

GUNNER

M I L L I O N D O L L A R S I R E



With only 146 NRHA-licensed get, it didn't take Gunner long to become an NRHA Million Dollar Sire, and he's the first Paint Horse to do so.

CHERYL MAGTEAUX

ONE IN A MILLION.

BY DOREEN SHUMPERT

NOT ONLY IS HE ONE IN A MILLION; HE'S ALSO now an NRHA Million Dollar Sire. He's registered as Colonels Smokinggun in the American Paint Horse Association (APHA). He's officially Colonels Smoking Gun in the American Quarter Horse Association (AQHA).

To most, he's "Gunner," a once-in-a-lifetime horse to train, ride, show, own, and breed. Aptly named, he's shot to the top of countless score cards, regardless of his rider, and his fans are blown away by his fantastic disposition, trainability, and willingness to please. Those closest to him say they've never seen the like, before or since.

And now, he's joined the ranks of the NRHA's elite as a Million Dollar Sire. Having finally gained his AQHA papers in 2004, he's a dual-registered horse and the first Paint to become a Million Dollar Sire.

Obstacles?

In 1993, a Quarter Horse colt hit the ground by Colonefourfreckle and out of the great proven producer Katie Gun. Bred by Eric Storey of Henagar, Alabama, it was certainly feasible for a baby with that blood to be a potential world-beater. But he didn't just radiate talent; he had a white bonnet face, blue eyes, four white legs, and a white tail—far too much glistening chrome to qualify for his AQHA papers. Prior to 2004, any foal with "excessive white" that extended into various areas (such as above the hocks or over the eyes) was ineligible for registration. It would be years before the rules changed.

Consequently, the Quarter Horse colt grew up Paint. Overcoming obstacle number one, he did qualify for his APHA papers as a sorrel overo, but another roadblock challenged the colt—or so it seemed.

He was completely deaf.

Missed Opportunity

Ask anybody who knows Gunner, and they'll tell you he's mega-athletic, uncannily smart, and incredibly mellow.

Among the first to saddle the yet undiscovered superstar was NRHA Professional and future Hall of Famer Clint Haverty, Krum, Texas. Gunner had been purchased by Paul and Pam Rohus of Royce City, Texas, through Charlie Hutton of Hilldale Farm, Fayetteville, Tennessee. After the Rohuses bought Gunner, they called several trainers to ride the colt. Haverty was the only one who called them back! He credits the colt for advancing his career, but claims the horse also skewed his expectations in the years that followed.

"He spoiled me," Haverty admits. "For three or four years after Gunner, I'd compare horses to him and they didn't meet my expectations. He was so unique. At that time, I didn't have the numbers of nice horses coming to me like some guys did, so it was neat to ride and develop a horse like that," he continues. "It was like raising an outstanding kid. There's so much satisfaction."



CHERYL MAGOTEUX

It was during these early years that Haverty and Tim McQuay first had the opportunity to buy the colt at a rock-bottom price, but were “too slow at the time to jump on it,” Haverty jokes.

McQuay stopped by Haverty’s to see Gunner and wanted a trial run, but that first ride didn’t go very well. Clint’s back was out, and he couldn’t ride the horse for Tim, so Tim just got on. Clint didn’t want to see the horse leave before the NRHA Futurity, so he “failed” to mention the horse was deaf and not to depend on the word “whoa” when stopping the horse.

“Tim couldn’t get him to stop,” Haverty laughs. Gunner and Clint went on to win reserve at the 1996 NRHA Futurity. “After that, he sold to Debra Sloan and went to New Jersey for several months. Then I got him back for his four- and five-year-old years,” says Haverty.

Gunner’s homecoming to Haverty’s place proved to be a prime example of the horse’s incredible intelligence.

“When I had him, there was a drop-off right outside his stall door that he used to step over,” Haverty explains. “While he was at Sloans, I filled that drop with concrete so it wasn’t there any more. When I put him back in his old stall, he took a great big step down and then snorted like ‘Where’d it go?’” Haverty recalls. “I thought to myself, ‘What in the world do I have here, a genius?’”

That same intelligence sparkled through in his training and in the show ring. Haverty describes Gunner as good to be around, enjoyable, and full of try.

“Once he figured out something, he had it,” he says. “You just had to give him the opportunity, then stay out of his way. He couldn’t talk, and it might sound crazy, but he could convey a message,” Haverty adds.

But he could also be a comedian.

“He was a goober to ride, too,” Haverty laughs. “He was playful. For example, he wouldn’t do his lead changes at first. You couldn’t trick him into it. We spent hours counter-



Clint Haverty was the first one to recognize Gunner’s many talents.

Gunner’s Big Shot Stats:

- ★ NRHA Lifetime Earnings: \$173,728
- ★ 1996 NRHA Futurity Reserve Champion
- ★ 1996 APHA Futurity Challenge Champion
- ★ 1997 NRHA Derby Finalist
- ★ 1997 APHA World Champion Junior Reining
- ★ 1998 NRBC Reserve Champion
- ★ 2001 USEF Reining Champion/USEF Festival of Champions
- ★ NRHA Certificate of Merit
- ★ NRHA Silver & Gold Certificates
- ★ 2003 NRHA Hall of Fame inductee

cantering and all, and he finally got pretty good. He’d change leads then look back at you like ‘Hey guy, how’d you like that?’ and give you the impression he was talking to you. He’d respond to you in a way that let you know you could leave him alone—he had it. It was just a feeling he’d give you.”

After the early years of NRHA and Paint titles with Haverty, Gunner returned home to Kim and Debra Sloans’ place in New Jersey. In 2001, NRHA Professional Bryant Pace was riding for the Sloans and their Kebra Ranch. It was his turn to climb aboard the Gunner.

Greatest Rides of All Time

“Originally, I didn’t want any part of it,” Pace says. “Clint had done so well with that horse, I thought ‘I have nothing to gain and everything to lose.’ But Kim came out to the barn one day and said that Clint wanted Gunner back for the USEF (United States Equestrian Federation) Reining Championship, and I said ‘You probably ought to send him because Clint knows that horse better than anybody,’” Pace explained. “Kim said he’d think about it, but he wanted to build our operation there, so he gave me a choice. Kim had shown Gunner in non pro classes, and he said either you can show him in it (the USEF) or you can help me do it,” he said. “Well that was a no-brainer, so I did it myself,” Pace jokes.

That ended up being another career-defining moment for yet another rider. Bryant won the USEF Reining Championship aboard Gunner, marking a 233.5 in the semi-finals, the highest ever in that event.

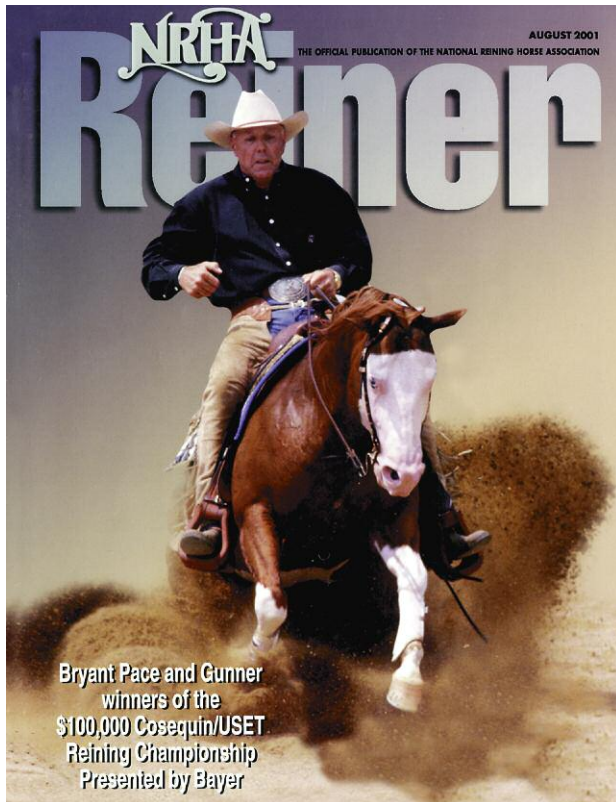
“It was the greatest ride of all time,” Pace exclaims. “I’ll probably never top that in my entire career. That horse couldn’t possibly ride any better than that. I’ve had others that I thought were once-in-a-lifetime horses, but he truly was.”

Although Pace has been credited with taking Gunner to the next level, he disagrees.

“I was just at the right place at the right time. He was ready to go to the next level,” he states.

Other highlights come to mind, like their first show where Gunner marked an amazing 229. That was topped by the second show in Oklahoma City, where Dell Hendricks led with a 228 when a 225 usually won. Gunner marked a 233.5.

“You think you’re running for second in that case,” Pace explains. “I just showed him. Everything clicked that night.



Bryant Pace: "I've had others that I thought were once-in-a-life-time horses, but he truly was."

It was phenomenal, and I give all the credit to the horse. He always has such a good mind, he's so athletic, he gives his all, and there's no cheat and no bad thoughts. I'll probably never see another one."

No Obstacle at All

Pace also felt that Gunner's other "obstacle"—his deafness—was really no obstacle at all.

"You see this come up in bonnet-faced horses," he explains. "Some of Gunner's get are also deaf. But personally, it made me a better trainer and showman. There's less distractions for the horse, like crowd noise, they can concentrate better, and they have to depend on you so much and wait on you to tell them what to do."

Pace explained that verbal cues, such as clucking, saying "whoa," or humming to slow one down, obviously don't work on deaf horses.

"In a way, those things are crutches," he adds. "I get in tune more with the horse, the feel becomes so much more, and they go fast because I have a leg on them, not because I'm clucking. Now I treat all of them (his horses) like they're deaf, and I get them a lot more broke."

But what does he consider Gunner's standout trait? Again, his sweetness.

"He's got a look in his eye like you can walk up and pet him. He was born with natural manners," Pace says.

Kim Sloan also has many fond memories. In 1996, he went looking for mares to breed to his stallions, but true to form, Gunner was the one who stood out.

Gunner's High-Money Earners:

| | | | |
|----------------------|-----------|----------------|----------|
| The Great Guntini | \$125,229 | Smokin Dually | \$64,269 |
| Snow Gun | \$118,339 | Gunners Indian | \$46,403 |
| Sorcerers Apprentice | \$72,367 | Gunslder | \$43,571 |

"I saw a Paint colt with Clint Haverty that never minded anything else," Sloan said. "I told my wife that I had good news and bad news. Good news was I'd found a horse. Bad news was he was a stallion, not a mare." Kim's wife Debra obviously agreed, she was officially Gunner's owner until he sold to the McQuays.

During the course of Sloan's ownership, Kim showed Gunner as a non pro, and Haverty and then Pace showed him in open competitions. Miraculously, Gunner carried all three riders to their highest scores ever.

"Clint marked a 156, I marked a 224, and Bryant marked a 233. That's incredible," Sloan remarks. "This horse was in and out of retirement three times. Something would come up, so we'd get him out and campaign for a certain goal, then retire him again. That went on until 2002, which was his last show year." (Gunner was inducted into the NRHA Hall of Fame in 2003.)

Sloan's experience with the bald-faced wonder was similar to Haverty's. Kim admits that Gunner spoiled him as a non pro competitor. It took 10 minutes, a couple of fast circles, a few spins each way, and one stop to prepare to show. He'd wake up long enough to do his job, then walk out and go to sleep on the rail without ever even breathing hard. He was the same with a pro aboard.

"In 1998, at the Southwest Reining Horse Association Futurity, Clint showed him in the open and it was one of the most spectacular opens ever," Sloan remembers. "There were over 20 horses, and you had to be over 150 to get a check. We drew late, and a 152.5 was leading. I told my wife I wasn't sure we could beat that; it'll take a great run," Sloan explained. "Gunner walks in quiet, marks a 156 with Clint, wins, walks out quiet, and goes to sleep back in the warm-up pen. He's the type that won't move unless he has to, then he gives 100 percent."

Unbeatable Temperament

Like the others, when asked to choose a favorite quality about Gunner, Sloan said his temperament. The horse became such a crowd favorite, it became necessary to have people stay with him all night, not because of any danger, but to ward off admirers so he could sleep. He also recalled Gunner needing his front feet soaked twice daily due to quarter cracks for an hour each time at the USEF semi-finals. They'd take him out of his stall, throw the rope over his neck, and put both front feet in the bucket. There he stood for an hour, untied, with no one holding him. When the hour was up, they'd take off the rope from around his neck, then he'd take his feet out.

Gunner further displayed a high level of understanding each day when it came time to clean his stall. He'd stand in one corner until you were done, give you that certain look, then move to the other side.

“He was an ultra athlete,” Sloan said. “But it was his personality and everything all rolled into one that made him so special.”

The Legacy

At Kebra Ranch, Gunner stood to limited outside mares due to his show schedule and the short breeding season in New Jersey. Also, the Sloans were more concerned with quality, not quantity. But as competition slowed, chiefly due to Kim's highly demanding schedule as an orthopedic surgeon and duties as NRHA president, the Sloans made what he calls “the hardest decision they've ever made in the horse industry,” which was to sell Gunner, but only under one condition.

“We'd had offers for years from everywhere, even overseas, but we've always respected Tim and Colleen McQuay's program,” Sloan says. “We've had success with each other's horses. I've been to their ranch, and I know how they treat their horses. Debra and I would not have sold the horse to anybody but the McQuays. I couldn't think of a better place for him to go.”

So, in 2005, the same year the famed Hollywood Dun It (owned by McQuay/Easton) died, Gunner embarked on career number two as the senior sire at McQuay Stables in Tioga, Texas. Ironically, things had come “full circle,” and McQuay was the proud owner of the record-breaker that had first captured his attention as a young colt.

“I liked him from day one when I saw him with Clint, and I did try him, but didn't buy him,” McQuay laughs, agreeing with Haverty. “Then I told Colleen at the (NRHA) Futurity that we better buy him. She priced him, but Kim had already bought him,” he says.

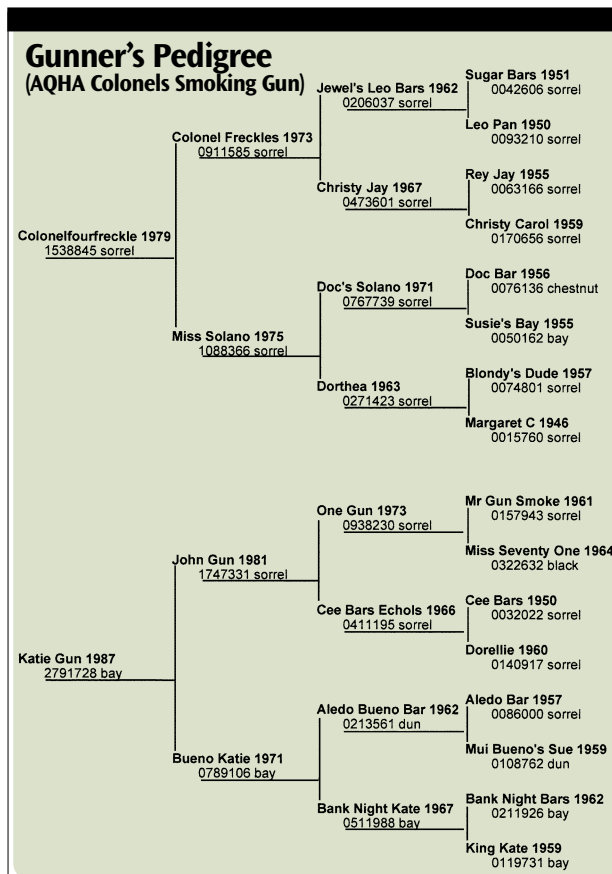
Now Gunner has finally ended up with McQuay, and the NRHA Professional, Hall of Famer, Two Million Dollar Rider, and Million Dollar Owner (See story elsewhere in this issue.) couldn't be more excited. Colleen wasn't so sure about getting heavy into the breeding end of the business again, but Gunner quickly became part of the family's retirement plan and “part of the woodwork.”

McQuay doesn't know about a “magic cross” with respect to breeding mares yet, but he and Colleen are really happy with the crosses they're getting. They'll breed Gunner to several Hollywood Dun It mares and “everything” at this point.

As a stallion, he's the same old Gunner.

“He's easy to be around,” McQuay says. “When we first got him, he'd sort of stand in the back of his stall but we give our stallions treats at the door. He figured that out pretty soon, and now he greets everybody. It's a great honor to own him. He fits into our program so well,” he continues. “He deserves to have a great chance, and we sure hope to give it to him.”

It's already apparent that his get inherit his disposition. They're good-minded, trainable, and many are “characters” to be around. Some are even deaf as well, but not as many now with more Quarter Horse mares in the mix. Many inherit the trademark “chrome.” And while each and every one may not possess every ounce of his athleticism, the majority are standouts. They're big stoppers, crowd-pleasers,



and they ride a lot like him. They're talented, too—proved by his Million Dollar Sire status.

According to APHA, his first two registered foals were born in 1997, and included Colonels Lil Gun, who followed in his sire's hoof prints and is a champion and sire of Paint and Quarter Horse reining champions. The Great Guntini, his highest money-earning offspring, has slid his way to earnings over \$125,000 and counting. As a group, his 146 NRHA-licensed get have earned \$1,032,728 for an average of \$7,073 each. And, if they're overachievers like their sire, chances are “You ain't seen nothin' yet.”

Obviously, the reining industry will be “going great guns” far into the future. ♦

Editor's Note: As the NRHA doesn't record scores, those mentioned in his article are unofficial.

ABOUT THE WRITER:

Doreen Shumpert is a freelance writer based in Berthoud, Colorado. She has a lifetime of experience in the horse industry, and has trained, judged, shown most English and western events, including jumping, reining, and barrel racing. She's also a certified riding instructor. Along with her children and husband Dave, they own and operate X2D Horses where they breed, raise, and train both rodeo and show prospects. Visit them online at www.x2dhorses.com.

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