

What does it take to be great?

Great broodmares require both opportunity and quality
to become Foundation Mares

by Rommy Faversham

AT WHAT point in her career does a great broodmare transform into a great matriarch, a true Foundation Mare? Furthermore, what are the some of the key factors that lead to such transcendence?

A great broodmare, no matter how many stakes winners she produces, depends on her daughters and granddaughters to perpetuate her family. And it is really the records of those female descendants that tell the tale.

For example, Fall Aspen produced a modern-record nine stakes winners, but it is her six daughters-three of them stakes winners themselves-who are well on their way to making their dam one of the most important matriarchs of the 21st century.

Perhaps the best way to measure a family's current strength is by determining its overall rate of success. This ratio, or percentage, can be calculated by dividing the number of superior individuals-stakes winners and group/graded winners-in the family by the total number of individuals the family has produced.

By evaluating these records, both quantitatively and qualitatively, one can better evaluate each family's ability to produce superior individuals.

Table 1 compares the records of United States Broodmares of the Year from 1975 to 1984. For each of these outstanding females, the first four columns shows the number of foals, number and percentage of stakes winners (SWs), number and percentage of graded or group winners (GSWs) and number and percentage of Grade/Group 1 winners (G1SWs) the mare herself produced. Columns five through eight show the same totals and percentages resulting from the foals of all of her daughters, their daughters, and so on, for all branches of the family trees through 2002.

In other words, columns five through eight for each mare in Table 1 evaluate how each of these ten broodmares have performed, so far, as a matriarch, the foundation root of her given family. As enumerated, these ten demonstrate a wide range of success in this capacity.

To provide a frame of reference for the figures in Table 1, Table 2 presents comparable figures for the average for the breed, foals by top 1% of sires, and two examples of breed shaping stallions.

Table 1

U.S. Broodmares of the Year 1975-1984

	Foals	SWs (%)	GSWs (%)	G1SWs (%)
1984 HASTY QUEEN	16	6	2	1
her daughters' branches	140	4 (3%)	2 (1%)	0 (0%)
1983 COURTLY DEE	18	8	7	2
her daughters' branches	215	29 (13%)	19 (9%)	7 (3%)
1982 BEST IN SHOW	18	4	4	1
her daughters' branches	494	53 (11%)	33 (7%)	16 (3%)
1981 NATASHKA	9	5	5	1
her daughters' branches	469	45 (10%)	23 (5%)	8 (2%)
1980 KEY BRIDGE	12	4	4	3
her daughters' branches	481	20 (4%)	13 (3%)	4 (<1%)
1979 SMARTAIRE	12	4	3	1
her daughters' branches	153	10 (7%)	7 (5%)	1 (<1%)
1978 PRIMONETTA	7	4	4	2
her daughters' branches	99	5 (5%)	2 (2%)	0 (0%)
1977 SWEET TOOTH	13	3	3	3
her daughters' branches	187	8 (4%)	4 (2%)	1 (<1%)
1976 GAZALA II	10	5	4	3
her daughters' branches	36	3 (8%)	2 (6%)	0 (0%)
1975 SHENANIGANS	6	3	3	1
her daughters' branches	74	13 (18%)	7 (9%)	2 (3%)

Table 2

AVERAGES FOR THE BREED	--	(3.2%)	(0.7%)	(0.2%)
Foals by Top 1% of sires	--	(9.1%)	(3.6%)	(1.2%)

COMPARISONS to Breed Shaping Stallions

	Foals	SWs (%)	GSWs (%)	G1SWs (%)
SADLER'S WELLS	1,073	173 (16%)	100 (9%)	51 (5%)
DANZIG	884	160 (18%)	90 (10%)	40 (5%)

Variable results

The ability of these ten outstanding broodmares to develop viable long-term families has proven to be surprisingly variable.

1984 Broodmare of the Year, Hasty Queen II (1963, One Count--Queen Hopeful, by Roman) has failed to establish a viable family of her own. Despite having five producing daughters, none of their branches have come close to issuing an individual as good as her own son, multiple Grade 1 winner Fit to Fight. Most remarkably, Hasty Queen produced more stakes winners herself than have her female line descendants.

Courtly Dee (1968, Never Bend-Tulle, by War Admiral), 1983 Broodmare of the Year, on the other hand would be an example of an outstanding producer whose daughters and granddaughters have gone on to forge one of the world's most celebrated contemporary families. As Table 1 demonstrates, her rate of success as a matriarch, so far, rivals those of current breed shaping stallions. In an amazing show of family depth, Courtly Dee has a total of ten daughters whose own branches have already produced graded/group winners. The family has also produced important sires such as Green Desert (59 SWs) and Twining (21 SWs).

The 1982 Broodmare of the Year, Best in Show (1965, Traffic Judge--Stolen Hour, by Mr. Busher) is another acclaimed broodmare who went on to become a breed-shaping matriarch. Her family represents one of the best sources of middle distance grass champions in the world today. As success so often leads to new opportunities, the Best in Show family has been the most prolific (494 foals) of the ten clans under review. Despite the relatively large numbers, the line has maintained an outstanding rate of success. Important sires tracing to Best In Show include El Gran Senor (54 SWs), Try My Best (32 SWs), Compliance (13 SWs) and Malinowski (13 SWs).

Natashka (1963, Dedicate-Natasha, by Nasrullah), 1981 Broodmare of the Year, is another blue hen from this era who has launched a very successful American family. Table 1 shows her overall rate of success as a matriarch is lower than those of Courtly Dee and Best In Show, but still well within the realm of an accomplished family. Mukaddamah (21 SWs) and sensational freshman sire Elusive Quality (8 SWs) are the clan's two most prominent contemporary stallions.

Daughters of the dam of champions Fort Marcy and Key To The Mint, 1980 Broodmare of the Year, Key Bridge (1959, *Princequillo--Blue Banner, by War Admiral)

received ample opportunities at stud. Nevertheless her tail-female line has not come close to consistently providing the kinds of superior performers normally issued by an elite family.

Smartaire (1962, *Quibu--Art Teacher, by Olympia), 1979 Broodmare of the Year, has become a good matriarch but not a great one. Her figures, from only a moderate sized family population, rank her below Courtly Dee, Best in Show, and Natashka, but still well above the averages for the breed. Important stallions arising from this clan include Smarten (49 SWs) and Quadratic (25 SWs).

Like Hasty Queen II, 1978 Broodmare of the Year, Primonetta (Swaps--Banquet Bell, by Polynesian), is a heralded broodmare who has become quite mediocre in the role of family matriarch.

Sweet Tooth (On-and-On--Plum Cake, by Ponder), 1977 Broodmare of the Year and dam of the great sire and broodmare sire Alydar, has likewise failed to impress as a matriarch, with rates of success not much greater than the averages for the breed.

1976 Broodmare of the Year, *Gazala II (Dark Star--*Belle Angevine, by L'Amiral), herself a French champion, produced three Grade 1 winners, including two more French champions. Despite this superb record at stud, the *Gazala II family actually teeters on extinction due to a rather extreme shortage of female representation throughout its few branches. In fact, of the 46 tail-female descendants of *Gazala II, only 13 have been fillies. Additionally all eight of the family's stakes winners have been colts or geldings. The result of this male dominance has been a severe inhibition of family growth, despite good rates of success from very limited opportunities.

The 1975 Broodmare of the Year, Shenanigans (Native Dancer--Bold Irish, by Fighting Fox) produced only two daughters. One was Ruffian, very possibly the best American racing filly of the 20th century. Her mortal breakdown in the Foolish Pleasure match race of 1975 left her dam with only one surviving daughter, Laughter, by Bold Ruler, to carry on the line. As Table 1 indicates, this single viable branch of Shenanigans has produced outstanding rates of success. As a result, the family appears to have overcome its initial phase of retarded growth and now has the look of an extended, breed-shaping clan for the future. Important stallions who descend in tail-female line from Shenanigans include Icecapade (73 SWs), On To Glory (32 SWs), Buckfinder (25 SWs), Blue Ensign (22 SWs), Private Terms (19 SWs), and promising freshman sire Coronado's Quest.

Opportunity vs. intrinsic quality

What does this statistical review suggest about the way Thoroughbred families grow and flourish?

The first requirement for a viable and successful family is adequate opportunity. In the case of the Shenanigans and *Gazala II clans, the number of foals generated over

time has been hampered by an insufficient number of female producers. Clearly, all broodmares, regardless of their potential, require sufficient opportunities to manifest their long-term influence.

On the other hand, while ample opportunity may lead, for a time, to the proliferation a given female line it certainly does not appear to be the sole reason why certain families become successful. For example, the mediocre figures in Table 1 put up by the Key Bridge line, despite an excellent number of opportunities, is a good illustration of this.

Ultimately, of course, it is racing success that determines the selection process. This implies that families, regardless of previous esteem, who fail to continue to produce enough superior runners will eventually recede in the overall population.

What, then, makes a family flourish? When does a great producer transcend to become a great "producer of producers" and beyond?

At the cellular level, this could involve issues involving the X-chromosome, or even more likely, mitochondria DNA which is known to be family specific but can be prone to change through random mutation. All of this would affect the long-term intrinsic qualities of a female line.

Then, there are the all-important interactions between sire and dam. Great matriarchs typically found key branches characterized by high levels of compatibility throughout their succession of male unions. These affinities can often be described in terms of inbreeding patterns as well as distinct body types.

Elite families also appear to be more apt to form auspicious relationships with particular sire lines. In the case of the Best in Show clan, for example, nine of the 17 Grade/Group1 winners have been sired by Northern Dancer-line stallions. As pointed out by John P. Sparkman in his Foundation Mares series, a remarkable number of the best representatives Natashka's family were sired by members of the *Ribot male line.

Whatever the causes, great matriarchs represent the origins for all of the significant clusters of matrilineal success scattered throughout the history of the breed. Establishing their relatively high rates of success in this capacity can help to distinguish them from the overwhelming majority of tail-female ancestors.

A catalog page does not reveal the level of opportunity available for different families. For example, two individuals who descend from Shenanigans and Smartaire respectively, could have catalog pages which look remarkably similar in the amount and quality of black type they contain. What Table 1 reveals is that the Shenanigans tribe did it with less than half the numerical opportunity. That might be valuable information to consider when appraising the family's likelihood of producing another top-notch horse.

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