



ANZ

Breeder Of The Month

Louis Mihalyka - Laurel Oak Bloodstock

How did you become involved in breeding?

"I became involved in breeding, I suspect, the same way most people do. We liked racing and suddenly we had a mare who retired from racing, and we were looking at each other wonder what we are going to do so we said 'let's breed from her'. We started breeding and breeding very naively and unsuccessfully. We got smarter and my ex-accountant brain meant that we thought there was a better way of doing this, and I became a firm believer in pedigrees. In the early '90s the opportunity came up to become the Australasian representative for Brain Pedigree Analysis and I learned then that what I was doing was amateurish compared to the level of research that they were doing, so we have basically used Brain Pedigrees for all our matings and we have been breeding successfully for a long time since then."

How many mares do you own?

"At Laurel Oak, we manage 15 mares at a time and we try and keep them at commercial quality. One of the things that Brain told us very early, and it took a long time to really appreciate, was that a good mating will help a mare fulfil her potential, and we were too much into the pedigree theory rather than the quality of the mare. Since we have upped the ante with the quality of the mares, we have got a lot better in terms of producing high-quality racehorses."

Who are your favourite mares among the Laurel Oak broodmare band?

"Our best known mare would be Ancient Song, who we own with Stuart Ramsey. She was a Group One winner who holds the wonderful record of selling a \$1,600,000 Sepoy yearling a

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couple of years ago at the Inglis Easter Sale. He was the highest priced yearling by a first season stallion to sell in the Southern Hemisphere. We also have Lady Zhivago, who was a good city-class race mare, who is the mother of the Wellington Cup winner Maygrove. Texarcana was a good city-class mare who is well bred and the reason we kept her was because we knew the family was full of genuine racehorses, even though it wasn't sexy on the pedigree page. And we raced a lot of them, so we knew how good they were. Rebel Dane is a product of mating her with California Dane. Since then, we have been buying mares and we have had some good results. One of the mares is Power Of Love, who is the mother of Vacluse Bay, who won two Saturday races in a row at Rosehill recently."

What is the best piece of advice you have received or you would give about breeding?

"There are two things. Use quality mares and ring us up for a Brain Pedigree Analysis, because a good mating will help you breed a good horse."

Are there any pedigree nicks / stallions you like and why?

"No, for each mare there are going to be particular stallions who are suited to her and her pedigree, but that stallion might not suit other mares. I am a firm believer that part of the reason why some stallions succeed on one side of the world and not the other is that the gene pool of mares they are covering does not include the right mares for them. They could potentially succeed in that part of the world if they had the right gene pool of mares. Sometimes the gene pool of mares are so different that it doesn't suit the stallion."

What do you look for when selecting a mare? Is there a criteria you use when buying mares?

"I look at the family, the broodmare sire, the female line and what opportunities there are to not necessarily duplicate those ancestors but complement those ancestors. A good mating is not necessarily a duplication of a single ancestor but a merging of compatible bloodlines where the families are so similar, and they have worked in the past. For example, our horse Rebel Dane with Danehill and More Than



Rebel Dane

SPORTPIX

Ready has worked very well in the past. If you understand pedigrees, there is a reason why Danehill and More Than Ready work well and that is because the two pedigrees complement each other. There is plenty of line breeding going back in the pedigrees."

How do you see the industry changing in the next five years?

"The outlook for the breeding industry is outstanding. The level of international investment now is phenomenal and the prize money levels in the major states of New South Wales and Victoria, which are also the key breeding sectors, has been fantastic. As long as international involvement remains, and there are no major changes to interest rates or the world political scene, the market is going to be very good. Those international investors have really changed the game. We were able to go and buy mares four or five years ago who we would have no hope of buying now, because of the international competition and the willingness to pay vast amounts of money for them. Australian breeders need to get into a position where they can sell to these people rather than necessarily competing against them."

Which stallion do you think is the most underrated?

"I couldn't speak of one in particular because the stallions are all pretty well exposed."

What do you think of the first season stallions? Do you support them or do you like to go with the proven stallions?

"We do support the first season stallions, but again, because we are trying to breed commercially, which is our first thought, we will assess the mare and what stage of life she is up to, what number foal will it be, and what she has achieved so far when deciding suitable stallions. We do tend to avoid third season sires because we have been caught out a few times, because if the first crop hasn't fired, you can get burnt. We will look at the compatibility and the price of that stallion relative to the mare. If she has already produced something and can be mated to any stallion, then the foal is still going to sell well. If you end up with a mare who hasn't got a good breeding record, and the horse is by a stallion who isn't going so well, you are in a lot of trouble."

Who do you most admire / respect in the industry?

"I couldn't nominate any single person. There are so many fantastic operators in the industry and some new farms on the block, with Newgate being one of them. Then you have some wonderful established farms like Widden, Coolmore, Arrowfield, and Swettenham Stud with Adam Sangster in Victoria, who is standing Rebel Dane. Darley is another one, so I can't exclude anyone."

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