





SIGNIFICANT SIRE SERIES

Astronomicallee: Defying Convention

In six short years, a new stallion has risen to the favor of top Morgan breeders. With more than 100 foals on the ground and no show record, this young stallion has broken through the walls of convention for Morgan stallions, proving that beautiful, successful progeny are the best tool for marketing a stallion.

Before he'd risen to the successful sire status he has today, Astronomicallee was just a beautiful weanling, frolicking in the pastures of Shingle Branch Farm in Jasper, Alabama. His dam, the great Liberation Starbrite (Wham Bam Command x Austin Flying Cloud) had for four years been on the farm's show string, winning her first world titles in the amateur park harness division with C. A. "Tony" Lee, III. "Selling Liberation Starbrite was one of the hardest things I ever had to do since becoming involved with Morgans," Tony shared, "She is a once-in-a-lifetime horse. I am truly blessed to have had the chance to own and show her. The one hope making it possible for me to let go was the possibility of keeping a part of her through a foal. It is unbelievable how lucky we were to have that foal be 'Astro.' He truly is carrying on his dam's legacy. We are so happy to have him as part of the Lee family."

By Abbie Felton-Trexler

With her sale in 1997, Tony retained an embryo from Starbrite, and in 1999 Astronomicallee was born to her by Futurity French Command (Carlyle Command x Nobelle). The successful dam previously had produced the full brothers Liberation First Star and Aljaks Double Whammy, both by Century Free Spirit who, by the time of Astro's birth, already had embarked on their remarkably successful careers in the breeding shed. Jean Lee, the matriarch of Shingle Branch Farm, saw the dam line glowing brightly in young Astro. "I absolutely adored Starbrite. She had undeniable charisma and presence. From day one, Astro had the personality and charisma that captured everyone's attention. His personable nature always caught the eye of horsemen and non-horsey people alike. He was always a favorite in the barn. We miss having him here in Alabama, but get tremendous joy in seeing the impact his offspring are having in the Morgan world."

Convention has it that Morgan stallions prove themselves in the show arena in order to book mares. In only rare cases has this convention been defied. Astronomicallee's rise was promoted entirely through an aggressive advertising campaign using unique and beautiful images. Scott Trees captured the charisma and excitement of the shows Astro puts on at home for visitors in the photos shown on these pages.

GET OF *Astronomical*

(Top to bottom, left to right)

Love Her Madly, Locutus, Merriehill Roxie Hart, Cingate Lucky Star, and Cingate Revelation



Photos © Debbie Uecker-Keough, Howard Schatzberg and Tami Johnson

In the year of his birth, Astro was one of 35 foals born to Futurity French Command. Wildly successful in the breeding shed, French already had produced 80 foals by 1998: reflecting back on it now, a high percentage of the 263 foals he produced (and still produced thanks to frozen semen, five years after his passing) are now household names in Morgandom for their contributions in the show ring and the breeding shed. French brought his own sizeable talent to his foals. He was a two-time world champion in the park harness division (having won the three-year-old and then the amateur when he was just four), following in the impossibly large hoof prints of his great sire, Carlyle Command. Incredibly beautiful and exotic, he was the first foal of Nobelle (Noble Command x Waseeka Valiant Lady), the grand dam who later produced the great park horses HVK Ancient Cry, HVK Constantinoble, and The Noblest.

There was great hope for the young colt. He was begat from the royalty of the breed, an heir who held promise and talent for the future. Yet, tragedy struck when Astro was a yearling. While playing in the field at Shingle Branch, he badly injured a front leg. Tony nursed him back to health, but he feared the young colt might never show due to the cosmetic damage of his injury. Nevertheless, after a visit to the Alabama farm, Broadmoor trainers Mike Goebig and Dwayne Knowles encouraged Tony to send him to training, based on the talent and beauty that lined every curve of the colt's body.

As a late two-year-old and early three-year-old, Astro began to bloom in training at Broadmoor. He had the talent of his world champion parents; the exotic beauty and great size of his sire, and the eagerness to learn and please of his dam. He was masculine and strong, he loved more than anything to lead for his trainer, Dwayne, and his elevation in the front end was as extreme in-hand as it was in harness. Tony traveled north to Pennsylvania to drive the game colt. "It really is surreal to sit in the buggy and jog Astro. His charisma and fluid motion is very much like his famous dam. It's almost as if he glides effortlessly without ever touching the ground."

Because of his remarkable quality and talent, the team of Tony and his trainers decided to breed Astro, and in 2003 his first foal crop of 11 was born (an amazingly high number of get from an inaugural year). Among them were the Thornwood-bred Love Her Madly (x NBN At Your Command) and the Goebig/Knowles-bred Get Busy (x So Vain, herself out of NBN At Your Command), two young stars that quickly rose to fame in the park division under the Broadmoor banner (as did their dams before them). To date, the two have a combined total of five world championships and three reserve world titles. Interestingly, NBN At Your Command is by Carlyle Command, so his line runs parallel tracks on both sides of these pedigrees.

Soon, based on word of mouth-testimonials from those who were pleased with their foals, along with

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(Top to bottom, left to right)

Cedar Creek Flambeau, Get Busy, and Merriehill Black Betty.



Photos © Howard Schatzberg and Shane Shiflet

Goebig, Knowles, and Lee, word began to spread that this young stallion, who nobody had ever seen, was producing fantastically. Pictures of the foals circulated at horse shows and clinics, each owner raving in excitement over their promising crop. Promotional shots of the stallion were taken by the great photographer, Scott Trees. A strong marketing plan, blanketing the publications was hatched. Mare owners booked contracts for their best stock to go to the young unknown, and in 1994, 12 more foals were born, among them Cingate Lucky Star, Straight Up, and Lake Holiday Magic. Cingate Lucky Star, under the direction of Merriehill Farm, was the first foal to win in the in hand arena, garnering the Yearling Stallion World Futurity in 2005.

By then he was proven, after just two seasons in the breeding shed, having never been anywhere but his home farm and his training barn. Breeders of show horses flocked to Astro, eagerly bringing their best mares to him: Pompp And Pazazz, MKS Destiny's Echo, HVK Flaire Rose, Futurity Chicago Whitesox, Waseekas Gifted Lady, Merriehill Great Day, Purest Adrenaline, Signed Sealed Delivered, Cedar Creek Wind Chime, Cingate Vincent's Song. The owners wanted to own his foals and the trainers wanted to train them.

To date, at the young age of 11, Astro has 109 registered foals. He already has made his way to *The Morgan Horse Sire Rating*, the youngest stallion so honored. His Grand National and world champions are numerous, dominant particularly in the park and other high-stepping divisions, and include such greats as Love Her Madly, Get Busy, Cingate Lucky Star, Extremelee, Straight Up, Cingate Revelation, Cingate Starry Night, Locutus, Cedar Creek Flambeau, and Merriehill Black Betty. Although these horses share world and national titles, they each strongly resemble their wonderful dams. Astro adds quality and size, his long, laid back shoulder, great angulation behind that allows his get to drive from behind, and long, strong forearms. The trainability of his foals is legendary. He doesn't stamp his get with one particular "look," rather, he enhances the quality, athleticism, talent and type in each mare to whom he's bred.

What does the future hold for this bright stallion? His two youngest foal crops have yet to hit the ring, but show promise both in quality and in numbers, with 18 born in 2008 and 19 born in 2009.

Astronomical's contribution to the breed is evident in each foal he puts on the ground. He is proof positive that a superior individual can create a legacy without ever stepping foot off the farm or in the show ring. In the breeding business he is much needed new blood. In the continuum of Morgan pedigrees, however, he is descended from the most reliable and respected sources, son of the number one ranked sire and one of two sons on the sire rating from his great dam.

They say, blood will tell. It has. It is. And it will. ■