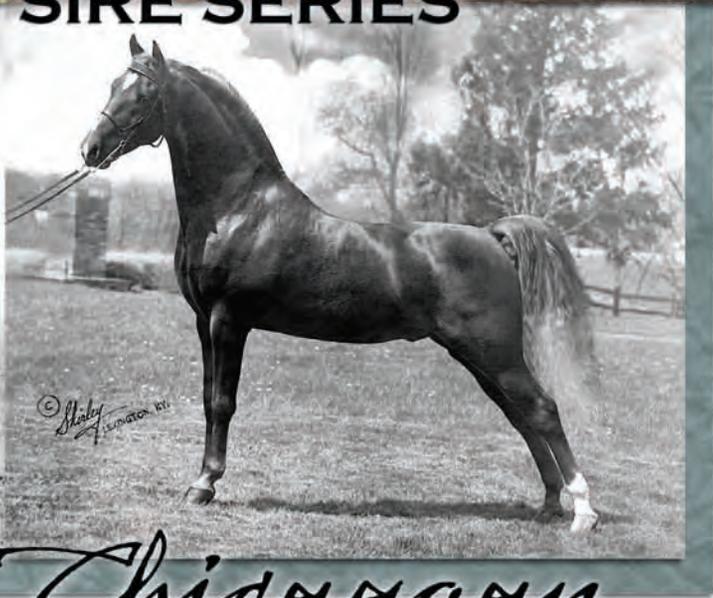




## SIGNIFICANT SIRE SERIES



# Merriehill Chicagoan, the Lion In Winter

We know stallions from pictures during their prime, from public appearances, from images made during their breeding careers. Meeting a stallion in retirement at home provides a different picture. There have been cases of stallions who are used to babysit pastures of weanlings as they've become lambs later in life. There was one ridden through pastures of mares by his owner during breeding season teasing a whole herd in one pass. The

By Stephen Kinney

ravages of years (and the demand on joints and limbs of climbing on breeding phantoms) can have a resultant effect on personality. You'll find old studs turned loose to wander and visit around the farm while chores are being done. It's good for their social life and they won't go far. Merriehill Chicagoan, aka Zeus, aka Grandpa, who lived in the corner stall of the back barn at Merriehill Farm, never failed to come out of his stall roaring. He was the lion of Marengo, Illinois. "He led you out of the stall," says Stan Bodnar.

(Top row) Merriehill Chicagoan. (Bottom row) Fleetwing and Black River Zeus.

Photos © Howard Schatzberg, McClasry '62 and Shirley of Lexington, KY.

*“He brings a tie in to a segment of the Morgan gene pool that is rapidly disappearing. ... And that is the Brunk and Government cross, with high heads, powerful hind ends. ... He brings to the present day the old heritage of the Morgan horse.”*

Mark Staehnke

He was unquestionably a presence on any piece of property.

Sally Longenecker, who cared for Chicagoan while he stood at her Saralin Farm, recalls his presence, “There was never a moment that he didn’t have a smile on his face. Whenever someone came to see him and there were crowds, he never failed to put on a show. Not your average ‘I’m a stallion and I am wonderful’ show, but an ‘I can’t take my eyes off you’ show. And it would go on as long as someone was watching! I’m serious, hours of tail over his back, blowing, snorting, posing. He was wonderful.”

Sally has one son and one daughter from her beloved Joyful Command sired by this “wonderful” horse.

**H**is coming into the world was a colorful combination of happenstance and good planning. Mark Staehnke says his mother saw and fell in love with the mare Donna L while visiting friends in Kansas. Her owners would not sell this “gorgeous, refined” mare, Mark recalls, though in a later total dispersal their horses went to live at the Dolan’s Cairnbrae Farm. As fate would have it, the Staehnkes had a mare, Merrihill Lovely, that the Dolans really wanted. They only got her by including Donna L in foal to their stallion Black River Zeus in the deal.

The breeding was very much planned, “Uncle Mark” recalls. “Why did I want to do it? Because Fleetwing always crossed well on the Brunk mares. That was the key to the Reata and Black River horses. They were great horses, but they tended to be bulky. And I thought if I could get this refined mare bred to what I thought was the best of the Fleetwing horses, Zeus, it would be a great cross. Donna L was in her 20s by the time this happened.

“They got her bred, sent her up to the farm and Chicagoan was the only foal she had for us. And that was all she needed to do for us.”

Mark is quick to agree that Chicagoan was of antique pedigree. His sire, Black River Zeus was by Fleetwing, out of Reata Goddess who was herself a daughter of the much noted broodmare Polly Forrest. Donna L, by Linsley Allen and out of Donbelle Colonel, is an intense mix of Government and Brunk breeding, going back very quickly, not only to Linsley, but to the likes of Fanita, Jubilee King, Querido, Cornwallis, Mansfield and General Gates.

Mark observes, “He brings a tie in to a segment of the Morgan gene pool that is rapidly disappearing. And that is the Brunk and Government cross, with high heads, powerful hind ends. Twenty five or 30 years ago they were the major show horses, horses bred like that, and they’ve kind of disappeared. He brings to the present day the old heritage of the Morgan horse.”

**I**n early January, Paulette Bodnar had trouble composing her thoughts about Zeus without tears. “He was Stan’s baby,” she said. “Stan loved him and he loved Stan.”

Son Mark Bodnar provided this reflection: “I have never seen

## GET OF *Merrihill Chicagoan*

(Top to bottom, left to right) BLFM Best Evidence, Merrihill Isabeau, Cyberbay Chantilly, and Futurity Chicago Whitesox.



Photos © Bob Moseder, Howard Schatzberg, Linda Quillen Wollaber and Casey McBride

## GRAND GET OF *Merriehill Chicagoan*

(Top to bottom, left to right) Fox Hollow Talk About Me (Whispering Whammunion x Cyderbay Chantilly), Cingate Sugar Magnolia (Brentwood Command x Cyderbay Chantilly), BLMF Star Witness (Astronomicallee x BLMF Best Evidence), and Merriehill Home Stretch (Tug Hill Whammunion x Futurity Chicago White Sox)



Photos © Howard Schatzberg

a man and a horse more similar than Merriehill Chicagoan and my father. Neither one would ever give in to the other and they both had to have it done their way, and I believe they both loved it every step of the way. I believe my dad learned so much from Chicagoan that it helped tremendously making him the horseman he is today. But often I think of what they could have achieved if dad had him today, over 20 years later.”

Clearly he was a horseman’s horse. Stan was not having troubles talking about “his baby” for this article. Indeed he was on a roll.

“He pretty much taught me how I show a horse today. Because he taught me that English horses have head carriage not headset. I never had one that could put his head up where that horse could do it.

“He had what you would call extreme head carriage. Plus he had rear wheel drive. He pushed himself forward from the rear rather than pulling himself forward with his front legs.

“He taught me that it was easier to say whoa than it is to say go.”

Stan repeats the thing he was most often quoted as saying about Chicagoan: “I wish I knew then what I know now.”

Well, hindsight being 20-20, don’t we all wish we could go back? But Stan gets a lot more specific and it tells a tale of how the knowledge of horsemanship is accumulated. “He was telling me to channel his energy, not try to subdue it. He came in the years when the In Command horses were just coming in strong. I tried to show him like they were showing, slower. He wasn’t geared to be a slow horse. He was geared to trot more like a five gaited horse.”

Chicagoan the show horse has two reputations. That he was a world champion, which he never was. And that he was difficult, which Stan sees through a different prism: “Had I let him trot like a five gaited horse, we wouldn’t have had the explosions that we did. I didn’t know that back then. I was trying to conform to the competition, rather than conform to my horse. He taught me you had to show every horse in their best gait.

“He was not an ill-tempered horse. He was an exuberant horse. And I tried to restrain him too much by trying to put him in an In Command frame. He was meant to be in a Wing Commander frame. He had a rounded trot rather than an up and down trot.”

Stan continues: “Everyone thinks he was a World Champion and he never won that title. He was by far the most exciting horse I’ve ever ridden, and I’ve ridden a lot of them. The closest to him are his kids and his grandkids. Isabeau was a tiger. She saw a ring and she knew what she was doing. You got to guide her, but you didn’t get to control her. If you tried to subdue her she just got tied up in a knot.” Merriehill Isabeau, Chicagoan’s first foal, would win the English Pleasure Reserve World Championship and, to be itemized shortly, has contributed to his legacy through her winning produce.

Stan sees the stallion’s legacy as twofold, one of athletic achievement and the other, which takes longer to evaluate, of his inheritance.

*“He had what you would call extreme head carriage. Plus he had rear wheel drive. He pushed himself forward from the rear rather than pulling himself forward with his front legs.”*

Stan Bodnar

*“Whenever someone came to see him and there were crowds, he never failed to put on a show. Not your average ‘I’m a stallion and I am wonderful’ show, but an ‘I can’t take my eyes off you’ show.”*

Sally Longenecker

## GRAND GET OF *Merriehill Chicagoan*

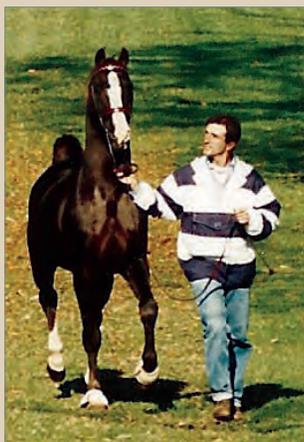
*(Top to bottom, left to right) Cingate Lucky Star (Astronomicallee x Flirtatious Me), Cingate Mr Lucky (Brentwood Command x Flirtatious Me), Merriehill Isa Diva (Beethoven x Merriehill Isabeau), and Cingate Shoot The Moon (HVK Courageous Flaire x Cingate Truly Chic)*



Photos © Howard Schatzberg and Shane Shiflet

### A COMPOSED PAULETTE RECALLS ZEUS:

“Zeus was Stan’s horse until he was done showing and began breeding more. In working with Zeus as a breeding stallion you couldn’t have had a kinder horse, he never bit or did anything wrong, other than if you had a peppermint he would about shake you down for it. He loved peppermints. He had little quirks like he loved carrying a whip in his mouth, except one time he pulled a whip in his stall that had plastic on the end. He chased himself round and round running from the plastic. One other thing, Zeus was so photogenic, I loved taking pictures of him, I took almost all of his non-show ring pictures.”



*Zeus and Stan  
photographed by Paulette.*

On the first subject he says, “His legacy to the breed would be horses that do a four-cornered trot. Not a mystery gait, a trot. He gets this through the Fleetwing.”

On the second subject this is his analysis: “I don’t think he ever sired his equal. His daughters are producing the heirs. Futurity Chicago Whitesox produced two world titled horses in one year. Isabeau produced Isa Diva and Hometown Hero. Talk About Me is out of a Chicagoan daughter.”

So we arrive at the real subject of the Significant Sire Series. The breeding legacy. And here’s a quotation from Mark Staehnke you can put under the magnet on your refrigerator: “Ma Greenwalt always said ‘It doesn’t matter whether stallions produce great sons, it matters that that they produce great mares.’ And that’s where Chicagoan shines. It takes forever, but you start to see it in where his descendants are producing.”

Lets examine the database.

His eldest daughter Merriehill Isabeau (x Merriehill Radiance by Senator Barr) gave the farm another of Stan’s favorites Merriehill Home Town Hero by Royal Oaks Andrew, a horse very much set up and geared like his grandsire. Stan had Oklahoma victory passes in both 3-year-old park harness and 4-year-old park saddle. The super flashy hunter Merriehill Isa Boo came from this mare. And most recently, a gorgeous filly by Beethoven won the Weanling Gala at Jubilee in 2009.

Speaking of Home Stretch, he comes from another World Reserve Champion English Pleasure Chicagoan daughter, Futurity Chicago Whitesox (x Futurity’s Nobelle Prize). He is sired by Tug Hill Whamunition who often gets credit for the colt’s dark color, though Midwesterners will remind you that there were a lot of black chestnut from the Fleetwing line. The colt, now owned by Ruthann Peterson, was named Reserve World Champion Three Year Old Park Harness in 2009 and he took everyone’s breath away in his bravura performance at Jubilee last year. His full brother, Merriehill Major League was Reserve World Champion Three Year Old Hunter Pleasure the same year and is now being enjoyed by Katie Merrill as her new hunter pleasure mount at Taylor River Farm.

A horse that is proclaiming the Chicagoan stamp is last year’s Pleasure Driving World Champion Fox Hollow Talk About Me. The bright looking, chestnut with the four cornered trot is out of Chicagoan daughter Cyderbay Chantilly (x HVK Rare Vintage). Says breeder JoAnn Holston, “he’s Chantilly’s last foal, but she went out with a bang.” Being by Whispering Whammunition he’s another example of the success of crossing the Whamunition and Chicagoan lines. Cyderbay Chantilly is also known for foals produced for the Lorinos, namely Cingate Sugar Magnolia and Cingate Rebel Yell.

To remain in Cyderbay territory, the mare Cyderbay Sassafras (x Merriehill Mystique), a favorite of every trainer who has

worked her, has produced the Grand National pleasure driving champion MSV Genuine Risk, by Minion Millennium.

In Cingate country, the mare Flirtatious Me (x Royal Crown Centerfold) has been a particular benefit to that breeding program. The dramatic Cingate Mr Lucky was a hands' down winner of the marathon 2002 World Futurity Two-Year-Old Pleasure Driving Championship. He was sired by the Lorino's Brentwood Command. His half brother sired by Astronomicallee, was the

World Futurity Champion Yearling Stallion in 2005 before a distinguished career in hunter pleasure including a Grand National Championship as a four-year-old.

Uncle Mark is right. This is the kind of legacy that takes years to sort out. But it is a familiar story with some of the breed's best blood that we only discover it's value when it's almost too late in the stallions life. This is certainly the case of "broodmare sires" who inheritance to be passed along in the second generation, more than it is in the first.

You can be pretty sure that owners with Chicagoan mares in their barns are going to be taking serious stock of their assets as his grand-get continue to deliver the results like Fox Hollow Talk About Me, Merriehill Isa Diva and Merriehill Home Stretch.

Significant Sires Series sounds like a Sponderous, but fairly humorless, magazine department, So we are grateful to Shanna Gish who, as an aspiring young trainer, hung out at Merriehill, for providing the comic relief. It's story around which you can't help but get visuals. "I remember several of us that were working at Merriehill one summer thought that Zeus was just too great for a regular jog cart so we took an old one and painted it hot pink, gave it a plush seat and hung dice from the dash board. It was "Zeus's" pink caddy! I have great memories of him out on the track pulling his Caddy with Stan at the reins."

His impact on this Shanna then is consistent with how others feel about him: "I was in my teens when I was introduced to him, and he was my first introduction to a truly powerful and athletic show horse. Once I saw him work, all I wanted to do was sit behind that kind of horse for the rest of my life. His hocks were amazing and the power that he carried in his shoulder was equally remarkable. Then came his foals and each of them carried his same high on air attitude. I always thought that he was a horse ahead of his time and have wished



The Merriehill Family:  
"Uncle Mark" Staehnke, Mark,  
Whitney, Paulette and Stan Bodnar.

many times in he last ten years he had been out there showing in the park classes. I feel so blessed to have been a small part of his life and appreciate his inspiration."

Everyone who lived with him, from the time he was a baby, to his breeding career, to the last days of his life recall, as Sally Longenecker did, his amazing performances out to pasture.

Paulette says, "He didn't know how to put his head down. He could only strut. And he'd stand at his window and look out at the other horses and want to go out there. It was getting to point where he'd go out one day and put on a performance back and forth along the fence, and then suffer for it with three days of being sore."

"I think he decided it was time and he didn't make us decide for him," she says gratefully.

He died, most likely instantaneously asleep on his feet in his favorite corner stall and was found at peace on December 22.

Says Stan, "I loved him. I truly, truly loved him. Even to the last day he still led you out of the stall. He was a great horse and everybody thought he was a great horse. They were afraid to breed to him, but they loved to watch him. They came to see him and he gave them a show. That may be his legacy. He never let an audience down." ■

*"Once I saw him work, all I wanted to do was sit behind that kind of horse for the rest of my life. His hocks were amazing and the power that he carried in his shoulder was equally remarkable."*

Shanna Gish

Golden Chicagoan Daughter  
Offered for sale

## GOLDTREE LOCOMOTION

(Merriehill Chicagoan  
x Goldtree Starlite Express)

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Only palomino offspring by Chicagoan

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