

Leading Sires and Bloodline Patterns in Steeplechasers

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In 1990, researchers at the University of Maryland initiated a study of factors affecting the success of horses used in the sport of steeplechasing. The preliminary findings of that study were published as “Dosage and Bloodline Patterns in Steeplechasers” (Fact Sheet 664). Data for 1994 and 1995 have been added to the initial study, and previously unavailable data have been acquired and included.

The added data supported and reinforced the patterns related to dosage, which were discussed in the previous publication. New data on dosage will continue to be acquired and analyzed but, until significant changes in patterns emerge, the findings from the earlier study remain useful and timely.

Background of This Study

The pedigrees of all steeplechase winners in the United States between January 1, 1991 and December 31, 1995 were analyzed. The raw data was acquired from the National Steeplechase Association, Bloodstock Research Information Services, and Jockey Club Information Systems. There were a total of 606 steeplechase winners included in the study. In the previous study, data on 537 horses were analyzed and overlapping data, covering steeplechase winners in 1991, 1992 and 1993, are included in this analysis.

Because of the enormous size of the data set, and the fact that each time a generation is added to the analysis the data set more than doubles, only sires in the first three generations were considered. Researchers were attempting to identify specific sires, their exact position in the pedigree, their frequency in each position, and any other pedigree patterns that emerged.

Previously unavailable data were obtained from Jockey Club Information Systems. This data included

the number of horses by a sire or grandsire making a start in a steeplechase race within the time frame (i.e., runners) and data related to purse earnings.

As in the previous study, leading sires are categorized first by number of steeplechase winners and secondly by number of steeplechase stakes winners. The first is a good indicator of quantity, whereas the second is a better indicator of quality. Figures for average earnings per runner and per winner, as well as identification of the sire’s primary earner and the amount it won are also presented.

Leading Sires

Followers of the sport and bloodline experts will not be surprised to find that Northern Baby has retained his ranking as the nation’s leading steeplechase sire (Table 1). His 10 winners, from 19 steeplechase runners, have total earnings exceeding \$1 million. Northern Baby’s winning progeny have average earnings of \$100,764, with his primary earner being former steeplechase champion, Warm Spell.

Making a very positive move into second place on the leading sire list is Golden Act. The fact that he has sired eight winners from only nine steeplechase runners is particularly impressive. Although the data in Table 1 are not calculated annually, it should be noted that in 1995 alone Golden Act sired 7 winners — 2 of which were also stakes winners. By comparison, Northern Baby sired 2 winners and no stakes winners in 1995.

Northern Dancer’s dominance as the leading paternal grandsire is strengthened by the new analyses. His presence as paternal grandsire of 63 winners and 10 steeplechase stakes winners completely overshadows the genetic influence of the other leading sires in the category (Table 2). This conclusion is

underscored by the fact that Northern Dancer is the paternal grandsire of more than 10 percent of all steeplechase stakes winners, and excluding the influence of the second- and fifth-placed sires in this category, his sons, Nijinsky II and Lyphard, he exceeds the combined number of stakes winners by the other sires listed in Table 2.

Although Nijinsky II's rank as the second leading paternal grandsire is a notable accomplishment, his influence as the leading maternal grandsire, as Table 3 shows, elevates his genetic pre-potency to an advanced and more versatile level. (Nijinsky II's versatility is discussed later.)

Green Dancer's statistics as a maternal grandsire are particularly impressive. Had the rankings of sires in Table 3 been arranged by any criteria other than number of winners, he would have been at the top of the list. The fact that Green Dancer is the only one of the top ten ranked maternal grandsires still standing at stud is also notable and indicates that his positive influence will increase with time.

Analysis of the sires listed in Tables 2 and 3 may produce a more accurate picture of the true genetic influence of specific stallions, because the demand for sons of certain sires such as Northern Dancer and Nijinsky II are clearly affected by economic factors. That is, almost anyone with a sound, athletic son of Northern Dancer will elect to stand him at stud after his flat-track career rather than steeplechasing him because of the comparative risks and returns. This situation is minimized at the grandsire level.

A summary, in which the sire's influence is weighted to account for generational factors, is presented as Table 4. Northern Dancer overwhelmingly dominates the list of most influential stallions for steeplechase winners and stakes winners. He has more than double the points of his closest rivals in both total points and stakes points. Since Northern Dancer earned the majority of his points as a paternal grandsire, he is the second leading sire of the maternal grandsire and his sons Nijinsky II, Lyphard, Northern Fling and One For All appear as leading grandsires; it is safe to assume that his genetic influence will continue to be the dominant factor in steeplechasers for years to come.

Although the Northern Dancer influence totally dominates in both quantity and quality, there is a caveat. When evaluating his influence through female lines (the sum of the points in the columns with "(2), (4), and (6)" at the top), the Northern Dancer influence only accounts for a total of 52

points. In other words, 94.3 percent of the Northern Dancer influence is expressed through his sons versus his daughters. Given Northern Dancer's ranking among the leading broodmare sires of flat-track earners, this is surprising.

While Northern Dancer is a notable example of a stallion whose primary influence is expressed through male-line progeny, he is by no means the only stallion to exhibit this tendency. Nearctic, Raise A Native, Northern Baby, Golden Act and Lyphard also exhibit a strong male-line tendency. Pedigree followers will recognize the pattern that Nearctic is the sire of Northern Dancer and the grandsire of Northern Baby and Lyphard. It should also be noted that age may be a factor for Northern Baby, Golden Act and Lyphard and, that given more time for the daughters of these sires to produce more offspring, their maternal contributions may increase.

At the other end of the genetic spectrum of influence are a group of sires which are female-line dominant. This group includes Prince John, Buckpasser, Round Table and Princequillo. It is interesting that all four of these sires have also distinguished themselves as top broodmare sires of flat-track horses.

Evaluating the versatile sires in the group listed in Table 4 is a bit more difficult, since age must be factored into the equation. The sires that appear to rate special significance as the most versatile are Nijinsky II, Green Dancer, Northern Fling and Secretariat. Since the oldest of these four, Nijinsky II, was foaled in 1967, time appears to be their ally and future analysis should reflect their influence in a wide variety of pedigree positions.

Patterns to Successful Steeplechasers

In conclusion, the addition of new data confirms previously established patterns related to dosage and bloodlines. The research suggests that a relatively few sires consistently appear in the pedigree of steeplechase winners. The information presented here and in the referenced fact sheet is intended to enable steeplechase enthusiasts to refine their selection process.

References

Malcolm Commer, *Dosage and Bloodline Patterns in Steeplechasers*, Fact Sheet 664. (College Park, Maryland: University of Maryland Cooperative Extension Service, 1994).

Table 1. Leading sires of steeplechasers, from January 1, 1991 through December 31, 1995, in descending order by number of winners

Stallion ¹	Number of steeplechase runners/winners	Number of steeplechase stakes winners	Average earnings/runner	Average earnings/winner	Primary earner
Northern Baby ¹	19/10	3	\$53,034	\$100,764	Warm Spell (\$457,963)
Golden Act	9/8	2	20,632	23,212	Fifth Creek (\$46,147)
Providential (IRE)	13/6	1	10,326	22,374	Western Run (\$54,696)
Iram (ARG)	8/6	0	15,317	20,423	Word of Honor (\$37,916)
Vaguely Noble	10/5	0	21,005	42,010	Made Noble (\$93,800)
Northern Fling	14/5	0	10,660	29,848	Polar Parallel (\$77,290)
Green Dancer	7/5	1	24,284	33,798	Green Highlander (\$102,034)
Compliance	7/5	1	29,630	41,482	Master McGrath (\$138,000)
Waquoit	5/4	0	17,794	22,243	Rippleton Road (\$38,170)
Topsider	4/4	0	25,176	25,176	Senator Brady (\$42,500)
Smarten	7/4	2	20,672	36,176	Wise One (\$57,900)
Sir Raleigh	15/4	0	3,260	12,227	Midnight Entry (\$18,700)
Rock Talk	6/4	0	17,944	26,916	Lots Of Talk (\$60,682)
Robellino	7/4	1	9,947	17,407	Angallino (\$33,310)
Mr. Leader	4/4	0	12,413	12,413	Speculative Hold (\$27,500)
Mokhieba	10/4	2	25,660	64,150	Circuit Bar (\$179,434)
Majestic Light	7/4	0	9,829	17,200	Shining Beacon (\$35,250)
Domineau	7/4	1	13,057	22,850	Barassi (CHI) (\$39,987)
Carnivalay	8/4	0	14,329	28,658	Dum Crambo (\$66,899)
Alleged	6/4	0	10,813	16,220	Reputed Dancer (\$26,100)

¹Stallions in bold type were actively standing at stud (in North America), at the start of the 1996 breeding season.

Table 2. Leading paternal grandsires of steeplechasers, from January 1, 1991 through December 31, 1995, in descending order by number of winners

Stallion ¹	Number of steeplechase runners/winners	Number of steeplechase stakes winners	Average earnings/runner	Average earnings/winner	Primary earner
Northern Dancer	159/63	10	\$15,987	\$40,347	Warm Spell (\$457,963)
Nijinsky II	66/21	5	9,985	31,381	Ninepins-GB (\$179,617)
Damascus	36/15	4	16,434	39,442	Circuit Bar (\$179,434)
Roberto	24/14	4	22,091	37,871	Darby Sky (\$175,806)
Lyphard ¹	23/13	5	24,615	43,549	Declare Your Wish (\$276,500)
Hail To Reason	26/11	3	9,272	21,915	Joe's O.K. (\$64,027)
Herbager	30/10	4	16,483	49,449	Isaiah (\$113,042)
Hoist The Flag	34/10	2	11,388	38,718	Saluter (\$201,789)
Graustark	25/10	1	6,547	16,367	Delessio (\$50,445)
Raise A Native	31/10	0	5,313	16,471	Gelatti (\$46,912)

¹Stallions in bold type were actively standing at stud (in North America), at the start of the 1996 breeding season.

Table 3. Leading maternal grandsires of steeplechasers, from January 1, 1991 through December 31, 1995, in descending order by number of winners

Stallion ¹	Number of steeplechase runners/winners	Number of steeplechase stakes winners	Average earnings/runner	Average earnings/winner	Primary earner
Nijinsky II	15/9	2	\$13,523	\$22,539	Caveat Fumator (\$43,300)
Key To The Mint	12/7	0	11,606	19,896	Petroski (\$32,050)
Tentam	15/7	0	7,813	16,743	King's Testimony (\$50,749)
Green Dancer ¹	7/6	3	113,117	131,970	Lonesome Glory (\$623,794)
Northern Fling	11/6	1	28,246	51,785	Irish Approach (\$198,460)
Hawaii (SAF)	9/5	1	8,690	15,642	Water Skipper (\$29,195)
One For All	9/5	1	9,905	17,829	Hodges Bay (\$31,190)
Proud Clarion	5/5	0	20,000	20,000	Peer Prince (\$52,475)
Secretariat	9/5	0	7,528	13,551	Grenade (\$25,600)
Val De L'Orne (FR)	8/5	0	12,399	19,838	Lots of Talk (\$60,682)

¹Stallions in bold type were actively standing at stud (in North America), at the start of the 1996 breeding season.

Table 4. Most influential stallions in the first three generations of steeplechase winner pedigrees, from January 1, 1991 through December 31, 1995, in descending order by total points

Stallion ²	Weighted points ¹							Total	Stakes
	Sire (1)	Mgs (2)	Pgs (3)	Smgd (4)	Smgs (5)	Spgd (6)	Spgs (7)		
Northern Dancer	16	8	504*	16	144	28	200	916*	172*
Nearctic	0	0	40	0	28	8	304*	380	60
Nijinsky II	32	72*	168	4	48	24	16	364	76
Bold Ruler	0	8	32	8	148*	48	116	360	40
Hail To Reason	0	16	88	16	56	28	88	292	52
Raise A Native	0	8	80	4	44	8	100	244	40
Prince John	0	24	40	32*	32	56	28	212	28
Tom Rolfe	16	32	48	4	28	4	68	200	52
Herbager	0	24	80	20	28	8	36	196	44
Ribot	0	0	16	16	36	36	88	192	28
Buckpasser	0	0	72	24	12	60	16	184	16
Turn-To	0	16	8	4	52	12	88	180	32
Graustark	16	0	80	4	36	20	20	176	12
Round Table	0	8	24	4	36	88*	16	176	16
Damascus	0	8	120	16	20	0	8	172	44
Never Bend	0	8	40	16	40	12	56	172	20
Vaguely Noble	80	32	32	4	8	8	4	168	16
Northern Baby	160*	0	0	0	0	0	0	160	48
Roberto	32	16	112	0	0	0	0	160	48
Sir Gaylord	0	24	32	16	20	16	48	156	8
Green Dancer	80	48	24	0	0	0	0	152	40
Grey Dawn II	32	24	56	4	20	16	0	152	24
Native Dancer	0	0	0	20	28	28	68	144	20
Hoist The Flag	0	32	80	8	0	8	8	136	28
Golden Act	128	0	0	0	0	0	0	128	32
Northern Fling	80	48	0	0	0	0	0	128	8
Secretariat	16	40	64	0	4	4	0	128	16
Lyphard	16	0	104	0	0	0	4	124	40
Princequillo	0	0	0	16	32	32	40	120	12
Run The Gantlet	48	8	56	4	0	0	0	116	52

Note. Numbers in parentheses refer to position in the pedigree. An asterisk (*) indicates a leader in each column. Mgs = maternal grandsire; Pgs = paternal grandsire; Smgd = sire of maternal grandam; Smgs = sire of maternal grandsire; Spgd = sire of paternal grandam; Spgs = sire of paternal grandsire.

¹Points are assigned to reflect the weighted influence in each generation, such that the sire receives 16 points per steeplechase winner, grandsires receive 8 points and great grandsires receive 4 points per steeplechase winner.

²Stallions in bold type were actively standing at stud (in North America), at the start of the 1996 breeding season.