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For Albertans About Albertans

Breeding Alberta

By Alex Grayton

Finding a top level show jumping horse is a difficult task. There are thousands of horses competing in the sport at various levels, so trying to find the right one for you is like looking for a needle in a hay stack. But to look one level earlier in a horse's progression to the level of sport, breeding horses for show jumping is even more of an exercise in a chance.

It can be said that the dedicated and enthusiastic breeders of show jumping horses have been struck with a passion for our equine partners, and without them, our sport would stagnate, excitement would wane, and the potential of growing and developing the next Hickstead or Arko or Big Ben would be lost.

Alberta is unequivocally the horse capital of Canada. According to the statistics published by Equine Canada yearly, Alberta has more horses than any other province, and more people actively involved in equine sports. With the top-ranked show jumping venue in North America, according to the North American Riders Group (NARG), Spruce Meadows, in Calgary itself, and a growing and very popular venue in Rocky Mountain Show Jumping (RMSJ) just five minutes away, the sport of show jumping is alive and well.

While many of the top riders in North America travel to Europe to buy horses for the top end of sport as well as for their clients, Canadian and more specifically Alberta breeders have been working hard to catch up and develop top quality horses that only need the opportunities to be developed into world class superstars.

It is hard to argue against the quality product that European bloodlines have produced over the past half-century, as Dutch, German, Belgian and French studbooks have been the overwhelming success stories in our sport. The World Breeding Federation for Sport Horses (WBFSH) is a sort of conglomeration of the major studbooks around the world, designed to promote the member studbooks, stimulate the development of breeding for sport around the world, and improve cooperation among the stakeholders of breeding for sport around the world. The WBFSH compiles rankings on a monthly basis, organized for show jumping, eventing, and dressage, from the FEI world rankings system for horses that compete in international competition (i.e. the horses that are really at the top of their own sport).

The year-end ranking of the WBFSH for 2013 for show jumping horses confirms the above statement of European dominance at the highest level. The studbook that produced the best results for show jumping over the course of 2013 was KWPN (Dutch Warmblood), followed by the BWP (Belgian Warmblood), Selle Francais, Holsteiner, and Belgian Sport Horses (SBS).

While there may not be many Canadian bred horses that made the list to pump up the Canadian Warmblood or Canadian Sport Horse, there is still a lot of good news to be taken from the WBFSH list for Canadian and Alberta breeders. Alberta's breeders are doing an excellent job of keeping up with trends in the sport. Breeders have imported mares to Alberta from Europe that help establish a foundation for the next generation of Alberta-born sport horses. Not only that, but all of the horses that Alberta riders have imported over the years from Europe to go right away into top sport can add to the genetic pool, so to speak, for future breeding in Alberta.

As a result, there is now a wealth of quality bloodlines available in Alberta. The pedigrees of the stallions that stand in Alberta are so similar to the pedigrees of the top horses on the WBFSH list!

Equitop Farms is an Alberta breeder of historically Hanoverian bloodlines. Many readers may know them for their stallion, Portland L, who is by the renowned stallion Pilot, out of a Ramiro mare, and who goes back to Thoroughbred breeding as great-grandsire. Portland L himself had a very successful career in show jumping in Europe under Marco Kutscher (Olympic bronze medallist in 2004). What is perhaps even more exciting is the future for Equitop Farms – Quidam Blue. This progeny of Quidam's Rubin, out of a Come On x Pilot mare, has been under the tutelage of Canadian Olympian Jill Henselwood for the past year, and looks to remain there as a potential contender for Nations Cup and major games teams. This is a shining example of the exciting bloodlines available in Alberta!

Two stallions stand in Alberta that are by two-time Olympian Carthago Z. Jos Lansink rode Carthago Z in both the Atlanta and Sydney Olympic games, and represented Holland in 15 Nations Cups. Carthago Sun I and Carthago Sun III are both out of the mare Davos, who is by the Thoroughbred stallion Schampus. Davos herself has a storied history, and her grand-dam is a full sister to the mare that produced the illustrious Holsteiner stallion Come On and the wildly successful mare Fleur (ridden by Michael Whitaker and Ray Texel). Schampus is by Julio Mariner, a Thoroughbred stallion known for steeplechase, and is really sought after in European studbooks for show jumping prowess. Carthago Sun I stands at JES Breeding in Calgary and Carthago Sun III stands at Wachter Horses in Red Deer County.

Cardento shares the same sire as Carthago – Capitol. On the dam's side, Cardento traces back to the great producer Lord and the Thoroughbred stallion Sacramento Song. Sacramento Song is the sire of Sandro, who was very successful with German rider Franke Sloothaak, and has produced over 40 horses who jumped at the highest level. Cardento himself was a true winner. He won silver medals at the European Championships, the World Equestrian Games, and the Olympic Games with Swedish rider Peter Eriksson! Lindsay Powell of LEAD Partners owns Caribbean, a stallion by Cardento, out of a Kilian x Athlet Z mare. Caribbean's dam, Kaprice, was very successful in sport herself, having won many classes up to 1.40m.

This is already a very impressive roster for breeding in Alberta, but there is more yet.

Ikoon is very well known in Western Canada. After a successful career in Holland with rider Leopold van Asten, where they represented their country in Nations Cups, Ikoon moved to Canada to continue his career as a producer of sport horses. Offspring of Ikoon have been very successful in the show ring already – Ulrike R won the CSI-W 3* Grand Prix of Tallinn, and went on to compete at the World Cup Finals. In Canada, an Ikoon offspring was the top seller at the Canadian Sport Horse Association Select Sale (Charly). Ikoon is one of only five approved stallions by Libero H, the winner of the World Cup Finals in 1994 with Jos Lansink. Two of the other Libero H sons are absolutely causing a stir in European breeding, as Ustinov and Numero Uno are both extremely popular for show jumping. In fact, at the 2013 Dutch Championships for show jumping, three of the top six horses in the final ranking were by Numero Uno, and Ustinov offspring are selling at sport horse sales in Holland as quickly as they can be developed. Ikoon's own successes, and his close relation to these success stories make Alberta breeding even more powerful. Ikoon stands in Calgary at Creekside Farm.

Salvatore is a KWPN stallion by the show jumping phenom Cavalier (also known as San Patrignano Mister). Cavalier was ridden to glory with Franke Sloothaak, winning over 40 international classes from Grand Prix to Puissance. Cavalier stems from a very famous dam line in Holland, the Sina line, that has produced many other famous show jumpers including Pierrot, ridden by Emile Hendrix, and Piccolino, ridden by Rene Tebbel. Salvatore's damsire Leandro, is also the sire of Levisto, who was ridden by the Belgian Judy-Ann Melchior to back-to-back victories in the Sires of the World competition at Lanaken in Belgium. Salvatore is owned and ridden by Alberta native Danielle van der Werf of Edmonton.

The stallions and bloodlines described above are really just a small snapshot of what Alberta breeders have to offer. The potential for show jumping superstars exists in our province, and with the unbelievable results that Alberta riders have been producing for the past few years, the future is certainly looking bright for breeding and young horse development right here at home!