much anymore. I certainly wouldn't rule it out in the future, but it takes a very special baby to compete in those classes.

Why do you think your foal numbers as well as those across the board have gone down? Well, I hate to say it, but I think transported semen and embryo transplant have played a big role in that. I was originally pro semen transport and, in fact, agreed to disagree with

"Nothing beats Mother Nature"

my friend Carter Cox on the subject. He was vehemently against it and now I have to believe he was right in many ways. For stallion owners, transported semen reduced the number of mare owners that would board their mares at the stallion owner's farm for breeding, which greatly reduced board income for the stallion owner. It also reduced the number of mare owners who would come to the breeding farm to see the stallion in person, visit their mares and new foals, and look at other, older offspring of the stallion. Lots of sales were made when mare owners came to Reedannland. We could usually sell them a long yearling or a prospect that they picked out.

Would you agree that semen transport has done some good for the industry?

Yes, in my opinion it has helped raise the quality of our breed as a whole. I do think it opened the door for a mare owner on one side of the country to be able to breed to a stallion across the country that they never would have bred to before due to the travel distance.

Your thoughts on embryo transfer? Embryo transfer has polarized the industry. Backyard breeders can't afford it. The very wealthy can end up dominating the industry as they have the means to get multiple embryos or oocytes out of one mare, year after year, and I don't know if that is always a good thing.

Is the majority of your breeding now done via transported semen? No. If we breed to outside mares, then yes. However, here on the farm, if we know a mare is clean, we often use live cover. Nothing beats Mother Nature. We are not the only industry that allows transported semen and embryo transfer. However, the most successful of all the breeds is the Thoroughbred and you have to wonder if requiring live cover is the reason behind a lot of their success.

Have you raised your stud fees to reflect the times? Actually, we have lowered our stud fees in an attempt to make it more affordable and to encourage more people to breed.

How do you feel about stallions that charge extremely high stud fees? If they can get it, that's great. I think every few decades a stallion or two will come along that gets really hot and starts to monopolize the industry. That's all fine but without some diversity and outcrosses, we could end up hurting the breed. You never want your gene pool to get too concentrated.

What is your opinion on line breeding? Line breeding or inbreeding as most call it is something I believe very strongly in. Humans have just 23 pairs of chromosomes but horses have 48. To concentrate the number of desired traits in a horse I think you need linebreeding, primarily on the distaff side. This will reduce the genetic possibilities.

Any thoughts on the proliferation of South African bred horses here in the States? I think they are importing some very nice horses but you know they all trace back to American bred horses. The ancestor of these current horses were exported to South Africa long ago and crossed with some of the native South African horses. So yes, they could be nice outcrosses but if you go far enough back on their pedigree you will find some of the best American blood.

How do you feel about the rising popularity of the Western and hunt seat classes at the shows? I think anything that gets people showing and gets these horses

in the ring is good. I will say that as a breeder, I don't aim to raise a Western pleasure prospect. When people would call me in the past and ask if I had any prospects for those divisions I used to tell them that I sure hope not! Unfortunately, not everything you breed can turn out to be a top show horse so it is nice to have a place for them. Our industry is changing and not every horse can be a five-gaited star and not every rider could ride one. We definitely need to tap into that market.

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Do you get the majority of your outside breedings from advertising? I would have to say that for us, it is more word of mouth. As I said before, we have lowered our stud fees and that helps bring more interest. We also donate a lot of stud fees to the various stallion service auctions across the country. We lose money on that but it may open someone's eyes to the stallions we have and we may get some repeat,

paid breedings if the stallion service purchaser likes their resulting foal.

Can you pick a favorite of all your breeding stallions over the years? That would be Phi Slama Jama. He was a very popular and prolific breeding horse for us. He was an extremely beautiful animal. Phi was line bred and traced to Denmark's Bourbon Genius three times in the second generation of his pedigree. His daughters have really gone on to be top broodmares. I bred him to a lot of daughters of Stonewell's Main Event as I had so many. I also bred him to a lot of Supreme Sultan mares. He got a bit of a reputation for siring beautiful horses without a lot of motion. My only regret with Phi is that I didn't breed him to mares by ^{CH}Will Shriver or ^{CH}Yorktown. I think some of that strong blood would have helped his offspring in the show ring.

What about ^{CH}The Talk Of The Town? Grand horse, but he definitely needed mares with quality bred to him. You really have to study the pedigrees of both the stallion and mare and try not to enhance any faults. And again, I believe in doing some line breeding on the dam side. You know, Jean McLean Davis never bred much to Talk, either before or after she sold him to me. Daughters of ^{CH}The Talk Of The Town have been wonderful producers and I think daughters of his close relative ^{CH}Man On The Town should be great producers as well.

Can you name a favorite horse from all of the great ones that you have raised? I would have to name two, Five-Gaited Worlds' Grand Champion ^{CH}Breaking News and Five-Gaited Ladies Mare and Ladies/Amateur Mare World's Champion ^{CH}Jaunty Janette. It was such a thrill to have bred the world's grand champion and ^{CH}Jaunty Janette was just very special. And both were sired by Talk Of The Town.



The Mystery Writer & Dr. Alan Raun