

February: 30 Years Ago

Here's what the February, 1979 *Saddle & Bridle* didn't tell us about that year: A record for American paintings was set in art auction for "Icebergs", which had hung unappreciated in a church in England since 1863; it brought \$2,500,000; its painter was Frederick Church. Among celebrities who died that year were former vice-president of the U.S. Nelson Rockefeller, cartoonist Al Capp, clown Emmett Kelly and film star John Wayne. In sports, Muhammed Ali retired from boxing, the Pittsburgh Steelers won the Superbowl and the Pittsburgh Pirates the Major League championship.

What that issue of *Saddle & Bridle* did give us, besides its 47th annual sire ratings and its second annual Best of Breed rankings, was news of the death at 25 of Oman's Desdemona Denmark. He shared with WC harness horse Kate Shiver—Will Shriver's dam—the genes of Reverie's Desdemona and King's Genius. Among both ancestors and descendants of Oman's Desdemona Denmark were many distinguished names.

Again a Saddlebred faced movie cameras. This time it was Mr. Magic Melody, owned by Bill Thompson, publisher of *Saddle & Bridle*. Magic's role was that of pulling a vintage milkwagon in a Pevely Dairy commercial. The accompanying *Saddle & Bridle* story explained that the magazine's offices often serve as a sort of clearing house for many general horse questions from the public. This time the request had been for the source of "a gentle, pretty driving horse." The shoot would be in Lafayette Square, an area of St. Louis whose houses were being restored by their owners to give the impression of stepping back in time. For all that, however, the area is heavily trafficked, not exactly the ideal surrounding for many horses, but one that a show horse might be expected to tolerate fairly easily. Action would be the routine passage down the street of a milkwagon, with children running out for slivers of ice.

Thompson volunteered Magic, who fit the request perfectly. Having been shown successfully in pleasure driving by Bill's son, Jeff (now an editor of *Saddle & Bridle*), the gelding had demonstrated enough poise that Bill was sure he would not be taken aback by his new situation. Magic, as if in

collusion, delivered a terrific piece of PR for Saddlebreds, patiently performing what was asked of him, with only minimal and short-

most sophisticated maneuvers that would be required of it, was doing diagonal side passes, four or five steps at a time to one



Mr. Magic Melody visited the *Saddle & Bridle* office after his workday ended.

photo by Jeff Thompson

lasting fidgeting. A large group of passersby gathered to watch the filming, which gave Bill Thompson a chance to enlighten them about Magic's breed. When the filming was done, Magic was loaded up and taken to the *Saddle & Bridle* offices, then on Brentwood Blvd. There he again posed patiently for several pictures taken by Jeff. As far as anyone knew, it was the first time a horse had visited the magazine, which is dedicated so lovingly and carefully to a particular breed of the species.

One of the February 1979 articles designed to help with a show horse's appearance was subtitled "Tails: How to Get 'Em; How to Keep 'Em. Written by Sandy Simpson, an Illinois hairdresser, it gave many tips for making tails as lovely as possible. One of these was detailed instructions for doing a tail up for the winter. Simpson provided advance reassurance for that awful moment when you undo the tail, and it seems like half of it falls out. She said that is only what was shed naturally while tied up; if not confined, it would have fallen out unnoticed, a few hairs at a time. She warned against nails or other protuberances in stalls that could snag and diminish a tail, and she reiterated that hair-by-hair handling is usually necessary at times in order to preserve a big tail.

In remarkably concise and clear terms, famous trainer Bob Robinson gave instructions for helping a horse to have the best possible balance. One of the things he recommended for preparing a colt for the

side, then forward a few, then to the other side. It's hard to believe that anything that is so much fun for the rider would not soon be considered fun by the horse, too. And Robinson tells us that the secret to good head position is teaching the horse to put its weight on its hind quarters while bringing the head up naturally. "Trying to raise it by pulling, without a corresponding change in balance, will only result in a bad mouth," he said.

The name of Robinson's column was The Trainer's Space and some of the other, most imaginative column names were; Zaney Meandering by Irene Zane, Zig-Zagging by Tom Zeigler, California Comments by Louise B. Francis, Bits and Pieces by Wendy Davis, Rocky Mountain High by Dorothy Eberhard, The Tale End by Jacki Chapman, Heads Up by Ruth Laurel Hansen and Horse of a Different Color by Alda Buresh.

Possibly the most interesting article in this issue was about computers. The late Lynn Weatherman, one of *Saddle & Bridle's* all-time ace writers, had made a trip to Phoenix, Arizona where American Continental Life Insurance Company, offered the latest in services to equine publications and organizations. Weatherman wanted to get the full story on what computers could do for Saddlebred records. He found that Continental could help with recording registrations, breedings, such specific information as how many colts were sired by which stallion and how many were borne by which mare, and name changes.

Important Horse Show Dates In 2009

Sixteenth Annual Raleigh Spring Premier Benefit March 26-28

James B. Hunt Horse Complex – Raleigh, NC
Saddlebred, Hackney, Roadster
& Morgan Divisions

Fourth Annual Asheville Spring May 8-9

Western NC Horse Facility – Fletcher, NC
Saddlebred, Hackney, Roadster Divisions

Twenty-Sixth Annual Asheville Lions Benefit May 13-16

Western NC Horse Facility – Fletcher, NC
Saddlebred, Hackney, Roadster Divisions

Ninth Annual Dallas Summer Classic May 29-30

Biggerstaff Park, Dallas, NC
Saddlebred, Hackney, Roadster Divisions

Eighty-Sixth Annual Blowing Rock Charity Horse Show June 11-14

Blowing Rock, North Carolina
Saddlebred, Hackney, Roadster Divisions

Seventh Annual Dallas Fall Classic October 16-17

Biggerstaff Park, Dallas, NC
Saddlebred, Hackney,
Roadster Divisions

Humanitarian's Challenge Of Champions Charity Horse Show November 12-14

Palm Beach Equestrian Club,
Stadium Jumping Inc.
West Palm Beach, Florida
Saddlebred, Hackney,
Roadster & Morgan Divisions

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The speed and accuracy with which this data could be produced impressed Weatherman particularly. "It can provide a seven generation (128 names) printout in three to four seconds; lists of progeny with descriptions, date of foaling and other details."

At the time of Weatherman's visit, the Saddlebred association was not taking advantage of what computers could do, but they soon had their own set-up. Weatherman believed that someday computers would contain all of *Saddle & Bridle's* articles and columns from over the years.

For instance, Weatherman raised the question of why there are so few male descendants of Independence Chief in the records despite John T. Hook's saying that this was the greatest breeding horse who ever lived. If every word we have about Independence Chief were assembled in one place we would have this possibility: This stallion ranked #3 or lower among Longview sires, Hook told me, because he was generally accepted to have an "ugly" head. Nobody ever described to me just what that meant —too coarse? was attached or carried incorrectly?

Hook referred Independence Chief to me as being used mainly as a teaser, or

breeding at a lesser rate than the others, to mares whose owners wanted good using horses, not show contenders. Mr. Hook, in his memoirs dictated to me, tells how Chief Of Longview's sire by Independence Chief came about by accident, on a mare whose owner did not care enough about her to retrieve her when her board bill became an embarrassment to him. The mare, Myrtle Dickey, was impregnated so she could be sold as in foal to a Longview stallion.

Loula Long Combs, in her autobiography *My Revelation*, loyally defended Independence Chief's head, saying that his blood (very good), disposition and his body and motion made up for it and she did not find it so ugly, really. But if most people did, then he may have been routinely passed over by people who were breeding for stallions. Or was Hook referring to Independence Chief's potency? Maybe he had every quality he needed except a refined head and maybe the well descended mare, who became the mother of Chief Of Longview, had that. Does anyone know what became of her, or how her other foals, besides Chief Of Longview and his distinguished full brother, Reveler, fared? These are the kinds of secrets that may be just waiting for discovery once the right data gets into the right computers.