

Understanding *Gun Runner* and his Sons --- *IL Miracolo*

In 1957, the employees of the 3M Corporation wished to buy their boss, William L. McKnight, a gift for his 70th birthday. Mr. McKnight worked his way up the latter in the corporate world from a minimum wage bookkeeper - accountant, to a great titan of business; the company that invented Scotch tape. Amassing a net worth estimated at approximately \$500 million in the 1960's, McKnight learned that if he became a horse owner he could get a clubhouse badge, and have free admission to the track.

His further involvement as a racehorse owner grew, and as luck would have it the 3M employees would claim the King Ranch bred mare *Aspidistra* for a mere \$6,500 for McKnight's birthday gift, and become truly a "claim to fame". She would eventually become an instrumental foundation mare of McKnight's newly establish Florida breeding operation Tartan Farm. Under the complete direction, design and management of John Nerud, McKnight entrusted his entire bloodstock empire. Nerud trained the horses, designed the farm, selected the stock, planned the matings, and invested in stallion shares. At its inception, 1959 Champion sprinter *Intentionally* was purchased by McKnight in 1961 and raced as a future stallion prospect. *Rough'n Tumble* was identified as solid stallion share investment. Both *Rough'n Tumble* and *Intentionally* would become key foundations in the development of the Florida breeding industry.

Aspidistra would become the dam of the great *Dr. Fager* (by *Rough'n Tumble*), whose 1968 campaign is considered by many to be the greatest racing season ever campaigned in the history of the breed. *Dr. Fager* would set a World Record for 1-mile (1:32 1/5), and eventually become the only American horse in history to win Championship honors in four categories in the same year, as Champion Sprinter, Handicap Male, Turf horse and *Horse of the Year*. *Aspidistra* would also produce Champion Sprinter of 1969, and 1970; the filly *Ta Wee* (by *Intentionally*), the Sioux words for "Beautiful Girl".

The current and future of *Aspidistra's* relevance to modern pedigrees may lie in the fact that her sire *Better Self*, is by Champion and *Hall of Fame* inductee *Bimelech*; the only rare son of the elite mare *La Troienne*. A French bred Marcel Boussac cull, *La Troienne* (1926) is considered to be the most influential mare ever imported to the U.S. Stakes

winners tracing directly tail-female to her is at least 800+ stakes winners (2021). *Better Self* (*Bimelech* – *Bee Mac* by *War Admiral*) provides an influential balance to the numerous daughters and granddaughters of *La Troienne* bred on the same famed *War Admiral* / *La Troienne* cross such as *Busher*, *Striking* and *Busanda*. *La Troienne*'s influence is so pervasive, it is hard to find a modern Classic pedigree without her presence.

Dr. Fager's influence is immortal, as the damsire of *Fappiano*, possibly the most important classic-sire branch of the *Mr. Prospector*-line. From *Mr. Prospector*'s second crop, *Fappiano* would have the speed necessary to win Nerud's favourite race, the one-turn mile, and win the Met Mile (G1). *Fappiano* would spend his first six seasons at Tartan Farm in Florida, and move to Lane's End in Kentucky for the next three seasons before passing away in 1990 at the age of 13. His Champion son *Unbridled* would win the 1990 Kentucky Derby, and establish his own ongoing dynasty with sons *Unbridled's Song* and *Empire Maker*.

However, the newest *Fappiano* phenomenon is in *Fappiano*'s branch through another son *Cryptoclearance*, a sire who himself at the time had little impact on the breed. *Cryptoclearance*'s fortuitous exported son *Ride The Rails* would sire the amazing Argentinian bred *Candy Ride* (ARG). Shipped to the US, *Candy Ride* (ARG) would finish his 6-race undefeated career defeating *Medaglia d'Oro* in the Pacific Classic (G1) by 3 ¼ lengths. As a sire, *Candy Ride* (ARG) would sire 20 Grade 1 winners, and eight Champions including *Gun Runner*.

Champion *Gun Runner* (\$15,988,500) was *Horse of the Year* and a 6-time Grade 1 winner. A *Hall of Fame* inductee he has already sired 16-millionaires, and 12-Grade 1 winners. His young sons are currently the most sought out stallion prospects, being the most marketable, and potentially the most successful sires in the World.

Gun Runner provides a highly successful example of inbreeding and linebreeding theory, and its effectiveness as a breeding strategy. Linebred to several prepotent sires, *Gun Runner* is 4 x 4 to *Fappiano*, 4 x 5 to French Champion 2-year old *Blushing Groom*, 5 x 4 to French Champion sire *Lyphard*, and has also 2-lines of *Herbager*. On further investigation, his sire *Candy Ride* (ARG) has both *Blushing Groom* and *Herbager* extremely close-up in his 3rd generation. *Gun Runner*'s damsire *Giant's Causeway* has *Rahy* as his damsire; also bred on a *Blushing Groom* / *Herbager* cross. *Gun Runner*'s 2-

lines of *Fappiano* are through his male-line sons *Cryptoclearance*, and the sire of his 2nd dam is *Quiet American*, he being inbred 2 x 3 to *Dr. Fager*. Both *Quiet American* and his own sire *Fappiano* are tail-female to another Tartan Farm foundation mare *Cequillo*. *Cequillo* is from a famed female family of *Plucky Liege*, as she traces tail-female to *Marguerite De Valois*, a rare full-sister to the full-brothers *Sir Gallahad III* and *Bull Dog* (and half-brothers *Bois Roussel* and *Admiral Drake*). These two were leading sires from 1930-1950's and shared the US champion sire ranks a total of 19-years. Many pedigree theorists, that study the evolution of the breed, believe that *Fappiano*'s tail-female line gives him a genetic advantage, carrying the rare full-sister, to link-up with the many multiple male-lines of *Plucky Liege* commonly found in the most average pedigree. *Gun Runner* has 35-lines of *Plucky Liege*.

IL Miracolo --- Background

IL Miracolo was an exceptional racehorse earning \$1,137,135. Making 23-starts, he won or placed in 8-Graded Stakes including the Pennsylvania Derby (G1), winning 2-Graded stakes. He had 8-triple digit speed figures and was at his best over 1-mile, a key distance and predictor of future sire success. He is currently the only son of *Gun Runner* at stud out of a *Tapit* daughter. Other important and exciting ancestors in his pedigree include *Mt. Livermore*, and *Holy Bull*. *IL Mirocolo* is tail-female to the important mare *Sun Worship*, the dam of *Solario*. Although he figures in the pedigree of countless pedigrees, he is best known as the damsire of *Royal Charger*, the sire of *Turn-to*.

IL Miracolo --- Key Ancestors

IL Miracolo's pedigree is highly predictive. By understanding *Gun Runner*'s *Fappiano* genetic background, it is easy to understand to see why *Tapit* has become *Gun Runner*'s most effective damsire of stakes winners, accounting for 9-stakes winners, including 6-Graded (1/5/26). *IL Miracolo* is out of a daughter of *Tapit*, a leading sire. *Tapit* has the distinction of being out of a daughter of *Unbridled*. *Unbridled* has one of the most revealing pedigree patterns of how to design a great mating; he has *Dr. Fager* and his sister *Magic* appearing 3 x 3, and is from the female family of *Aspidistra*. *IL Miracolo* has no inbreeding in 4-generations, and his important background strains might easily be overlooked. Careful observation shows he has 3-lines of *Fappiano*, and 3-lines of *Blushing Groom*, and an amazing 6-lines of *Aspidistra*, with three of those through

Fappiano (dam by *Dr. Fager*), and two additional lines from *Magic*, and *Holy Bull*; his sire *Great Above* is out of *Ta Wee*. Therefore, from each successional generation we can

The easiest way to capitalize on *IL Miracolo*'s pedigree background-strength, using each past successional generation, and look for the following in suitable mares:

1. Additional lines of *Blushing Groom*
 2. Additional lines of *Fappiano*
 3. Additional lines of *Storm Cat*
 4. Introduce multiple lines of *In Reality*. Multiple lines of *Fappiano* require multiple lines of *In Reality*
 5. Introduce *Relaunch* (*In Reality*) a full-brother is *Tapit*'s 3rd dam *Moon Glitter*
 6. *Dr. Fager* is by *Rough'n Tumble* whereas *In Reality* is out of a daughter of *Rough'n Tumble*
 7. Introduce *Damascus*, a close genetic-relative to both *Native Charger* and *Iron Ruler*
 8. Mares that trace directly (tail-female) to a daughter of *Fappiano*
 9. Mares that trace directly (tail-female) to a daughter of *Blushing Groom*
 10. See "Key Ancestor Table"
-

The presence of the dirt sprinter *Mt. Livermore*, bred on a *Blushing Groom* / *Crimson Satan* gives clues that reinforcing the input of *Storm Cat* might be highly effective, considering *Storm Cat*'s 2nd dam is by *Crimson Satan*, and that *Giant's Causeway* has a *Blushing Groom* / *Crimson Satan* cross close-up in his pedigree. 33% of *Gun Runner*'s stakes winners have linebreeding to *Storm Cat*, including 7-Grade 1 winners.

~ Robert S. Keck (1/06/26)

