

First Secretary

by Hope Holland

A MARYLAND STALLION OF DISTINCTION

The Appaloosa in Maryland has had a long and, if you will pardon the pun, spotted history. Unfortunately the advent of the App as a western pleasure horse for the Maryland local show rings coincided with the advent of the Quarter Horse. As most, if not all, of the local judges were Quarter Horse oriented, the western App had to be twice as good as the more plain colored competition if he wanted half the ribbons. The author's own experience of showing an App in western competition included hearing a judge tell her, "Oh, sure, your horse had the best round in here. But there were four plain colored horses that I liked better!"

Fortunately the Appaloosa seemed to fare better in the English circles. The show hunter folk didn't mind having a polka-dotted horse if it jumped well and many Apps were quite clever over fences. The App proved its worth at the track as a pony horse and the field hunters found that they could keep one App to go hunting three times a week with instead of a couple of other horses. Expediency and the Appaloosa were old friends. If the truth be told, the Appaloosa mentality was also more suited to a bit of autonomy in its duties than the western pleasure rings in the eastern United States allowed anyhow.

The Appaloosa turned up in the most unexpected places but in no place was it more of a shock than in the first successful mating of the super horse of the racing world, Secretariat.

Trouble in the Breeding Shed

After the big red horse's stunning wins in his first career as a racehorse, there were tidings of troubles in the breeding shed. It is not unusual for a youngster to have some problems making the transition from the shed row of the track to the breeding shed of the stud farm, but this was Secretariat, the super horse of Triple Crown repute and it was considered newsworthy that things were not proceeding well for the big colt. Speculation was rife.

In an article in Sports Illustrated there was a frank discussion of Secretariat's problems in the breeding shed. His sperm had been tested a half dozen times and found to show similar results



There was no denying 'Big Red's' mark on First Secretary.

Photo Courtesy the Appaloosa Horse Club of Canada.



Advertisement for First Secretary's services at stud.

Photo Courtesy the Appaloosa Horse Club of Canada.

each time: immature sperm in differing amounts.

In the article, entitled "They Used to Call Him Sexy", the authors, Whitney Tower and William F. Reed wrote, "Increasingly, racehorses are receiving heavy doses of drugs, vitamins and steroids. Modern steroids do help Thoroughbreds remain at their physical peaks, but few people know what effect this medication may have on the genitalia. Similarly, the repeated use of hormones may diminish a horse's breeding capacity."

Enter an Appaloosa mare named Leola. Leola was a nurse-mare owned by Bill Taylor, then manager of Kentucky's Claiborne Farm. Leola was bred to Secretariat and, in due time, pronounced in foal. With their usual hyperbole, the sports writers (who were having a field day with the fact that the first issue of Secretariat would be from a *déclassé* dam) named Leola 'mother of the year'. The sports writers were not the only ones who were somewhat ashamed of the lineage of the proposed foal. Secretariat's owners declined to issue a breeding certificate for Leola. Those of us who owned Apps were not surprised by this double standard, having dealt with it in several forms throughout the ownership of our horses, but I know that we were all snickering at the discomfort of the mighty of the Thoroughbred world with the fact the first issue of the proud Secretariat would very likely be a brightly colored horse with an undoubtedly western heritage.

His Kingdom for This Horse

Jack Nankivil, a real estate entrepreneur, was not snickering. After getting an introduction to the horse world through the auspices of three horse crazy teenaged daughters who shared a passion for Appaloosas, by 1971 Nankivil owned his own breeding operation, named Sahaptin which was situated in Winona, Minnesota. Nankivil read of the impending birth of a Secretariat foal to Taylor's App mare and decided that he needed to make a call to Taylor in KY.

He was surprised to learn that his call was one of many from others with the same idea. Leola was a mare of decent repute on her own, a registered mare who had sold for a record price at

that time in Texas in 1963. By the standards of her time, Leola was a good Appaloosa mare. Several breeders and not a few mountebanks had contacted Taylor with offers for the mare but he was not ready to make a deal for the mare immediately.

Nankivil was able to make an appointment with Taylor to see the mare and enter an offer for her in what was to become a bidding war for a mare who was suddenly a very important broodmare in the annals of Appaloosa history. He assured Taylor of his intention to use the horse responsibly as a breeding asset to the Appaloosa breed (instead of a display animal to simply raise money in a side show manner) and was assured of first refusal at any bid.

It took two trips to KY and an investment that was big enough to cause Nankivil a trip to the bank to take a mortgage on his home to achieve the purchase. There are several stories about the amount but it is estimated that Nankivil purchased the mare Leola for an amount in the neighborhood of \$25,000.

This purchase was, of course, pure gamble. The mare was in foal, but anyone who understands the nature of the breeding business knows that there can be many a slip between 'in foal' and 'live foal'. It was also anyone's guess as to whether the foal would be colt or filly, colored or solid. The potential permutations of Nankivil and Leola's date with Lady Luck ranged from, at worst, a solid filly which would then have to be bred again with another App to get color and a colt, to the best case scenario, a bright colored colt with recognizable Appaloosa characteristics.

Appaloosa characteristics include a wide range of things besides the undeniable coat colors which can put in an appearance up to the horse's fifth year. Parti-colored visible skin, which appears around the lips, nostrils and eyes on the head and around the anus and genitals at the other end of the horse is an indication of App blood, as are striped hooves (called 'agate stripes'). Lack of hair in the mane, tail and forelock were at that time an indicator of Appaloosa blood and pictures of Leola show that she had this characteristic, which has since largely gone by the board in the breed with the outcrosses to Quarter Horse and Thoroughbred horses. The white sclera that gives the App his startling wide-eyed look is yet another characteristic of the breed.

Nankivil did hedge his bet with the gods of fortune. At the time that he was apprised of the required purchase price, Nankivil sold lifetime breeding rights to Leola's foal-to-be to five other breeders for \$2500 each. By the time of the foal's birth he had sold a total of 15 lifetime breeding rights to other breeders for \$2500 each. All of these people were gambling on a colt.

The Stork's Report

At the time of the foal's birth the NBC and CBS news cameras were set up in the tack room of Nankivil's barn awaiting the impending birth with bated breath. They were not allowed to set up in the barn for fear of annoying the mother-to-be. Also not allowed was representation by the ABC network. Nankivil, a longtime Minnesota Vikings fan had taken umbrage at what he considered slighting remarks made by Howard Cosell about his favorite football team and refused to allow ABC access to his farm.

As Nankivil said at the time, "...this was one small man in the Midwest who would never have another chance to make his opinion felt taking a stand against Cosell," and Nankivil was exercising his right while he had it.

The gods of fortune often smile on those children of theirs who take the offensive against the world and, true to form, they smiled upon Nankivil and upon the mare Leola. At a little after midnight on November 15, 1974, Leola produced a big, fancy chestnut foal with a bright white blanket and three white stockings. More important, it was a colt.

The CBS and NBC representatives in the tack room were stunned when Nankivil, fueled by a couple of slugs of Kentucky bourbon (not his usual potion of Scotch, but taken in honor of the origins of his colt's sire) burst into the tack room and announced, "The little son of a bitch is a stud colt!"

Denied His Rightful Name

Considering the time that he had waited and the amount of the mortgage on his house, it is probably understandable that Nankivil in the words of his daughter, "...went a little crazy" that night. Within a very short time Nankivil had sold five more lifetime breedings to the horse for \$15,000 each and, very probably, cleared the remaining mortgage on his property.

Nankivil registered the colt, christened First Secretary, with the Canadian Appaloosa Horse Club, which allowed him to put down that the horse was out of the mare Leola and by Secretariat. The American Appaloosa Association would allow Nankivil only to say that the colt was out of Leola and by 'an unnamed Thoroughbred sire' as he had no breeder's certificate, in spite of the national hoopla surrounding the foal's birth. Nankivil said that he would register with the American Appaloosa Association if they allowed him to say 'unnamed Thoroughbred winner of the Triple Crown' but they declined that as well.

With the eventual combining of the Canadian and the American Appaloosa groups the problem solved itself, since each organization had agreed to recognize the other's standard, the foals from First Secretary were eligible for registration with the American club.

With admirable foresight Nankivil had promised the initial owners of lifetime breedings to First Secretary that he would limit the breedings to the horse in each year to 50 or 60 mares (with necessary returns) so that he would not devalue the horse with cheap mares. His first choice of mares to be bred were Quarter Horse and Thoroughbred race mares. Pumping the mighty Secretariat's genes into the start gate of Appaloosa racing seemed a sure bet.

The theory behind this decision was that a failed race horse might very well become a show horse, but breeding a show horse would definitely not result in a racing prospect as well. First Secretary came to stud at age four with no show or race record, being deemed too valuable a breeding animal to be risked in training or transit to races or competitions.

And The Beat Goes On

In his first year at stud he was bred to 43 mares, got 40 of them in foal and put color on three quarters of his foals. In this he did exceptionally well as fully half of the mares that he bred were plain colored themselves. In his second year at stud he improved his record by getting 60 of 63 mares in foal.

At maturity First Secretary reputedly stood close to 17 hands and, by all accounts, was the image of his sire, if you added the necessary Appaloosa variations in coloring. Although he was not being bred specifically for the show ring his foals were early on doing well in the halter classes throughout the mid west and the south. Several were winners and champions at halter in their yearling years.

First Secretary's first crop to race were a promising group as well. Of five starters, all five finished in the money and three were winners. The horse Bold Centurion was a four-length winner at Fresno, CA. First Replay won at 660 yards at Pompano Park and No Alibi won in a 700 yard dash in Florida and enchanted the bettors when his win completed a \$4,782 triple. Red Sea achieved three seconds in three starts in his first year at the track.

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First Secretary stood at Jack Nankivil's farm until January of 1988 when Nankivil called Randy Floyd and offered to sell the horse to him. First Secretary moved to New Hampshire to stand at Floyd's farm, in Northwood, N. H. for a stud fee of \$1000.

First Secretary Makes The Free State His Final Home

First Secretary stood in Maryland for the last three years of his life. Meredith Morrell (James), now deceased, brought the horse to her farm in Rising Sun, MD in 1990. In 1993, he was euthanized from complications due to colic.

Morrell was a devotee of the Appaloosa Sport Horse and owning First Secretary gave her a chance to cross him onto both Quarter Horse and Thoroughbred mares to complete the work that she had undertaken to bring an all around American sport horse to life within the Appaloosa breed.

First Secretary was a big horse and he sired big horses, a plus for the lady who needed a tall horse for her own length of leg. Her First Secretary outcrosses were shown at all levels and in both open and Appaloosa shows.

SRF Minnow (from a birth that took place under water in a creek on her owner's Stoney Run Farm), owned by Jo Ann Kricker in Cecil County, is a granddaughter of First Secretary. She is by his good son, Jetta's Image, and out of a Quarter Horse mare. After a successful career in "suitable to become" classes that included being named 2 y.o. Maryland State Fair Champion in Non-TB, Minnow is now on a free lease to an former 4-Her who is interning with Denny Emerson. In this Kricker is carrying on the traditions of her good friend, Meredith Morrell, who frequently loaned her valuable horses to young riders.

His Own Rightful Legacy

In his lifetime, First Secretary sired not only race prospects and Appaloosa show horses but also sport horses of superior quality. His foals performed well in dressage, endurance and in the hunter/jumper rings, across the nation and internationally. He has sons and daughters in such far-flung places as England and Australia.

He sired a total of 247 horses, including several sons that went on to be successful sires as well. Jetta Rue (see inset) has sired several fine show horses and is known as a good sire of speed horses as well. Ron Harkins, just over the Pennsylvania line in Felton, has a mare by Jetta Rue. The 9 year old Mega Jet, competes in the speed events (in App classes, speed events are run in heats horse against horse, instead of only against the clock). Mega Jet has a Superior in Barrel Racing, ROM (Registers of Merit) in every other App Speed Event except for Rope Racing. In 2001 Mega Jet and Ron finished 8th in the World App Show in Texas in Figure 8 Race (at one time or another in the mare's career the mare has ranked in the top ten year end point earners in the nation for each of her speed events). Her list of High-Point Awards for speed classes at App shows across the country is beyond counting.

In racing, First Secretary is the sire of 39 starters that won a total of \$53,100 with 8 winners, 1 Stakes Winner, 2 Stakes Placed and 3 Register of Merit racers. He sired 25 horses that were shown in Appaloosa shows and earned a total of 1373 points. The number of his foals that went on to show on the open circuits cannot be ascertained, but it is probable that many of them went into the open shows and did well in the hunter classes.

**If you have a First Secretary story to share with us,
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Equally important is the fact that his foals are horses that are easy to live with. Local owner of a First Secretary daughter, Kathy Erisman, says of her mare, First Folly (nicknamed "Pocket") that, "I love her to death and I will never get rid of her. She will always have a place in my barn!"

Erisman goes on to say, "The mare's trainer, Meredith Morrell said that this would be the easiest horse she had ever had to break—and she was right. This is my trail mare now and I wouldn't give her up for any amount of money. I love riding her."

And when you come right down to it, that is the measure of a horse, after all, isn't it?

SHOW RECORD FOR FIRST SECRETARY'S GET

American National Shows

Jetta Rue

1989 Year End High Point, Open Hunter Hack, 1st Year Green Hunter, Working Hunter, Non-Pro Hunter Hack, Non-Pro Working Hunter • **1990 National Champion**, 2nd Year Green Hunter, Non-Pro Hunter Hack, Non-Pro Working Hunter • **1990 World Champion**, 2nd Year Green Hunter, Non-Pro Hunter Hack, Non-Pro Equitation Over Fences • **1990 World Res. Champion**, Suitability For Dressage Stallions, Open Working Hunter

Something's Sweet

Versatility Champion • Bronze Medallion Winner • 1983 World Champion, Trail

Helen Wheels

Superior Event Award for Performance • Bronze Medallion Winner • 1984 World Champion, Hunter Hack

Nanny Brow

Bronze Medallion Winner • 1985 World Champion, Sr. Hunter Under Saddle

Suite As Sugar

Superior Event Award for Performance • Bronze Medallion Winner • 1985 Year End High Point, Sr. Saddle Seat • **1985 National Res. Ch.**, Sr. Saddle Seat • **High Point Youth Horse at 1985 Nationals**

Azucar

Reserve Natl. Champion • Many National & World Top Ten Placings

Secret Ingredient

Bronze Medallion Winner • 1985 National Champion, Hunter Hack • **1985 National Res. Ch.**, Green Hunter

Ms Secretary

1987 National Res. Ch., Open Jumper

International Shows

In The Black

Australian National Champion (sold for \$42,000)

State Secretary

New Zealand National Champion

First Draft

England Halter Winner and prominent breeding stallion

Secretary Royal

1989 Swiss National Champion, Hunter Under Saddle, Trail • **1990 Swiss National Champion**, Hunter Under Saddle • Sr. Western Pleasure • **1990 Swiss National Res. Ch.**, Trail