

Americas Horse - The Fastest Way To A Million

A two year old Quarter Horse filly called Fly Baby Fly won almost \$1.6 million last year and in so doing became the richest racing filly of all racing breeds. She also put an exclamation point on the rising interest and financial opportunities in quarter horse racing where million dollar purses are becoming the norm.

Reputed to be the largest horsebreed registry in the World in terms of members and horses, the American Quarter Horse Association may well be also the youngest being founded in Texas, USA, in the 1940's.

The origins of the Quarter Horse combine two distinct horse breeds, the English and North American thoroughbred and the mustangs of the south-western States that evolved from the horses brought to South and Central America by the Spanish Conquistadors.

A smallish thoroughbred called Janus (1746) was imported from England to Virginia in the late 1700's. While small in size he was noted for his speed over short distances and his offspring were favourites among the farming community for impromptu racing with their neighbours. As the Wild West became developed and the numbers of Thoroughbreds grew both in terms of imports and local breeds the settlers took many of them to the frontiers where they proved themselves as agile and willing ranch horses and indeed war mounts as a defence against raids by indigenous tribes mounted on their "mustangs". Inevitably the two breeds came together and the result was a horse perfectly adapted for local conditions and the needs of the booming cattle ranching business.

While they started out as work horses adept for such chores as herding, roping and cutting it was also inevitable that their speed over short distances would result in a racing version especially with the continued importation to the West of more thoroughbreds with comparable speed.

The formation of the American Quarter Horse Association (AQHA) predates organized racing and was created by a group of ranchers who enjoyed match racing and riding their horses for business and pleasure. The idea came from an article written in 1935 by Robert Denhardt entitled "The Quarter Horse, Then And Now" about the history and characteristics of the Quarter Horse.

In 1940, William Barre Warren was elected as the first President at an impromptu business meeting following a dinner party in Fort Worth, Texas, where the guests showed interest in forming a registry for the Steeldust and Billy horses of the Southwest. At that time Warren was a director for the Texas and Southwestern Cattle Raisers Association. He had hundreds of friends in the rodeo, match-race and ranch industries and it was at his suggestion that the registry not be confined to just the local breeds by western bred sires but that horses with up to 50% thoroughbred blood could also be registered as Quarter Horses.

Two of Warren's own stallions were Peter McCue and Traveler. The former was born in 1895 and was a great-grandson of a legendary Kentucky bred stallion called Steel Dust (1844), a descendent of the great Diomed, and who came to the Southwest as a yearling. Traveler was a grandson of Steel Dust.

The American Quarter Horse Racing Association was formed in 1945. This group mainly was concerned with the operation of racetracks and their registration efforts were limited to what was needed for identification for racing purposes. They set the standards for racing, and set up a Register of Merit system to help with handicapping racing. They registered horses that were in AQHA's stud books, as well as Thoroughbreds. Even "Paint" horses, which at this time had no registry and would not for another two decades, were registered. Painted Joe, a foundation stallion with the American Paint Horse Association (APHA), was registered with the AQRA and ran against many of the early Quarter Horse racers.

Because of the continued dilution of the original bloodlines as a result of the 50/50 registration rule there is now an offshoot organization dedicated to the preservation of the older strains dating back to the 1800's. There have also been registries of horses of color in addition to the Paint horses with the Palomino Horse Breeders of America and the American Buckskin Registry Association being cross registered with the racing and ranch Quarter Horses. Both the Paint and Palomino breeds have a racehorse component also.

The largest group of owners, however, are still those involved in rodeos, horse shows and pleasure riding. Today, people show American Quarter Horses in a variety of competitive events, including, but not limited to, halter classes; western style events such as Western Pleasure, Reining, and Cutting; English riding events in the hunt seat style, such as Hunter Under Saddle, Working Hunter, and Hunter Hack. Driving classes are available at some shows, as are some timed games such as barrel racing. There are also equitation and halter showmanship classes for non-pro exhibitors.

The Racing Quarter Horse.

The earliest mares were primarily ranch mares, many without known pedigrees and with names like Peg, Betty etc. or simply named after the Ranch with a number attached such as Waggoner Mare 56. As the breed has evolved there have been thoroughbred mares bred to Quarter Horse stallions that now are responsible for many of the top racers of today. On the Sire side the bloodlines are dominated by stallions tracing to the thoroughbred stallions Three Bars (1940) and Top Deck (1945), both descendants of the Darley Arabian through the imported English sire Camel (1822). Three Bars had several sons that continue to impact the paternal lines of today's best especially through Rocket Bar and his descendant First Down Dash (1984) who is still at stud although long past his peak in producing top performers. Top Deck is the sire line of the current top Quarter Horse stallion in North America named One Famous Eagle.

As in the thoroughbred world the other top influences in sires descend from Nearco and Native Dancer, known more commonly as the Northern Dancer and the Mr Prospector lines in thoroughbred circles although it is through Beduino and Raise A Native

respectively that these lines have come to prominence in Quarter Horse racing particularly through their broodmares.

One Famous Eagle combines all of the top sire lines in his pedigree and has produced One Dashing Eagle, a winner of over \$2 million, from a mare that also combines all of the same sires and traces back maternally to a descendant of Peter McCue, one of the original Texas bred sires owned by William Warren, the first President of the AQHA. One Famous Eagle has also produced the top two year old in North America in 2017 by the name of Fly Baby Fly who has the distinction of being the richest two year old race horse of any breed in North America last year. Her maternal line goes back to a ranch mare called Mollie born in 1930 and a grand daughter of Peter McCue. As for Janus, the little speedster who started it all, there appears to be no trace of him in todays pedigrees that I can find.

Bet you did not know that Roy Rogers horse Trigger was actually a Palomino quarter horse called Golden Cloud. His wife Dale Evans rode a buckskin quarter horse called Buttermilk. Another famous quarter horse in the movies was Mister Ed, the talking horse, played by a quarter horse called Bamboo Harvester and had a stunt double, also a quarter horse, by name of Pumpkin who subsequently appeared in the TV series Green Acres.