

THE CROSS BREEDING THOROUGHBRED, (Yearbook 1994)

At the dawn of the 21st century , after a little less than one and a half centuries of utilizing the thoroughbred to improve, first the army horse , then the saddle horse and now the sport horse ; do those which we call , in contrast, the " half bred " , "warmblood" still need to be transfused ?Today some would assert that thoroughbred blood is no longer necessary because our Selle Français half breeds have sufficient thoroughbred in their pedigree to become "self sufficient"

Certain technocrats have , in the last ten years, even put into place a selection process with a BLUP index which little by little eliminates the utilisation of the thoroughbred.

At the same time , the selection process imposed by the National Stud is closed, to all extents and purposes, to foreign sport horse stallions, which are nevertheless selected by our colleagues the German , Irish , Dutch and Belgian breeders based upon their athletic ability i.e. with the same objectives we have.

How should we envisage the future of our sport horses when in five years we will celebrate the millennium? All those who have read my articles in equine publications know to what point I am a partisan of an open studbook. I am a liberal, favourable to a "Europe of the Horse". I am against the protectionist policies of the National Stud who incite production with a sprinkling of subsidies, thus encouraging mediocrity. History has passed us by and in any event, we are not breeders in Kolkhozes! I am favourable to an aid in the selection process of a modern sport horse,i.e. one which corresponds to the athletic and commercial standards of our time. A standardised horse within a selection process which takes the market into account because the sport horse is a luxury agricultural product, just as is the racehorse. Its selection and production should strive to attain the objectives of both its utilisation and commercialisation , because , just like any other agricultural or industrial product, it should be sold with a profit. If those in authority have yet to understand this , I can see no salvation for this professional activity. When we think of the yearly budget spent by the National Stud without a sport horse standard ever having been established! One has only to see how both the breeding stallions and broodmares are chosen I challenge any member of a jury of broodmares or foals to explain his sport horse standard. He will certainly have an opinion , but that is not sufficient . When will we have a serious and quantifiable study concerning the high level sport horse standard, made for example using the thousand best world class show jumpers and renewed every ten years? Perhaps that would be the method to avoid continuing to breed blindly.

Certain studbooks such as the Holsteiners , also have a very controlled policy, however you feel that their choices are the result of a measured and well thought out selection process. The integration of foreign blood , whether it is thoroughbred , Selle Français , or even Anglo Arab , is studied and planned . the German stud book quantifies the amount of thoroughbred blood and their choices are not lightly made, but are a function of the objectives they are trying to attain, i.e. the production of a sport horse mainly orientated towards show jumping . For example, the Holsteiner Breeders Association recently acquired the thoroughbred SIR

SHOSTAKOVITCH(Rheingold and Grey Sovereign by Precipitation) who had been successfully breeding with the Trakehner studbook . In France , how are the thoroughbred stallions chosen by the National Stud, and with what objectives ? At the present time , horses are proposed to the Contrôleur Général during an approval inspection . Its been a long time since the officials in charge of selecting stallions have taken the time to go look for good thoroughbreds outside of France. We have to go back to the time of Maurice O'Neil, who post war brought back amongst others , FURIOSO, from England?

What are the production objectives of the thoroughbred?

Effectively ,everything in equestrian sports (showing, eventing and dressage),but first and foremost racing , both thoroughbred and non thoroughbred (AQPS), are the qualities needed to be the same for each discipline? I doubt that , with an exception or two , a thoroughbred having the qualities necessary for all of the disciplines exists . In any event , as long thoroughbreds are chosen because they "look nice" and based upon their racing performances only , which is rarely significant, only mere chance will determine their success in breeding sport horses. It is already so very difficult to encompass this subject with the Selle Français, when choosing separately for each discipline !

It appears to me quite obviously that the cross breeding thoroughbred should be selected for the discipline to which their offspring will be dedicated , just as is done in any other breed . In any event this is the method which I have used for my own Stallions and the results obtained with LAUDANUM bear me out. Off course , the same thing occurs with thoroughbreds that happens with SF : certain of them may well have been good performers , but they don't always become good breeding animals. Here again , if the inheritability of athletic ability is already uncertain when there has been a selection based upon performance , how much more so will it be if the choices made are not based upon this selection.

The question is should we continue to use the cross breeding thoroughbred in our selection programme or not, and if so, with what objectives?

In France there are some 20400 broodmares bred to produce SF horses (1993 statistics). 14200 of them are bred by Selle Français stallions to produce SF offspring, or 70%; 2 150 S F mares are bred by thoroughbred (about 10%) but among these 2150 mares are a high proportion of AQPS mares (approx. 50%) which brings the number of mares to produce SF offspring to 5%. This is a very low percentage. The influence of Anglo Arab Stallions is about the same or slightly higher (1600SF mares bred by AA stallions).The fundamental reasons for this decrease in the amount of "blood" brought into the SF studbook are two faceted. First of all , thoroughbred and AA stallions , in the present context, do not offer sufficient comfort concerning the inheritability of their qualities , whe taking into account their haphazard selection and the lack of performance data for the stallions. Secondly ; utilisation of the BLUP type selection heavily penalizes those offspring bred by XX and AA stallions, not quantifiable through their families performance.

The combining of these two observations is the cause why breeders are backing away from this type of cross breeding for commercial reasons, giving no chance to new stallions , notably thoroughbreds. This attitude is antinomial with the needs of high level competition.

Our officials have very little awareness of this , due to their lack of attendance at the world class equestrian competitions. But this paradox is blatant when you listen to high level riders.

In an interview with the reserve World Champion Michel Robert in L' Eperon Special Breeding 1994 publication , entitled "Credo for the Thoroughbred", Michel Robert expressed himself thus: "The error has been to set aside thoroughbreds, Anglo Arabs, and trotters ,or in any event not to look at them because it was thought that they would bastardise the race ... I am suspicious of "pure blood" SF horses with only far removed thoroughbred ancestry, because I know they are going to lack the "gasoline". I believe that my opinion is shared by all the other riders . If they have a complaint about their horse , its often " at the jump off he wont move forward", it's that the horse lacks "blood".The use of the XX and AA should be accentuated in the maternal bloodlines , and with the stallions.....we should ideally have thoroughbred stallions with show jumping performances which could become the new foundation sires to get the ideal cross. I would take a dark brown thoroughbred stallion with a lot of strength, a show winner , with depth and length,

a little tough, a thoroughbred which could do three day events , and I would cross him with a dam from the Ibrahim line; or vice versa. The Ibrahims were jumpers with a lot of strength in their backs and a classical style. Almé was a phenomenal horse, in his propulsion he passed his hind quarters in a manner rarely found in our French Horses. He should be used for this strength of hind quarters, but crossed with XX or AA to infuse class and agility. What at one time saved the French breeding industry was the fact that thoroughbreds such as FURIOSO and RANTZAU were brought here, who truly marked our breeding and who were the base for the show bloodlines. I am convinced that to make crack horses, we need horses with thoroughbred or AA in their breeding .A good horse must be fast , careful and brave, with a lot of power."

To this panegyric of the thoroughbred written by one of the best riders in the world, we can add the comments of a young horse trainer , a member of the French team, Bruno Rocuet, who, in another interview defended the use of "blood": "If we hope to continue to shine at the highest world levels , we have to stop reasoning "Big BLUP", and start reasoning the bringing in of new blood ; opening the studbook to foreign horses, and the increased use of thoroughbreds and Anglo Arabs. For the pleasure of using a formula , I would say that when there is some thoroughbreds in the first generation bloodlines, you are driven with super gasoline, if not , you only have ordinary gas and its just not as good....when you are riding in the international circuit, you need horses that can gallop to win".

All of the European countries are becoming aware of the need to once again find and utilise good cross breeding thoroughbreds.

Recently when judging the Belgian foal championships with Dr Greve, an eminent sport horse specialist in Holland as well as a large stud owner, he spoke to me about the need in Holland to use XX in a country where we French think that the horses are already very "XX". He himself uses two XX in his own stud. Because if , effectively, as our eminent riders comment , the thoroughbred or AA bring agility, courage, speed etc....indispensable qualities for our contemporary sport horses, the thoroughbred is moreover, and I would say , especially important in bettering the breed over the medium and the long term; in effect, through the use of these stallions we enrich our bloodlines with new genes , which is what the Anglo Saxons call "out crossing". Mr de Royer , the former Controler General of the National Stud , already wrote in 1985, 10 years ago: " There will be too much ROYAL CESTNUT, there is not enough IBRAHIM, there is also enough URIEL.... It is through top quality young stallions that the breed will make another leap forward". M de Villeneuve, his successor, continued by confirming : "The concentration of the best broodmares to the old stallions in vogue is not a panacea, it tends to keep the breed at a stable level with no ambition to better it".

The present SF bloodlines are limited to a few ancestors , from which we risk being saturated on the medium term.

The ORANGE PEEL line (xx1919-1940) by Jus d'Orange x Ajax was one of the most influential lines after the war, from which the stallions PLEIN D'ESPOIR,IBRAHIM ,ALME.;etc.... were bred.Then came FURIOSO(xx 1939-1967 by Precipitation x Son in Law), breeding Mexico, Furioso II; the line of RANTZAU(1946-1971 by Foxlight x Cavalier d'Arpino), sire of STARTER,COR DE L BRYERE; the line of FRA DIAVOLO(1939-1959 by Black Devil x Blandford), from which NANKIN, NYKIO,URIEL,ROSIRE....and we are presently saturating, via the stallion GRAND VENEUR, the line of ULTIMATE (xx1941-1964 by Umidwar x Beaudelaire).

All of these foundation sires in the SF studbook have another point in common : their stud careers were all based in Normandy, cradle of the breed and the exclusive source of supply for the studs purchased by the Administration. Our present studbook officials should reread the words of M . Jacques de Royer, their predecessor, who also said in 1985: " Cross breeding with XX or AA should not be abandoned . It will always bring to the breed a superior nervous influx , a good orientation of the profile, which combats the draft horse atavisms of the old half

breeds. Its effect is often better at the second generation. Before the present time, cross breeding, then called "metissage", of a strongly built mare with a XX stallion was almost exclusively used to obtain high quality horses. It should never be underestimated. It is always desirable for big strong, beautiful mares". Elsewhere, in studying the major bloodlines of the French sport horse, it can be seen that the XX played a determining role. There is not one major bloodline that has not sprung from XX origins. Thoroughbreds have always allowed the European sport horses to make major advances. Other than the stallions mentioned above, let's not forget FOU DROYANT II. BABOUINO. L ALCAZAR. and more recently NIGHT & DAY. POPOF. VERDI. MONTIGNY. MONCEAUX. And even closer still ST. BRENDAN. AMARPOUR. POT D OR. COUNT IVOR. LAUDANUM. BENROY. KINGS ROAD. DUC DE FERCE.....who are some of the major leaders having left their mark on our mares and stallions of today.

But France is not the only country which owes a lot, not to say everything, to thoroughbred stallions.

Who doesn't remember the XX stallions such as WATER SERPENT(1941 by Shining Tor) BATTLE BURN(1949 by Shapoor), who stood in Ireland at John Hughes, at Wallslough House, CO. Kilkenny, where they sired many great champions who built the renown of the Irish sport horse in the 1960's & 70's. Ireland also had NORDLYS and BARTHRAIN other famous sires that we can find in the exceptional pedigree of the Irish half bred CRUISING, at the present day internationally performing and available at Alain Katz's Horses Import -Export. The Holstein has its time of glory, thanks amongst others to the XX like SACRAMENTO SONG(Sicambre) sire of SANDRO, the best sire of winners at the last World Championships or again the incontrovertible LADY KILLER (Sailing Light) father of the fabulous stallions LORD and LANDGRAF, or COTTAGE SON (Young Lover), ANBLICK(Ferro), MARLON(Tamerlane).

Holland has also known glory with LUCKYBOY (Compromise); who launched the Dutch phenomenon by siring a multitude of international winners, but also thanks to XX's such as COURVILLE(Fair Trial) or ABGAR(Abernant).

Certainly today it is not easy to find good cross breeding thoroughbreds; the sprinter racehorse type is not systematically what the studbooks are looking for. Good looking XX's with depth, points of strength, good movement and the balance of a sport horse can never tarnish broodmare stock. But you must choose them with this in mind!

The National Stud who are responsible for supplying XX's for racing and for sport should test them over jumps and automatically dedicate those with necessary ability to sport horse broodmares. Their offspring would subsequently give us further information concerning their sires.

It should be known that a thoroughbred having a good balance, supple and relaxed with good style will transmit those qualities. It has been said that RANTZAU, FOU DROYANT II; FRA DIAVOLO or FURIOSO didn't jump. FALSE. They were never tested. At least not officially, because FURIOSO was presented to Mr Duquesnel (Elevage de l'Isle) in Catimini in the indoor ring, free jumping. He became one of the first breeders to use the stallion who was at the time standing at the Haras du Pin and he used him for years with great success. His daughter, Monique Duquesnel, confirmed that FURIOSO jumped with style, suppleness and balance. As seen above, every European country has had great success with certain XX stallions. If our neighbours the Belgians, Dutch and Germans were sufficiently intelligent to introduce the blood of some of our best thoroughbreds via some of their sons COR DE LA BRYERE(Rantzau) first in the Holstein then throughout Europe, and FURIOSO II (Furioso) first in Oldenburg, then again all over Europe, it is incomprehensible that we, French breeders, cannot freely benefit from the blood of the best descendants of LADY KILLER, LUCKY BOY, SACRAMENTO SONG etc..... in order to better the genetics of our own sport horses.

I am not the only stud owner to be convinced of the benefits of using

thoroughbreds having proven their aptitude in show jumping. Paul SHOCKEMOHLER had an excellent XX which won at show at show jumping in the U S , MITY WIND(Lasting Wind)who is a successful stallion in Belgium , Holland, and Germany. The stallion MARTELL (Afayoon), an international show jumper is at stud in Holland. At Saint Lo, rumour has it that there is a South American XX stallion which may come to stand at Fernand LEREDDE's.

It would appear that a good number of European breeders are aware of the permanent need to utilise thoroughbred stallions , and to select them, based upon their performance in show jumping , which is the main objective of our breeding program. Today , XX breeding has spread over all of the continents. We can of course go choose them in the USA or in Europe , mainly in France , Ireland, and England, but also in South America, New Zealand, Japan as well as in the Eastern European countries which have conserved the old style "stayer" XX. If in the past we looked for the blood of MOURNE, FRANC LURON or SICAMBRE, who bred so many winners , today the blood showing promise comes from the descendants of NEARCO but why not CARO, who although he did not leave any show jumpers while breeding only to XX here in France at the Haras du Bois Roussel(Orne), is now producing excellent show jumping thoroughbreds , retired from racing in the USA where he is presently at stud. Isn't he the sire of PING PONG (ridden by Beezie Patton) and TASHLING(ridden by D Matz) two members of the U S team? Does he perhaps cross better with US bloodlines?

So from where will the next great stallions appear? Only God can answer definitely , but one thing is certain , both breeders and stud owners must worry about finding successors to these great names in sport horse breeding . Each can have his own method perhaps, but the objective remains that of not abandoning the cross breeding XX to improve sport horses. I will repeat here what I wrote ten years ago in L'Eperon "The thoroughbred stallion continues to play an important role in the selection of the sport horse, permitting the Selle Français to preserve its attainments. Stopping or reducing the introduction of thoroughbred blood , as certain people are advocating , would be an error . The specificity of the French sport horse is due precisely to the remarkable balance between blood and bone which makes it highly sought after not only as a sport horse but as a breeding animal to better other breeds. Today it is necessary only to choose those XX stallions with good references and aptitudes of the sport horse." Ten years have gone by , and the National Stud has changed nothing in its selection process concerning thoroughbreds , which is worse now that the BLUP has been introduced. As a private stud owner I have put my theory into practice , purchasing several good thoroughbred studs who are having a great success with breeders.

BERNARD LE COURTOIS