

POLO

PLAYERS' EDITION

SEPTEMBER 2003



Prince of Polo

\$5.00 US/\$5.50 Canada



Hidden treasure

*Investigate your thoroughbred's ancestry
and you might find noble blood*

Gold, as the prospectors say, is where you find it. But it can take some looking. One of the most endearing things about Seabiscuit is that he lost his first 17 races. Hm. Sounds familiar. Mutt, my thoroughbred about whom I wrote in the April issue, went 0 for 8 before finding himself as a polo pony. A very enjoyable aspect of the horses that make our sport possible is study of their pedigrees and histories. The two horses Gary Dempsey bought for us last year from Podger el-Effendi came with papers, and it was very easy, (www.equineline.com) to get their race records from the Jockey Club, and soon the computer was chugging out five-generation pedigrees and, astoundingly, a most fantastic collection of famous racehorses. Our darlings? These hayburners? I'll try to be more respectful.

A few years ago the *New Yorker* magazine published a long review of a book called *The Mountain of Names*, which revealed some of the intricacies of the science of genealogy. One of the interesting details was that all our ancestral backgrounds begin by expanding out to include more and more forebears, but at a certain point, about 16 generations back, they start converging again. There just aren't that many ancestors for us to hearken back to. In somewhat the same vein, everyone in England is some form of distant relation to the Queen.

Similar themes can be discovered by studying bloodstock breeding. If you take a five-generation chart from the Jockey Club, just about every horse in the right-hand column is a legend, a truly great horse. Seen from a breeding standpoint, all the competition on the racetrack is really about becoming one of these

If you have a thoroughbred or quarter horse and want to know its pedigree, on the Internet you can go to www.equineline.com and order a report. Equineline.com, which is a subsidiary of The Jockey Club, also gives details about a racehorse's wins and the amount it has won in its racing lifetime.

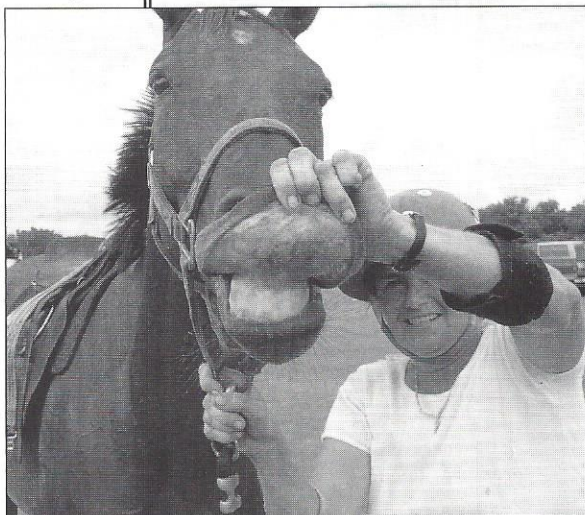
To get a report, go to www.equineline.com and click on "equineline Reports." Create an account for yourself and then choose the type of report you want. There is a fee for reports.

One of the most popular reports is the five-cross pedigree. This report "gives you the sires and dams back five generations," the Web site states. It "also provides the breeder, inbreeding, dosage and colors (through the fourth cross). The hypothetical option on this report makes it a great tool for helping make important breeding decisions."

To get a report on a particular horse, you will be asked to provide your horse's name and its year of birth, or its year of birth and its dam's name.

One may also request that a tattoo research be conducted. Thoroughbred racehorses are often tattooed on the inside of the upper lip with an identifying letter that corresponds to the year of birth and then a series of numbers. If Equineline.com succeeds in identifying the animal, the company will provide the customer with a report.

Get a pedigree for your thoroughbred



defining influences of the breed. The second column from the right is more of the same—great, famous, legendary horses, and finally on toward the left side of the page, horses one has never heard of begin to appear. Lastly, there's the horse in question, probably not famous, not a great racehorse, but certainly an illustrious, well-bred animal—a window on the whole effort to breed great horses.

With the help of Charles Leicester's *Bloodstock Breeding*, and also *The Blood Horse's 100 Greatest Racehorses of the 20th Century*, it became possible to know

our horses far better than, I dare say, they know themselves! Mutt, aka Dandy, traces in tail-male top line to the famous "crack" Ksar, through Good Behaving, Am Behaving, Ambiorix and Tourbillon, arguably the best line of French thoroughbreds of the 20th century. Mutt? As a serendipitous accident, at a library book sale, we came upon a copy of *The Longden Legend*, in which famous jockey Johnny Longden accounts his experience of Count Fleet, 1942 Triple Crown winner, who figures in the tail-female of Mutt's sire, Good Behaving. When Gary handed these horses off to us, he tipped us to one of Mutt's salient characteristics: "He's not even afraid of Podger." Longden describes Count Fleet in similar terms, that he would have horrified the other great horses he rode.

The mare, a tall gray with a fantastic, tail-male top line, Blenheim II-Wyndham-Windy City-Restless Wind, looks very much like Native Dancer, her sire's dam's sire, echoing Alfred Vanderbilt's strategy of breeding discovery mares, in this case Geisha, to Polynesian. It's great



thoroughbred history, just three generations back in this very horse.

The exercise of searching in a living, breathing animal for traits indicated by a pedigree can seem farfetched, but it can also be satisfying, and even profitable. In one famous example, the late Charlie Whittingham took a Guggenheim horse, Ack Ack, thought to be a sprinter, and, noticing the stayer Princequillo three generations back, started pointing him toward longer handicap races, and uncovered the prototype West Coast handicap star. More treasure uncovered.

In the book *Their Turf*, author Bernard Livingston wrote what one woman had never forgotten, which another horse breeder told her with the famous Princequillo-Somethingroyal mating for the ultra-fashionable but doubtful stayer Bold Ruler: "The Princequillos can run all day, and if the races get long enough, and the other horses get tired enough, they'll win for you." They may also make very good, durable polo horses.

Speaking of Princequillo, one of our fellow boarders at Rancho Polo last season, Pam, had a pony she'd bought from Vicky Owens, thought he might be registered, but didn't know much about him except his name, Strait (for the Country and Western singer) Fromthegate. It was a treat to hand her a chart for her mystery horse, a Secretariat grandson with the famous Princequillo-Somethingroyal line we've seen countless times, echoed by the Nearco-Nasrullah-Never Bend line in the sire's dam, Constant Nymph. It's great to know these bloodlines, but to be riding them adds a very special interest and pleasure.

We 21st century humans have all been bred up, as have our horses. If we can remember that when they're pulling, or shying off the ball or doing any other of their endearing tricks, we'll enjoy them more, value them more highly and even get more out of them. The turnaround that created "the real Seabiscuit" was the devotion and intense fascination that Tom Smith, Red Pollard, and Charles Howard had for their charge. They were just doing what we all wish to do: finding hidden treasure.

Van Smith has been playing green horse chukkers in Indio, California, for 10 years. 🌿

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