

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION AND TERMINOLOGY

The trotting and pacing gait has been evident in breeds of horses for many centuries, as has the use of harness to control them. The standardbred trotter and pacer, however, is uniquely American.

Creating the standard breed

The evolution of the standardbred over a period of less than two hundred years is based upon the thoroughbred horse, although a number of other breeds have contributed. These are discussed in the next chapter.

Ancient beginnings

There is evidence of the trotting horse in ancient times. Horse drawn chariot races were recorded as far back as 4000 BC by the Babylonians followed by Assyrians, Egyptians, Chinese and Romans.



ROMAN HARNESS HORSE FIGURINE

The Olympic Games of 1000 BC also conducted chariot races, using two wheeled vehicles. In these cases however, the horses were bred for speed and quite likely used a galloping gait. They were also smaller than contemporary breeds, explaining why they were used in teams to pull carts rather than being ridden. Mounting horses for warfare, hunting

and sporting purposes came much later when the Oriental horse had been bred to be large enough to carry a full grown man in saddle. The speedier galloper was favored against whatever trotting traits may have developed.

The Norfolk Trotter

A cumbersome horse drawn Royal Coach was introduced into England during the reign of Queen Elizabeth I in the late sixteenth century, followed soon after by public coach transport. However, their widespread use was dependent upon reasonable roads and these did not arrive until the mid eighteenth century.

Road coaches led to the re-emergence of the trotting gait in the guise of the Norfolk Trotter. This high stepping horse was not bred for racing or sporting purposes but for speed and endurance upon the road. It evolved into what was known as the Hackney, after the coach that it drew. It was inevitable that rivalry over speed would result in competition.

Ownership of a speedy trotting horse and fine carriage became a hallmark of British aristocracy, accompanied by informal road races. Such events failed to take hold as they later did in America and thoroughbred racing remained the *Sport of Kings* and the domain of the aristocracy. While a fine looking horse and carriage continued as a symbol of prestige until the arrival of the motor vehicle, the harness horse was regarded by the wealthy in England as a beast of burden, suited only to the menial task of labour.

Many of the Norfolk trotters found their way to the American colonies to service coaching services and again, competitive spirit saw the emergence of road racing. The trotting gait was first appreciated among gentlemen in the vicinity of New York in the early

years of the nineteenth century. Like their English counterparts, high society Americans did not regard these events as sporting and thoroughbred racing remained paramount. The trotter was relegated to unofficial racing on the roadways.

Early American trotting

American trotting history in the early nineteenth century is obscure as newspapers did not regard it as newsworthy. Letters and diaries indicate, however, that many informal races occurred along the better roads of New York, Harlem Lane being one of the favored.



HARLEM LANE NEW YORK 1860S

The first published harness racing newspaper report was of a mile in 2:56 by a gelding named Yankee in 1806 while in Philadelphia in 1810 it was reported that a horse from Boston had trotted one mile pulling a sulky in 2:48½. It was not until 1830 that the American Turf Register began to publish thoroughbred racing events and it was 1840 before anything beyond occasional reports on trotting events emerged.

The economic recession in America during the late 1830s saw thoroughbred racing temporarily decline. This was exacerbated by attacks from religious powers, mainly because of gambling repercussions, while some states even banned thoroughbred

racing. Trotting, perhaps due to its lowly status, seems to have been spared these attacks and tracks began to emerge throughout the northern states. The breed of trotter, however, was little more than a derivative of the thoroughbred and the Norfolk trotter but this too was about to change dramatically.

The standardbred

As the wagers and gambling increased, so too did the desire for speed. More attention was given to the performance of potential broodmares and the sires of speed, predominantly thoroughbred. Unlike the English who kept accurate breeding records, little attention had been given to American pedigrees and there was a fondness for embellishment without recourse to fact or relevance. Hearsay was often good enough to raise prices and expectations. This situation was rectified with the publication of two American studbooks.

The first of these was titled Wallace's American Studbook and its one thousand pages included some seven hundred entries for trotters. As it diverted from the format of the English General Stud Book, thoroughbred owners ignored it in preference to the more conventional publication. Sales to breeders of trotters, however, encouraged Wallace to concentrate on these pedigrees and in 1871 he published the first Wallace's American Trotting Register to wide acclaim. In 1875 he commenced the Wallace Monthly. These two publications became the bibles of trotting horse breeders.

In 1878 Wallace argued for a standard to be established for entry into his Trotting Register. Following considerable discussion among governing authorities the National Association of Trotting Horse Breeders confirmed a set of rules in 1879. Their stated purpose was to define what constituted

a trotting bred horse in order to establish a breed of trotters on a more intelligent basis. The rules adopted to control admission to the records of pedigrees set a time standard of 2:30 or better for inclusion.



SKETCH OF EARLY AMERICAN TROTTER

In addition mares that produced a Standard Performer could be included irrespective of their own performance, while a stallion that produced at least two standardbred progeny was entitled to admission. Any horse given admission was entitled to be termed a standardbred. As the pacing gait proved to be faster in most instances, their standard was set at 2:25. Over the next century, the benchmark for excellence was gradually reduced to 2:20, then 2:10 and finally two minutes. However, the Standard Performer times of 2:30 and 2:25 remained as measures of sire and broodmare excellence for a considerable time.

Sire numbering

Volume IV of *Wallace's American Trotting Register* of 1882 was the first to adopt the new standard and contained over two thousand sires. Wallace also allocated a number to each of the Standard Sires. This had become essential due to the practice of the same name being allocated to many horses. The first *Trotting Register* includes eight registrations of the names Abdallah and American

Star, thirteen for Bellfounder and Black Hawk and no less than seventeen for Hambletonian. The first twenty five sire numbers allocated by Wallace are shown in the following table.

TABLE 1.1 SIRE NUMBERING (WALLACE)

ABDALLAH 1
HAMBLETONIAN 2
ENGINEER 2 ND 3
ANDREW JACKSON 4
BLACK HAWK 5
MORSE HORSE 6
WITHERELL MESSENGER 7
HENRY CLAY 8
ROYAL GEORGE 9
HAMBLETONIAN 10
MAMBRINO CHIEF 11
PILOT JR. 12
KEMBLE JACKSON 13
AMERICAN STAR 14
ABDALLAH (ALEXANDERS) 15
ABDALLAH (TAGGARTS) 16
ABDALLAH (JONES) 17
CASSIUS M CLAY 18
CASSIUS M CLAY JR. 19
CASSIUS M CLAY JR. 20
CASSIUS M CLAY JR. 21
CASSIUS M CLAY JR. 22
ALLEGHENY CHIEF 23
BLACK HAWK 24
NORMAN 25

The rapid proliferation of the new standardbred in America can be gauged by the fact that within little more than a decade from this publication the mighty Peter the Great, foaled in 1895, was allocated the number 28955. Most of the sires of the nineteenth century however, have passed into the history books while one came to dominate the new breed, This was the great progenitor, Hambletonian 10. We shall turn to his story in chapter three.

Trotting versus pacing

Until the establishment of the standardbred, harness horses had been referred to as trotters and this name has prevailed to current times. This of course fails to acknowledge the existence of the second form of standardbred, the pacer. The only difference is that of gait and despite two hundred years of selective breeding there are still constant examples of sires and dams throwing progeny of the alternative gait. Rivalry between proponents of each gait has existed since the beginning of the nineteenth century and their development and history has taken alternative, although similar, courses.

While the number of trotters outnumbered the pacer by twenty to one in 1880 this had reduced to around four to one by 1890. When hobbles were introduced to maintain gait in the pacer, and Grand Circuit racing began, the ratio fell further. At the close of the century and into the twenty first century it slightly favors the pacer.

There are numerous accounts of the rivalries surrounding gait in other books and it does not require further elaboration here. Suffice it to say that in Europe the trotter is dominant, while Australia and New Zealand lean strongly toward the pacer. Only in North America do both gaits approach equal recognition. In later chapters the development of each gait will be treated separately, although in most cases their stories intertwine.

Measuring success

In 2014 there were more than twenty thousand standardbred foals registered in North America. Of these only a small number will go on to win a major race, have substantial stake earnings or achieve an outstanding speed record. The majority will fail to

meet the dreams of their owners, or even pay their way.

Of the almost eight hundred stallions on offer, few will succeed at stud or even produce better performers than themselves. Of more than twenty thousand broodmares, only a small number from the highly successful maternal families will achieve status as outstanding dams. So where do the handful of champions in each crop come from and, even more importantly, how can success in harness racing be measured, let alone predicted?

Speed and earnings

Speed in the standardbred has been admired and sought after since the earliest days of the nineteenth century, demanding and receiving significant coverage from media and ecstatic followers of the sport. By themselves however, speed records cannot measure lasting success. Today the two year old can achieve times not considered possible by the aged champions of less than a century ago. Records of the evolution of speed do serve a purpose however, in tracing the success of sire lines and maternal families over time.

Likewise, the success of a horse may be measured in no small part through its earnings, yet like speed it is not an accurate measure of comparative success over time. The great champion Greyhound won a Hambletonian among over seventy victories yet his life earnings can be surpassed easily today with one two year old race win.

Given the vagaries of time, the evolution of speed and the increase in stake money, the champions of the sport can only be compared relative to each other in one respect; their ability to win races against the best competitors of their era. The very best of the champions are those that consistently

beat their contemporaries as two and three year olds then continue to do so throughout their racing careers. These are the horses that refuse to be beaten and dig deep under all conditions. The champion standardbred sires and maternal families are those that consistently produce such horses. So how can race success as well as speed record and earnings be compared?

Classic Families data base

To help answer this question a data base was created involving the winners of selected feature races in North America for each year commencing from the beginnings of Grand Circuit racing in 1873. To these were added those horses which achieved outstanding speed records over this time period. The pedigree of each successful horse was then traced back to the tap root mare that produced them. Each of these tap root mares was allocated a family name and number.

The result is [*Classic Families*](#), a web based program that is available free of charge. This program identifies all those maternal families that have produced successful progeny and the stallions that feature in their pedigrees. This data base currently includes over six thousand maternal families with more than one hundred and sixty thousand horses plus almost four thousand races with one hundred thousand winners. There are a further three hundred lists involving the worldwide evolution of speed records and earnings. The data base continues to grow as it is updated and added to each day.

Many of the listed maternal families have died out during the one hundred and thirty five years since grand circuit harness racing commenced, while a surprisingly small number continue to account for the champions of today. We shall next consider the

races and speed records chosen for inclusion into the data base and how the maternal families were numbered.

The Classic Races

The obvious start to creating a list of Classic Races is the Triple Crowns; the Little Brown Jug, Messenger and Cane Pace for pacers and the Kentucky Futurity, Hambletonian and Yonkers Trot for trotters. These are considered the jewels in the crown of harness racing and restricted to the outstanding three year olds of their year. Next to include were the longstanding races of repute such as the Lexington, the first official trotting race, which was won by nineteenth century stallions such as Steinway (1878). These prestigious races have been designated as Group One.

The next category contains those prestigious races that have been discontinued. Most contain the names of former champions of their day amongst their honor rolls. These include the Transylvania won by Peter the Brewer (1922), the Geers for three year olds, won by the immortal Billy Direct (1937) and the Elks Stakes for two year olds won by Adios (1942). These are designated with the letter F for feature race.

The final three categories are; group two and three plus listed races. Group two races are slightly below the top group and carry lower stake money, group three are restricted to progeny by state or sire and listed races belong to regional centers or tracks.

To measure the success of the standardbred internationally, the Classic Races of Australia, New Zealand and Europe were added to the list. While pacers were originally the poor relation to trotters, they now account for seventy percent of harness racing performers world wide. However, to maintain balance the final list of almost four thousand Classic

Races comprises almost equal numbers for pacers and trotters. In addition, there is an allocation of races for two year old, three year old and aged horses in proportion to their overall importance. The balance between races for colts and fillies is reasonably even, although a slight difference reflects historical circumstances where open races were replaced with separate divisions for colts and fillies.

Speed and earnings lists

The speed lists enable the reader to follow the evolution of the breed. The speed evolution lists indicate how the speed records have evolved internationally from the earliest beginnings to present times. The speed performance lists show the first hundred horses to achieve the 2:10, 2:00 and 1:55 benchmarks. The current speed performance lists are the 1:48 performers in pacing and 1:53 performers in trotting. By navigating through these lists, the reader can trace the impact and demise of sire lines and most importantly the strength of maternal families in producing this speed.

Maternal families

The program identifies over two thousand North American families of which only three hundred are still active. As mentioned, these families have been allocated a number from 1 to 3000 according to their contribution to the success and development of the standardbred.

All mares originating in North America were allocated the letter U as an identifier (because US is the commonly used identifier in Australasia). Outside America, other standardbred families have developed and the program has identified, named and numbered almost fifteen hundred families in Australia allocating them the letter A, over one

thousand in New Zealand with the letter N and a further five hundred in Europe with the letter E.

When numbering the families, success was measured by the number of Classic Winners among the progeny of each family. Family numbers were originally allocated in 2005 and although recent additions have altered the fortunes of each family slightly, the maternal families remain in almost the same order almost a decade later. The most noticeable change has been the widening gap between the number of Classic Winners for the two leading families compared with the others.

TABLE 1.2 AMERICAN MATERNAL FAMILIES

Number	Name	Winners to June 2014
U1	Medio	1651
U2	Minnehaha	1593
U3	Mambrino Beauty	1005
U4	Jessie Pepper	986
U5	Sally Sovereign	1125
U6	Mamie	809
U7	Miss Duvall	612
U8	Lizzie Witherspoon	707
U9	Midnight	629
U10	Jane Hunt	613
U11	Esther	484
U12	Miss Copeland	353
U13	Dolly B	276
U14	Ab	332
U15	Lady W	212

The number of Classic Race winners for each of the top fifteen American families up to the end of June 2014 is shown in Table 1.2. The success of these families in producing progeny with speed and earnings records, champion performers and successful sires will be discussed in later chapters.

The name allocated to a family is that of the earliest standardbred mare either registered or identified. In

some cases, however, a thoroughbred mare, or one of unknown breeding, has produced two or more standard producing mares and in these cases the name of that original mare has been allocated.

As an illustration consider the family of Medio (U1). While her dam Topsy was standardbred, she was not registered and her details not verified. The name of her only daughter Medio was then used.

Likewise, Netty Clay, the dam of Minnehaha (U2) appears to have been standard but convention has attributed the family to her very successful daughter who produced ten Classic Progeny. In the case of Jane Hunt (U10), she was a thoroughbred mare and it was seven generations before a standardbred arrived. In this instance two mares were foaled; Kathleen (1865) and Alma Mater (1872) that each formed separate branches of the same family. Other earlier dams had produced thoroughbred sons that appear in early standardbred pedigrees, so the common ancestress in both cases was Jane Hunt.

Since the creation of the American standardbred, many mares have been exported to Australia, New Zealand and Europe where they have established successful families. In a few instances the families have even become extinct in America. Where this has occurred, the maternal families maintain their U letter and have been allocated a number in the 300s for those in Australia and New Zealand and 400s for those established in Europe.

Terminology

The terminology used in both this book and the related web based program follows standard conventions. These are restated here to avoid misunderstanding and assure a complete appreciation of the analysis presented. In addition there are some additional new terms used in Classic Families that are explained below.

Performance and earnings records

Australia and New Zealand allocate winning performances as a mile rate using tenths of a second while **North America uses fifths of a second**. When exported to Australia or New Zealand, the performance of an American horse is readjusted to reflect local convention. Thus a best American performance of 1:55.3, for example, will be registered as 1:55.6US (the suffix indicating that the time was achieved in America).

The Classic Families data base closely follows the time conventions of the countries in which they were set. Australian and New Zealand performances are recorded in **tenths** while those in North American are in fifths followed by the suffix US. Trotting performances will have the prefix **T** and any performance achieved in a time trial will have the suffix **TT**. Performances of either gait in qualifying races will be preceded by the letter **q**. The New Zealand convention of allocating placed times has not been followed. Any time shown for a New Zealand performance represents a winning time, as is the convention elsewhere in the world. In Europe, performances are registered as kilometre rates followed by the letters EU.

Performers that set world records, whether they be for age, gender or track size follow the American convention of being termed **World Champions**.

In a similar way, Australian and New Zealand earnings are recorded in the dollars of their respective countries and treated as equivalent where a horse has earnings in both countries. North American earnings are preceded by the letters US and are in accordance with the official USTA website. European stake earnings are shown in Euros, although those earned prior to the adoption of this currency are shown in the currency of the nation in which they were earned.

Three eras

Given the dramatic changes in speed records, earnings and statistical records, the task of tracing the rise and demise of sire lines and of ranking the champion sires within them has been divided into three distinct eras. The first, the **Foundation Era** spans the half century from the first mile in 2:30, by Lady Suffolk in 1845, to the close of the nineteenth century. This was a period in which the basis of the breed as we know it today was formed. It was also an era that belonged to Hambletonian 10 and his sons, particularly George Wilkes. The end of this era was marked by the onset of a severe economic recession that almost brought the breed to an end. Stud farms struggled, broodmare bands were reduced and the industry stood still for almost a decade. This is reflected in the records established at the beginning of this decade. Most remained unchallenged until well into the next century.

The second era began with the economic recovery that occurred during the first decade of the new century and has been labelled accordingly in this book. This **New Century Era** also saw the emergence of two sires foaled at the end of the previous era in Peter the Great and Axworthy. They and their sons were to dominate the next fifty years as the industry rose and fell through two World Wars and The Great Depression.

An arbitrary cut off date between the New Century Era and the **Modern Era** has been set at 1950. Not only is this another fifty year time span but it also witnessed significant improvements in racing equipment, the commencement of mobile barrier starts and the beginning of the explosion in early speed. It also coincides with the arrival of the great sires Adios, Meadow Skipper and Stars Pride, each of whom began siring dynasties that have dominated to the present.

Classic Winners, Classic Horses, Classic Progeny and Classic Descendants

It is important to the analysis that follows, that there is a clear understanding of these four terms.

Any horse that wins one of the Classic Races described above, or appears on a Speed Evolution or Speed Performance list, is highlighted in the *Classic Families* program in **bold** type and referred to as a **Classic Winner**.

These Classic Winners plus all those horses that make up their pedigree are referred to as **Classic Progeny**. Any progeny that is not a Classic Progeny is not entered into the data base. Thus, a sire or dam may have many progeny but only those offspring that become Classic Progeny appear in the Classic Families data base. The immediate foals of a sire or dam entered into the program are referred to as Classic Offspring.

This strategy enables better analysis of success by identifying; winning progeny (**Classic Winners**), progeny that contribute to the pedigree of winners (**Classic Progeny**) and horses that did not contribute at all to the advancement of the breed. In many instances sires and dams that produced large numbers of foals are only represented by one of their progeny. **Classic Descendants** are those Classic Progeny that appear in later generations of maternal families or sire lines.

These four terms are of vital significance in measuring success. The contribution of sires and dams is compared in the following pages by constantly referring to the number of **Classic Winners** they produced and to the **Classic Progeny** that have contributed to genetic inheritance.

Comparing sires statistics

In following chapters the impact of sires will be measured. Initially this will involve tables based upon Standard Performers (2:30 for trotters and 2:25 for pacers then reduced to 2:20 and 2:15 respectively). Although no longer significant, this is a useful way of comparing siring contributions within the Foundation Era and the New Century Era.

The second measure is the number of **Classic Progeny**, or contributing offspring included in the Classic Families data base. This recognises the enduring impact of a sire over his lifetime rather than a single season, because it includes all foals that contributed in some way to later successful horses.

Using this measure, the standout Foundation Era sires are Hambletonian 10 with two hundred and twenty six and his sons George Wilkes 519 with one hundred and thirty eight and Electioneer 125 with one hundred and three.

In the New Century Era we see the impact of Peter the Great three hundred and eleven, Volomite three hundred and thirty one and Guy Axworthy two hundred and forty nine.

The Modern Era features Speedy Crown with seven hundred and thirty five, Albatross six hundred and fifty four and Super Bowl five hundred and eighty five.

The third measure is that of Classic Winners. This is not an effective measure for use in the first two eras because far less Classic Races are recorded on the data base, due mainly to a lack of available results. However, it is a very reliable measure in the Modern Era where the standout sires are Speedy Crown with two hundred and sixty two individual Classic Winners and the pacer Albatross with two hundred and nineteen.

This measure, however, does not take into account the huge number of foals sired by these sires, so ratios of Classic Winners to foals are also employed. This study of the number of Classic Winners comparative to the number of foals shows another interesting aspect and is discussed in chapters three through to ten.

I suggest that, in order to follow more closely the reasoning set out in the following chapters, it is advisable to use this book in conjunction with the

[Classic Families](#) program available at this website.

Incidentals and acknowledgements

The possessive apostrophe has been dropped from use in harness racing data bases since the use of computers became widespread. To reduce the possibility of confusion, the same convention has been followed throughout this book. Hence champions such as Star's Pride will be spelt as Stars Pride in the following text and tables, to match what is recorded in the Classic Families data base.

Where possible photos have been found from older publications of such magazines as *Horseman and Fair World* to more accurately show the equipment in use at the time. Many of these horses raced prior to the widespread use of photography. On many occasions, particularly when horses gained national acclaim, they were depicted in lithographs which were popular additions to many households. Those of Currier and Ives in particular became integral to the history of harness racing, and many are still readily available for purchase.

These have been used to add greater atmosphere to the story of those champions of earlier times.