

Perry Martin: Observations of a Breeder Pt. 1

April 29, 2015 6:13 AM | 0 Comments | Breeding, Triple Crown, West Region



Photo: Benoit Photography

Perry Martin

Editor's Note: Part I of this article appears in the May 2 edition of The Blood-Horse under the title "Observations of a Neophyte Breeder." [Order here.](#)

Part I: Getting Started

By Perry Martin

First and foremost I am a scientist specializing in failure analysis. Failure analysis uses many scientific tools, coupled with observation and deductive reasoning, to determine the root cause of product failures. The determination of what went wrong, along with the implementation of corrective actions, is the basis of product improvement. This works for all products; cars, airplanes, electronics and, yes, even Thoroughbreds.

The process of product improvement is never complete. The information passed along over multiple product generations and many incremental improvements moves the product ever closer to the unachievable—perfection. The process of product improvement is serious business and should never depend on luck.

When my wife, Denise, and I decided to get into the horse racing business as owners, we used the same approach taken when entering a cold swimming pool. First, we stuck in a big toe. We purchased 5% of a horse named Searchforthetruth from Blinkers On Racing partnerships. Greg Gilchrist is the reason we picked Blinkers On—we wanted to learn the business, and the best way to do that was to watch a top trainer.

Blinkers On was the complete owner experience. We got access to the backside and took advantage of it. We showed up for workouts, heard from Greg about what to look for, watched the care and feeding of the horses, and asked a lot of questions. Sometimes we made our presence known; sometimes we watched from afar. We also observed what other barns were doing differently.

What we observed in other barns helped us to develop the three H's for selecting a good trainer: hygiene, housekeeping, and horsemanship. I've been told this should all be covered under one "H." Maybe—our observations, however, tell us different. Let's start with hygiene. Do you wash your bottom with a sponge before you wash your face? If you do, I know where you can get a job as a horse washer. I've watched horses come in from morning works, get cooled out, washed, and put away without anyone checking/cleaning their feet. If a trapped pebble eventually causes an abscess, is this bad luck or poor hygiene?

We also observed poor practices usually occurred when the boss was not around to watch or, even though the boss was considered a good horseman, when he had multiple stakes winners to attend to. Housekeeping is picking up that stray horseshoe nail so that it doesn't find its way into a horse's foot, removing or covering sharp edges in a stall and around the shed row. Horsemanship is observing and knowing each horse and its needs.

I believe getting experience as an owner before becoming a breeder is very important. It seems to me that generation after generation of just being market breeders makes for great tradition but the valuable insight about why/how horses don't excel gets buried. As an example, let's go back to our first horse, [Searchforthetruth](#). He was finally going to run in his first stakes race, at a Northern California fair. We were on the road and halfway to the racetrack on race day when I got the call. A dumpster was outside the back of

Searchforthe truth's stall and the garbage truck slammed it into the stall wall. The horse spooked, jumping up on his hind legs, and hit his head on a low overhang. He had to be scratched. Dumpster positioning and low overhangs in stalls were housekeeping problems outside our control, at least for our one-day trip to the fair. If you don't start in a stakes you can't win a stakes.

I'm a fair handicapper, and I believe he had a good shot that day. Bad Luck? Concentrating only on racing wins as an indicator of breeding performance has its usefulness but it is certainly not absolute. There are many reasons horses do not win races. For another example, look at the run of **California Chrome** in the Breeders' Cup Classic (gr. I). According to Trakus, Chrome ran faster than any other horse in that race. Usually the fastest horse wins but not that race. Running 41 feet farther than the winner meant losing by a neck. Bad Luck?

Rather than focusing on the three H's, maybe the focus should be on the big "A" for attention to detail. My definition of "luck" is "Paying no attention to detail and still obtaining the outcome you desired." This philosophy has its roots in an interview with Arnold Palmer I watched as a kid. After Palmer had won a big tournament, the interviewer stated: "Well, Arnie, I guess this win was made possible after that lucky shot on 17." Palmer seemed stunned, then his face softened and he smiled saying: "Well, Bob, I find that the more I practice, the luckier I get!"

Arnold Palmer was a great example in not only how to approach life but also how to deal with the press. I'm still working on that last part. I should not get angry when reporters ask ignorant questions or write ignorant statements about Chrome's breeding, such as his being "ill-bred." I should probably just go with it or better yet use it as a teaching moment. "Yes, it's all just luck. I admit it. We are very lucky that all the really well-bred horses are so much slower than Chrome."

Breeders need to make a decision up front: whether to breed for the marketplace or breed to race. If DAP (Dumb Ass Partners) were breeding for the marketplace, then our purchase of Love the Chase was truly a dumb-ass move, as the lack of close-in, black type would have made for an anticipated low future sales price of our foals. However, since we are breeding to race, we could overlook the lack of black-type close in and focus on the pedigree potential of the mare. Veterinarian Dr. Tom Bowman and his wife, Chris, Bowman of Dance Forth Farm near Chestertown, Md., bred Love the Chase, a daughter of Not For Love. I believe the Bowmans also bred Love the Chase's dam, Chase It Down, a daughter of Polish Numbers out of the stakes-winning mare Chase the Dream, a daughter of Sir Ivor.

During the Triple Crown run I received a lot of requests for my time and either had to say, "No," or put them off to a later date. One request I put off was with pedigree analyst Rommy Faversham, who wanted to discuss Chrome's breeding. A couple of weeks after the Belmont Stakes (gr. I), Denise and I were returning from one of our visits to Harris Farms. We stopped at a restaurant for a cup of coffee, and I decided this was a good time to keep my promise and call Faversham. We ended up having a two-hour conversation, and I would have been happy to make it four. Faversham was knowledgeable, delightful, and had shared many of the same horse owner experiences.

A few days after our conversation Faversham sent me a copy of his book *Racehorse Breeding Theories*. I immediately went to Chapter 12 on Female Family Inbreeding and read it in full. Wow, why couldn't I have come across this sooner? It would have saved me a lot of research! The one section I'll never forget was at the end where he asked, what female family inbreeding lines will determine the champions 10 years from now? At the top of the list was "Numbered Account." (Love the Chase is inbred 3x3 to Numbered Account) I quickly turned to the front of the book and looked at the copyright date—2004. Wow, 10 years exactly!

John Avello (director of Race Sports Operations at Wynn Las Vegas), if you're reading this, how about a Kentucky Derby Futures line 10 years out based on breeding? I know someone you might want to ban from the Wynn racebook, because he's way too lucky!

READ Perry Martin: Observations of a Breeder Pt. 2

Perry Martin: Observations of a Breeder Pt. 2

April 29, 2015 6:11 AM | 0 Comments | Breeding, Triple Crown, West Region, Kentucky



Photo: Benoit Photography

Perry Martin

Editor's Note: Part I of this article appears in the May 2 edition of The Blood-Horse under the title "Observations of a Neophyte Breeder." [Order here.](#)

Part 2: Love the Chase

By Perry Martin

In **Part 1** I made some observations about luck. Don't get me wrong, I believe in luck, I just don't think it should be the basis of anyone's breeding business plan.

In matters of true random chance, I've never been very lucky. When the Mega Millions gets over \$100 million, I'll buy a ticket, but so far I've never cashed one. I understand the chances and am not very disappointed when I don't win.

Breeding horses involves chance. Breeding horses is very similar to playing blackjack (21) in a casino. The house has an edge, and you will win a few but usually the house will win more. In order to increase your money-winning percentage, you need either to be truly lucky or to understand the statistics to turn the edge to your favor. In blackjack this is done by "counting cards" to determine when the deck is "heavy" (in face cards and aces) and betting more when there is a higher probability of getting a good hand. You won't always win, but you will be more likely to when it matters most (when you bet heavy). Over time that edge should manifest itself as an over-all positive return.

As a breeder, how then do we stack the deck heavy? Female family inbreeding (FFI) offers a statistically significant improvement over other techniques for breeding champions.

Just as the heavy deck in blackjack, FFI stacks the mare's pedigree with desirable characteristics from a "foundation" mare. Female Family Inbreeding (FFI) is the duplication of a female ancestor, between both the sire and dam usually within five generations (5x5 or closer). Here in the States this is known as the Rasmussen Factor, named after Leon Rasmussen who wrote about this effect in the "Bloodlines" column for *Daily Racing Form*. Later in his career Rasmussen teamed with Rommy Faversham to co-author the book: *Inbreeding to Superior Females; Using the Rasmussen Factor to Produce Better Racehorses*. Faversham is the gentleman I wrote about at the end of Part 1. He went on to author *Great Breeders and Their Methods: Samuel Riddle, Walter Jeffords, and the Dynasty of Man o' War* and a chapter in the aforementioned, *Racehorse Breeding Theories*. Any or all of these books would be a great reference for anyone wanting to learn more about this subject. Faversham lays out the statistical analysis and also identifies the various forms of FFI.

Unfortunately, I did not rely on any of these references, although I am now continuing my self-education. No, I recognized the success of this breeding pattern through the study of the racing stables of Edward George Villiers Stanley, the 17th Earl of Derby. Equibase has pedigree records of these horses although other sources are needed for the racing records (unraced in North America). Lord Stanley was one of the most successful owner/breeders in England winning the Epsom Derby in 1924, 1933, and 1942; the Epsom Oaks in 1928 and 1945; the St. Leger Stakes in 1910, 1919, 1923, 1928, 1933, and 1943; the One Thousand Guineas in 1916, 1918, 1923, 1930, 1936, 1943, and 1945; and the Two Thousand Guineas in 1926 and 1944. Over and above his racing success was his breeding success mainly through his homebred horse Phalaris. Phalaris was a champion sprinter and the stallion responsible for establishing the most dominant sire line in Europe, and

later, in the United States through his four sons Fairway, Pharamond, Pharos, and Sickie. I found Lord Stanley's body of racehorse breeding work fascinating. All of these stallions can be found up and down the back-end of California Chrome's pedigree.

California Chrome's dam Love the Chase, 2014 California Broodmare of the Year, is inbred 3x3 to Numbered Account. Numbered Account was the 1971 2-year-old champion filly. She also has FFI influence being 4x5 to La Troienne and 5x5 to Selene.

I cannot take credit for going out and finding Love the Chase. She just happened to be purchased by Greg Gilchrist for Blinkers On Racing, the racing syndicate my wife, Denise, and I were associated with starting out as new owners. While we were racing Love the Chase, Denise and I were considering getting into breeding racehorses specifically because of the California-bred racing incentives. Not rushing into a new business, I took the time to study how successful breeders developed their racing and breeding stock. When we purchased 5% ownership in Love the Chase, I was not yet aware of the possibilities of her pedigree. We had a good experience our first year in the partnership and simply purchased 5% of all of the Blinkers On offerings for that second year. As the year wore on and I progressed into my breeding research, I began to get very interested in our worst-performing racehorse. We also owned part of stakes-winning fillies and mares, but I just didn't see the same breeding potential in them (knowing this goes against modern theory). I had become aware of the benefits of FFI and had researched Numbered Account and her lineage back to La Troienne. La Troienne had very good breeding but was an undersized filly and in seven starts racing in France and England had one second, one third, five unplaced finishes and the equivalent of \$146 won. Because of her small size and poor performance on the track, she was not considered a very good breeding prospect and was sold (Sound Familiar?). La Troienne now is considered as one of the most influential mares to be imported into the U.S. in the 20th century. I recommend you look up her offspring.

Love the Chase has produced four foals (delivering a full brother to California Chrome April 12), all by **Lucky Pulpit** . We have the financial ability to breed to any stallion; however, it's my belief there is no better match than Lucky Pulpit (more on that in Part 3). All three foals are chestnut. I'm told that when you breed a chestnut to a chestnut, there is 100% chance that the foal will be a chestnut. So far, so good. With other characteristics the mix is not that simple.

Intelligence is an important characteristic that plays heavily into the development of a racehorse. We have been given three very intelligent horses. Chrome always showed us he was quite smart, and he took to his training lessons well. I often tell the story of his 2013 sister who I believe to be the smartest of the three. She was in the pasture near her mom but standing at the fence staring for 20 minutes at the fence pole. I could not see what was so interesting until I went closer and saw that she was watching a line of ants going up and down the fence pole. This middle sibling is the smallest but also the most stubborn. Being small does not always translate to slow. Smaller horses carry less weight around the track, and if her stubbornness translates to tenaciousness on the track, then we're in for a treat.

Our 2-year-old (named Hope's Love) is in training now and is progressing steadily. If she does not perform on the track, she will not be culled from our stock as we have learned the lesson of both La Troienne and Love the Chase. I'll end with a quick discussion of our 2014 filly. I've already told you she is smart; she is curious, and has a wonderful disposition, but what is most exciting is her perfect conformation and large size. Our yearling is about as large as our 2-year-old. In addition, she is athletic, and there is no awkwardness at all.

What thought processes went into the stallion selection for breeding to Love the Chase? In Part 3 I'll discuss modern breeding theories and some of the tweaks I've applied.

READ Perry Martin: Observations of a Breeder Pt. 3



Tags

California Chrome · The Kentucky Derby Presented By Yum! Brands 2008 ·

The Kentucky Derby Presented By Yum! Brands 2009 · The Kentucky Derby Presented By Yum! Brands 2010 ·

Perry Martin: Observations of a Breeder Pt. 3

April 29, 2015 6:12 AM | 0 Comments | Breeding, Triple Crown, West Region, Kentucky



Photo: Benoit Photography

Perry Martin

Editor's Note: Part I of this article appears in the May 2 edition of The Blood-Horse under the title "Observations of a Neophyte Breeder." [Order here.](#)

Part 3: Stallion Selection

By Perry Martin

Previously I discussed our first racehorse, [Searchforthetruth](#), and how I liked his chances in an upcoming stakes race at a Northern California fair. Anyone who looked up his race record might be puzzled as to why, with a 5-5-5 record looking just at the 23 starts for Blinkers On, I would think he had a good shot to win his first stakes race. Good question. The answer lies in breaking down the overall data into sub-sets.

Have you heard the phrase, "Horses for courses?" If you look at "Search"'s 14 races run at [Golden Gate Fields](#) and Bay Meadows, there is only one win (7%). If you look at his nine races run at other tracks in California there are four wins (44%). He was a completely different horse on those racing surfaces. One of these wins was on the dirt at Solano, going six furlongs in 1:09.03! He won for fun that day pulling away from the field, and I believe he would have done well on any of the Northern California fair dirt tracks. I'm not trying to provide a handicapping lesson, only to demonstrate the importance of defining, separating, sifting, and prioritizing data subsets for inclusion into an analysis process. Now let's apply the process to stallion selection.

I believe I used both of the available computer-based nicking programs to evaluate the [Lucky Pulpit](#) /Love the Chase match. At that time one gave me a "C" while the other gave me a "C+". Anyone out there interested in breeding an average horse? Me either. Why then would I select that match? Easy, I didn't believe the computers. By the way, I just ran the same match on one of the programs and got an "A." It's getting better over time. To anyone not familiar with nicking, the central idea is that all bloodlines are not the same and that some specific combinations do better in producing desirable offspring than other combinations. What is better? Although the software algorithms are proprietary, they all look at some combination of percentage of starters, percentage of winners, money won, and number of stakes winners. That's easy enough, but then they use proprietary biasing protocols, giving more or less weight based on generation (closer carries more weight), sub-group populations (smaller groups less weight), etc. When evaluating the results, one must consider other biases that are not addressed in the software. One example that applied to Lucky Pulpit at the time was that new sires usually do not receive the best mares.

Before concentrating on what sire I selected for Love the Chase, it's probably best to take a step back and look at the process I used to find him. Again, you have to look at the mare's bloodline first. I made a decision that I would only look at "clusters." A cluster is the result of breeders' human nature. It occurs when one breeder produces a very good horse. Other breeders take notice and duplicate the cross, hoping to also get a good horse. The result is a fairly large population of a specific bloodline cross that is statistically significant. Being statistically significant simply means the results are more believable and not a fluke. As it takes multiple breeding seasons and years of racing results to develop a cluster, it is necessary to skip a generation in the pedigree for the analysis. For this reason I looked at the performance of Mr. Prospector mares against the major sire lines.

To make a long story short, one of the most intriguing crosses I found for Mr. Prospector mares was A. P.

Indy. A. P. Indy through Seattle Slew brings in two more lines back to La Troienne. There were 71 different Mr. Prospector mares bred to A. P. Indy resulting in 127 foals. Of these 103 (81%) started, 84 (66%) were winners, 22 (17%) were stakes winners. Better than one in six of all foals were stakes winners. Among all starters, 21% were stakes winners--better than one in five! That's what I'm looking for. Of course, the experts will say don't look that far back and expect similar results; the genetic factors of importance will be diluted. I don't disagree with that statement. However, if you offset that influence by concentrating factors using FFI aren't you back to average? Anyway, I'm looking for better results.

A simple, common breeding pattern Edward Stanley followed used inbreeding to concentrate preferred traits then outcrossing to correct deficiencies. Note that Pulpit was an A. P. Indy/Mr. Prospector mare cross. Pulpit now has 30 sons at stud around the world. This is considered one of the major Thoroughbred bloodlines in the world with the current top American stallion being Tapit. Yet the line has its detractors. Many breeders in America point to a fragility of the line because there is too much inbreeding. Too many of the stars coming out of this bloodline are retired quickly due to injury. The poor showing of A. P. Indy offspring in Europe has breeders there saying the line has no talent on turf. Wanting the high talent benefit of the A. P. Indy/Mr. Prospector mare cross without the deficiencies meant looking for a son of Pulpit with a beneficial outcross.

Lucky Pulpit being out of a Cozzene daughter was one such candidate. His standing in California so that we could take advantage of the Cal-bred benefits made it a no-brainer. Cozzene was sturdy and provided yet another line with turf influence. Our statistically insignificant one-horse sample indicates any deficiencies may have been corrected. I'll withhold judgment for a few more years, yet I'm encouraged. I know one race on the turf will not convince anyone. We have targeted several high-profile turf races for Chrome this year. Hopefully, he'll show something that will make European breeders come back to this bloodline.

Modern breeding theory in America has been highly influenced by Joe Estes, the former editor of The Blood-Horse. Estes understood statistics and applied them successfully to breeding. Before Estes, analysis shows that major successful breeders were obtaining one stakes winner from every 48 foals. Breeders using Estes' methods were able to obtain one stakes winner from every eight foals. That's pretty good. But not everyone really understands statistics. Over time Estes' methods became oversimplified and sometimes misapplied. I have studied these methods; however, it is difficult for me to boil them down to one article. Most proponents pare it down to just one sentence: Breed the best to the best and hope for the best, which is not very helpful. What is the best? Racing performance is an indicator of the presence of beneficial genetic factors. Would A. P. Indy be an inferior stallion had he never raced? I think not. How those factors combine across bloodlines is a different problem.

The highest stud fee does not make a stallion the best for your mare. The people who own that stallion will say differently because that's how they make their money. A high stud fee implies the best. A low stud fee implies poor breeding to those ignorant of what's behind good breeding. Again, you can be a successful breeder through luck, but I believe it's much better to be successful through understanding chance. It means study, understanding, and extra work, but it's worth it.

Both our understanding of genetics and the development of testing technology are expanding rapidly. We will soon be at a point where tests will determine optimal breeding combinations. It is comforting to note that once those selection methods are underway and have advanced the breed through several generations, horses will conquer the Earth and run the show. The racing industry will be saved—maybe.

[READ: Perry Martin: Observations of a Breeder Pt. 1](#)

[READ: Perry Martin: Observations of a Breeder Pt. 2](#)



Tags

[California](#) · [California Chrome](#) · [Searchforthetruth](#) · [The Kentucky Derby Presented By Yum! Brands 2008](#) · [The Kentucky Derby Presented By Yum! Brands 2009](#) · [The Kentucky Derby Presented By Yum! Brands 2010](#) · [The Kentucky Derby Presented By Yum! Brands 2011](#) · [The Kentucky Derby Presented By Yum! Brands 2012](#) · [The Kentucky Derby 2013](#) · [Kentucky Derby 2014](#) · [Kentucky Derby 2015](#) · [Perry Martin](#) · [Tc15](#) · [Love The Chase](#) · [Lucky Pulpit](#) · [Stallion Selection](#) · [Breeding](#) · [Joe Estes](#) · [A.p. Indy](#) · [Cozzene](#) ·