

Cracking the Champion Code with Scott Hagan

A Deep Look into the Philosophy of World's Grand Champion Breeder

by Kim Skipton

1. How many mares are you breeding each year, and how many stallions do you stand?

Hagan Saddlebreds currently has 17 mares. I stand three stallions: HS Daydream's Masterpiece (blind full brother to WGC HS Daydream's Heads Up), HS Daydream's Dignity (full brother to WC HS Daydream's Celebrity) and HS Castle Vision (full brother to WGC ^{CH}Castledream).

2. How many foals do you expect in 2021, and is that more or less than in past years?

HS is expecting 35 foals in 2021 — approximately double the number we have in a normal foal crop of 15 to 18. Fred Sarver's, Rood & Riddle's, and Dr. Rob Foss' embryo/oocyte programs were particularly successful in 2020, with one mare producing five embryos, which resulted in pregnancies plus the mare is carrying one.

3. Which specific bloodlines do you look for when selecting a broodmare?

I'm only interested in mares with hot, game bloodlines that usually have only a few traces to WGC ^{CH}Valley View Supreme. His bloodlines "added the pretty" but sometimes took away gameness, length of front legs and prominent withers.

When I analyze the bloodlines of mares, I study the pedigrees for gameness, motion, conformation, quality, attitude and charisma. I also try to talk with people who worked them and knew them as performance horses. To gain insight into the histories of the families, I discuss the pedigrees with experts like Hoppy Bennett and Fred Sarver. The ability to tap information about third and fourth generation horses in their pedigrees is very interesting and helpful to me.

The bloodlines I am most fond of go back to WC Attache — through his son Attache's Born Believer, WGC ^{CH}Will Shriver — through his sons WCC ^{CH}Caramac and WC Callaway's Blue Norther, Undula's Nutcracker, ^{CH}Courageous Admiral and The New York Times. When I analyze pedigrees, I am so grateful to Betty Weldon [and] her Callaway Hills. I wish I had met her, as her contributions to our breed are inestimable. Without the gameness she kept in her pedigrees, our breed would be in a world of hurt today. Without her contributions, we wouldn't have the pleasure of seeing the strong trot and bottomless gameness of the likes of WGC ^{CH}Callaway's Annabel Allison. The traits seen in this mare seem to be diminishing today.

Mares must "stand on their own." I've learned the hard way that you don't buy a mare and think you can successfully fix her with a stallion. She has to have it all on her own merit. I've bought mares and said, "If she just had this or that, she would be perfect." I thought I could fix their less desirable traits with traits of the studs I bred her to, but it didn't work. I remind myself of what a friend told me once, "If Grandma had balls, she'd be Grandpa." And so it is with mares. If they



don't have nearly all of this and all of that, I don't buy or keep them.

When I first saw George Knight show WC A Daydream Believer (BHF), I literally was dumbfounded. *She had it all.* Most importantly, she had the fiery eyes of a dragon, wild, barely tamable. Beautiful head, long hooked neck, prominent withers, fabulous slope to her shoulders, long front legs set far forward on her shoulders, short back, long underline, beautiful bend at her hocks, high-set tail, extreme motion and what old timers (I guess I'm one now) would describe as, "She had an oily way of going and rolled her shoulders."

A few years after I bought *ADB*, I bought her full sister, RWC I Am The Dream (BHF). *IATD* has produced multiple: WCC ^{CH}HS Baby Steps, WCC ^{CH}HS I'm A Dreamer, WC HS I'm Hot Wired, RWC HS Honor Thy Mother, etc.

What was the difference in *ADB* and *IATD*? *ADB* didn't need any fixing. She produced World's Champions by three different stallions (WC Castle Bravo, WC Sir William Robert and Undula's Nutcracker), including Fine Harness World's Grand Champion ^{CH}Castledream and Three-Gaited WGC HS Daydream's Heads Up. She also produced WC HS Daydream's Celebrity, WCC ^{CH}HS Dignitary, WCC HS Decorum, et al. All *ADB* needed was a stud not to detract from her. *IATD* has less quality, shorter neck, longer back and shorter front legs that are set back under her. She needed studs to add the quality, lengthen her neck, shorten her back, and hardest of all, to throw offspring with long front legs set far forward on her shoulders. Sir William Robert did that with ^{CH}HS Baby Steps and *Nutcracker* did it with ^{CH}HS I'm A Dreamer, HS I'm Hot Wired and HS Honor Thy Mother. But it took a lot more work to get that done than it did with *ADB*.

So, the long and short of the story is start with mares that have it all. Spend more to get the best and don't think a stud can readily fix a mare's less desirable qualities.

4. How important is pedigree?

Pedigree is everything. It tells you degree of gameness, the divisions the offspring are likely to succeed in, family traits that are both desirable and undesirable, what their

mental traits are likely to be, conformation defects, trainability, mental stability, etc.

It is astonishing to me how many people in the business know so little about pedigrees. I visited a trainer of a large stable and, as we went down the aisle, I asked him the breeding of each horse. He didn't know any of them. It was unbelievable to me that it wasn't important to him to know pedigrees and what the information in them would portend regarding each horse.

Why is the analysis of pedigrees an entire sub-industry of the thoroughbred industry? Because it matters! At what distance will any particular horse likely race successfully? What is the durability of its conformation? What is the likelihood of its ability to pass along the desired traits? What are the conformation and personality defects in its family?

So, give me the hotblooded mares and game, strong, bottomless studs that trace back to Attache, WGC ^{CH}Wing Commander, ^{CH}Caramac, Callaway's Blue Norther and ^{CH}Will Shriver. Give me the mares that were darn near too hot to train — borderline criminals that have all the other traits, and I'm going to have a chance to breed a WC or WGC.

Redd Crabtree became a friend of mine late in his life. He would say, "Breed for motion first." The hierarchy of traits I look for, after liking a pedigree, is, in descending order: gameness, athleticism, conformation, quality and charisma. Is my hierarchy much more complicated than Redd's? Not really, because the likelihood that a horse can have motion (athleticism) without gameness and conformation is zero. Furthermore, gameness doesn't fall out of the sky. It comes from pedigree. So, in the end, Redd's adage, "breed for motion first," encompasses everything except quality and charisma, which, at the end of the day, are icing on the cake of the other traits.

Hoppy Bennett has taught me so much about pedigrees, especially "trailer trash pedigrees" and how bad traits, even three to four generations back, pop up and bite you. He has taught me how to pick apart pedigrees to help figure out what is likely or at least possible to occur, both for good and for bad in any mating being considered. As far as "trailer trash pedigrees" and how you can't overcome them, I've had

my own bad experiences. I've bought young horses that looked like world beaters but had bad pedigrees. Screwed me every time. And there is one young horse in the business I've been watching very closely for a couple of years. I know his sire's and dam's pedigrees very well. I quit breeding to his sire because his babies weren't bottomless and too many were flashes in the pan that ultimately were quitters. I can't wait to see if that horse's pedigree on the sire's side haunts him.

5. Do you use live cover, transported semen, embryo transplant, oocytes, etc.?

We use transported semen for mares [that] will carry their own foals and for embryo transplants, but use frozen semen for oocytes. Many of my foals are by deceased stallions such as The New York Times, RWC I'm Lookin' For You and WC Our Axel Rose. Due to the limited availability of their semen, we have to go the oocyte route.

6. What specific bloodlines do you look for when choosing a stallion?

The studs I'm breeding to today match well with some of my mares, but none matches with all of my mares.

Undulata's Nutcracker: What more needs to be said? *Nutcracker* is the best sire of our time and has brought back to the breed what was waning (gameness, athleticism, strong trot and charisma). His ^{CH}Caramac top side and The New York Times bottom side (royal breeding with a capital "R") make him one of the all-time greats whose name should be spoken whenever a very short list of the greatest of all time are discussed. Look in the ring. Look at the stats. Look at the judges' cards. Look at the top producing sires in all divisions. Now consider where our breed would be today without this magnificent stallion.

Carl Lynn: A grandson of ^{CH}Caramac (the stud that, in my opinion, produced hotter offspring than any stud in the last 50 years) and out of Carol Lynn (BHF). ^{CH}Caramac is a son of *Nutcracker* and Carol Lynn (BHF) [and] is by one of the great broodmare sires of our time, RWC ^{CH}The Talk Of The Town, and she is out of a full sister to HS Daydream's Heads Up, making the colt line bred to *Nutcracker*.

RWC I'm Lookin' For You: I'm not an expert on this horse's pedigree, and the Roseridge Heir x Worthy Son bloodlines are something I'm experimenting with. But the facts are that this horse had an extremely high "hit rate," given the few mares he bred before his untimely death, and so I'm grateful that Kaye Bowles-Durnell sold me some of his frozen straws. This horse is a three-fourths brother to Samur, and since I own the straws and slightly prefer I'm Lookin' For You dam's bottom side, I'm breeding to him. In 2019, I bought Lady Lyra (dam of current Five-Gaited WGC I'm Lookin' At You) and now have a full sibling due in 2021. Lady Lyra is by *Nutcracker* and out of a WC Belle Reve's Renaissance Man mare. *Renaissance Man* was nearly 100 percent Chief. For those of you who don't know about the Chief, Denmark and Peavine original families of our breed, you should edify yourself. If *Renaissance Man* mares are high-headed, they are interesting to me.

Our Axel Rose: Although his sire, RWC I'm A New Yorker, has some traits I don't like, I love his ^{CH}Courageous Admiral bottom side and really liked this horse as an individual. Our Axel Rose was weak

behind but otherwise had everything I look for. Since I have high-headed mares, most with strong back ends, I like breeding to him. All the stuff about this horse once being a "bad actor" can be chalked up to "environmental inputs" and ignored. I have already bred RWCC HS Rose's Knockout (RWCC) and WC HS As Lovely As Ever. His offspring are gifted and hot but trainable by calm, talented trainers.

Northern Vegas: With Callaway's Blue Norther on his top side and WCC ^{CH}Santana Lass (by the great sire The New York Times) on the bottom side, this horse should continue producing high-caliber horses, and his progeny are already making a big splash in the ring. I only have one foal on the ground by him, but she is magnificent and I will cross this stud with a lot of my mares.

The New York Times: By New Yorker and out of an Oman's Desdemona Denmark mare with two BHF grand dams (one being Reverie's Desdemona (BHF), easily and arguably one of the top five broodmares of all time), The New York Times is the sire of fabulous horses such as Cherry Cherry (BHF), Lass Vegas, WC ^{CH}Undulata's Perfect Gift ERB (BHF), WCC Princess Stephanie ERB, WC ^{CH}That's My Story (BHF), Christmas In New York ERB (BHF), WCC ^{CH}The L. A. Times, WC ^{CH}Times Best, WCC ^{CH}Wall Street Week and WCC ^{CH}Best of Time, and he crosses well with my mares. I have bred and raised RWC HS Times Are Changing and HS The New York Times Best Seller by him.

WC Mountainview's Heir To Fortune: By WC Supreme Heir and out of a RWC ^{CH}Starlike Sultan daughter, this line bred Supreme Sultan stud adds athleticism and trainability, and I have had good success breeding big mares to this stud of Fred Sarvers.

RWC Joe Fabulous: by I'm A New Yorker (RWC) but with a wonderful ^{CH}Courageous Admiral bottom side, I like this cross with a few of my mares and have a wonderful 2019 colt out of WC HS Daydream's Fashionista.

There are a few other studs that I haven't had the opportunity to cross my mares with whose pedigrees I like, such as Arrowhead's Bateleur (grandsire Callaway's Blue Norther, line bred to ^{CH}Courageous Admiral, Booker Noe (*Nutcracker* on top and Evangelique (BHF), by Harlem Globetrotter on the bottom) and RWC Noble Braveheart (second and third generation Callaway's Blue Norther and ^{CH}Caramac on the top side and double bred WC Royal Memories on the bottom side shows a lot of potential).

HS Daydream's Masterpiece: This completely blind full brother to Three-Gaited WGC HS Daydream's Heads Up (by *Nutcracker* and out of *ADB*) has been lightly bred as most of my mares are too closely bred to him. However, the mares I have bred to him, including daughters of Callaway's Blue Norther, ^{CH}The Talk Of The Town and *Nutcracker*, have produced great offspring. My best two-year-old is a filly by him and out of a Blue Norther mare. Jim Stachowski has a two-year-old daughter out of a ^{CH}The Talk Of The Town mare that is stunning, and I have a 2021 foal due out of Lady Lyra (dam of Five-Gaited WGC I'm Lookin' At You). These babies have extreme high headedness, are very athletic and exude quality. Nelson Green and Jim Stachowski saw HS Daydream's Masterpiece as a long yearling right before he was blinded in a stable accident and both thought he was one of the best prospects they had ever seen.

7. What is your opinion on line breeding?

Line breeding is one of the most important aspects of successful breeding. I have owned and hunted English

Pointers from Alaska to Georgia since I was 12. The foremost breeder of English Pointer hunting dogs since the 1950s was Robert Wehle (spelling his last name backwards created his Elhew Kennels). Mr. Wehle bred hunting pointers for 60 years. He started with five dogs and line bred those five dogs each year, keeping the best male and a few of the best females. Other than small amounts of outcrossing to two particular stud dogs approximately 40 years into his breeding program, there was no outside blood introduced. Elhew Kennels became famous for producing conformationally consistent and emotionally stable dogs of unparalleled talent. The homogeneity of his dogs was world famous.

Line breeding, when done carefully, and with particular consideration of the individuals being mated, is the most successful way to eliminate variables that are undesirable and promote and enhance desirable traits. I just shake my head when I hear people say, "Breed the best to the best and hope for the best." To me, that is uninformed gibberish. Know your mare. Know the stud. Know the families. Cross families with families that are proven crosses. And when you have the chance to breed tight and close do it.

So, in my opinion, line breeding eliminates a lot of variables and creates a consistency of progeny that outcrossing is less successful at. Can you breed too close? Sure, but I am not hesitating crossing *Nutcracker* sons to *Nutcracker* daughters if the bottom sides of the mares are reasonably outcrossed.

8. Do you think the rising popularity of the Western and hunt seat divisions will help you as a breeder?

Not really. If I produce a horse that fits into these divisions, I have failed as a breeder, although I believe these divisions are important for our breeders to attract a wider variety of buyers and to have divisions for horses that would not be successful in the "higher" divisions. I am probably different than most breeders. My primary goal isn't to breed a lot of marketable babies. By that, I mean I'm willing to push the limits that may produce colts that are too hot for little Susie but have a higher chance of meeting my primary goal, which is to produce World's Champions and World's Grand Champions that, almost by definition, will be difficult. I'm breeding to produce superstars. In that quest, there are always lots of colts that don't make the cut, but when you succeed at producing a great one, the sense of achievement is exhilarating.

9. Do you show your colts in the in hand division? Why or why not?

Never. If I have a foal I think can win those classes then I have a foal I definitely would not do that to. I feel it is too stressful mentally and physically on them and, with very few exceptions, dooms them from becoming competitive performance horses. If you analyze the stallions that produce successful in hand babies, they almost without exception are not stallions that produce world-class performance horses, which is all I'm interested in.

10. What impact do you want your breeding program to leave on the industry?

I hope that HS's legacy is associated with world-class performance horses that are hot as fire and bred to go the distance. Horses that have/had quality and a "look" that is identifiable as an HS horse. Mrs. Weldon accomplished that, and although I won't have 10 percent of the impact on our breed that she had, I hope to leave a significant, discernible mark on the breed.