



# op/ed

by rob whiteley

## IT'S TIME FOR ANOTHER ... AND ANOTHER

A long-time breeder friend phoned recently to say how disappointed he is that I'll Have Another was sold to foreign interests and is lost to American breeders. He went on to say that he sees fewer and fewer top-class options available to commercial breeders and that recent sales of stallions like Empire Maker, Dehere (for the second time), Lion Heart, and Henny Hughes and the deaths or retirement of Indian Charlie, Dixie Union, A.P. Indy, Dynaformer, Grand Slam, and Lawyer Ron make him even more worried about "falling further behind the rest of the world."

My first thought was thank goodness that the purchasers chose I'll Have Another and not his young and already proven sire Flower Alley. My second thought was that there has been a lot of chatter lately about "falling behind" and the quality of American bloodstock compared to the rest of the world.

I'm not sure the quality issue can be sorted out to anyone's satisfaction. It is not possible to get a true or definitive read on the relative merits of America's stallions and pedigrees versus international stallions and pedigrees because the progeny do not race against each other often enough. Only frequent head-to-head racing on the same surfaces under the same set of rules and circumstances can determine overall quality comparisons. So, spending time on which is "best" is rather pointless, as there is no way for anyone to actually prove their opinion. Each reader is free, however, to decide for themselves which basket of 20 representative top stallions they would choose, if they were given one and only one:

**Basket A.** Awesome Again – Bernardini – Candy Ride – City Zip – Distorted Humor – Elusive Quality – Giant's Causeway – Kitten's Joy – Malibu Moon – Medaglia d'Oro – More Than Ready – Pulpit – Smart Strike – Speightstown – Stormy Atlantic – Street Cry – Tapit – Tiznow – Unbridled's Song – War Front.

**Basket B.** Danehill Dancer – Dansili – Deep Impact – Dubawi – Empire Maker – Exceed And Excel – Fastnet Rock – Galileo – High Chaparral – Holy Roman Emperor – Invincible Spirit – King Kamehameha – Lonhro – Monsun – New Approach – Oasis Dream – Pivotal – Redoute's Choice – Rock Of Gibraltar – Shamardal.

**American bloodstock at a tipping point?** Apart from chatter related to the "U.S. vs. the World superiority debate," it is nonetheless fair to ask what effects many years of "taking the money" might have had on the overall quality of today's American bloodstock. It is part of the public record that for nearly 40 years, American horsemen have *exported* a very large number of top quality foals, yearlings, broodmares, stallion prospects, and proven stallions, *with relatively little importation*. Given this history and with no unified plan in place for securing a long-term future for American breeding and racing, could it now be time to "pay the piper?"

**Generational amnesia.** However we answer the above questions, it appears that most modern American horsemen have lost sight of how American bloodstock rose to prominence.

A lyric from Simon and Garfunkel's *Mrs. Robinson* recently had extra meaning for me: "Where have you gone, Joe Dimaggio? A nation turns its lonely eyes to you. What's that you say, Mrs. Robinson? Jolting Joe has left and gone away." As I finished listening I started thinking, 'Where have you gone Colonel Bradley, Arthur Boyd Hancock, Bull Hancock, John Galbreath, E.P. Taylor, and John Gaines?' These were all extraordinary people with keen vision who understood the importance of reaching across continents for the best bloodlines available in order to bolster and build an American industry that would prosper and endure.

**We need to remember how our American industry was established.** American breeding and racing grew to a position of world leadership because of *importation*, not exportation. Without going into a detailed history of the American turf, imagine what Kentucky breeding and the rest of the domestic business would be like if these forefathers had not reached out beyond our shores for bloodstock of the highest quality.

Colonel Bradley of Idle Hour Farm, a constant innovator like Gaines, purchased the French-bred mare, La Troienne, at Newmarket and infused the American gene pool with incredible quality that still percolates through today's graded stakes and Classics. (Ogden Phipps built a successful program for himself and his family on the back of Colonel Bradley and La Troienne by acquiring a number of Bradley's mares after his death, including the great mare's blue-hen daughter, Baby League.)

Arthur Boyd Hancock from his base at Ellerslie Stud and then Claiborne, utilized a consortium to acquire Sir Gallahad III and Blenheim II.

Imagine if Nasrullah was not imported by Bull Hancock, et al. We would not have had Bold Ruler, Secretariat, Ruffian, and a core group of legacy stallions and racehorses.

Without John Galbreath reaching beyond the Bluegrass to import Ribot, we would not have the important stamina influences provided by that great horse and his sons Graustark, His Majesty, and Tom Rolfe (who in turn sired Key to the Mint, Pleasant Colony, and Hoist the Flag, respectively).

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If E.P. Taylor had not purchased Hyperion's daughter Lady Angela at Newmarket and then bred her to Nearco before importing her to North America to produce Nearctic, we would have had no Northern Dancer (nor would the world have had Nijinsky, Storm Cat, Sadler's Wells, Danehill, or Galileo).

The last of the great importers who championed the long-term viability of American breeding and racing was the genius innovator, John Gaines. He added Sharpen Up, Vaguely Noble, Blushing Groom, and Irish River to our genetic treasure chest, and repatriated Riverman and Lyphard.

Unfortunately, at present we have no American-based individuals, entity, or groups taking the baton from these historical giants to provide forward reaching stewardship for our industry.

**America at a crossroads.** Whether or not one believes that the quality of American bloodstock has declined compared to other parts of the world, it is hard to deny the common sense of trying to infuse American pedigrees with the blood of truly superior racehorses and sires wherever they can be found and obtained, after many years of domestic attrition and depletion. Especially during this time of globalization of racing, we need American leadership that can revitalize America's bloodlines in order to maintain our prominent place in a rapidly changing international scene.

It's time to search beyond our boundaries for another La Troienne or Lady Angela. And it's time to find and import the next Sir Gallahad III or Nasrullah.

**Men or women of wealth and vision need to step up on behalf of the industry.** What has always been *mostly* a rich person's game is becoming *almost exclusively* a rich person's game. Therefore, only wealthy American horsemen can lead the way in maintaining a prominent position for American breeding (and racing). If the path to long-term prosperity includes a serious venture into importation as I believe it does, then only people of wealth and financial staying power can succeed at importing because several major obstacles make the journey expensive, drawn-out, and problematic.

First, stallions or stallion prospects of the highest quality typically command very steep prices. Secondly, extended staying power is required because quite a few American horsemen have a bias against foreign horses and families and are often reluctant to accept them commercially. Whether it is a lack of understanding, a fear of the unfamiliar, or a misplaced sense of "nationalism," progeny of imported stallions often do poorly in the marketplace. Engaging in importation, therefore, means that participants must have deep pockets and be able and committed to staying the course.

Our American experience with Candy Stripes is a perfect example of the negative bias that must be extinguished. A Kentucky-bred son of Blushing Groom, Candy Stripes raced in France before becoming an outstanding stallion in Argentina. Imported to the U.S. to stand at stud, he was quickly sent packing back to South America because of non-acceptance by American breeders and buyers.

Of course, Candy Stripes subsequently became the sire of American turf champion Leroidesanimaux (sire of Kentucky Derby winner Animal Kingdom) and Breeders' Cup Classic winner Invasor. In addition, the currently successful American stallion, Candy Ride (who was also slow to gain acceptance in the marketplace despite an exceptional race record), is out of a daughter of Candy Stripes.

Going forward, we need to overcome these obstacles in an innovative way.

**A plan of action.** As in most instances, innovation does not mean re-inventing the wheel. We have a proven model to follow, one which has given us what we enjoy today. Arthur Boyd Hancock gave us the template nearly a century ago.

Hancock and his buddies William Woodward, Robert Fairbairn, and Marshall Field each took a quarter-interest when they purchased Sir Gallahad III (paying a record price for a French stallion at the time). And of course Sir Gallahad III sired Triple Crown winner Gallant Fox in his first crop before going on to be leading sire four times and leading broodmare sire 12 times, 10 of them consecutively.

A.B. Hancock did it again with four other partners (William du Pont, John Hertz, Warren Wright, and John Hay Whitney) when he acquired Blenheim II who was already a leading sire, and had the 1936 English Derby winner Mahmoud racing at time of purchase. (Blenheim also sired a Triple Crown winner in his first crop, Whirlaway.)

We need a contemporary group of American billionaires and mega-millionaires (and we have quite a few) to step up in a similar way. If American horsemen and horsewomen of wealth can find a way to partner together to purchase and import several outstanding international sires and prospects, it will stimulate additional foreign interest in America's horses and provide a protection against possible negative effects on our domestic gene pool of many years of exportation. As we have frequently observed, imported stallions generally require extra support to have sufficient time and opportunity to develop into successful commercial sires. Therefore, a strong co-op or consortium arrangement should be considered in order to spread the risk and provide a joint marketing effort that is powerful enough to overcome the marketplace mindset against "foreign" horses. Such an effort would be an important short-term investment in maintaining America's prominent place in international sales and racing, and would be a wise long-term investment in the future quality of its bloodstock.

**Comments for publication? Email [suefinley@thetdn.com](mailto:suefinley@thetdn.com)**

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