

Looking Back at Speedy Crown By Dean Hoffman

This past Thursday, Jan. 29, marked the 47th anniversary of the foaling of Speedy Crown, a stallion that dominated trotting in his era and whose influence is felt in bloodlines around the world.

The bay colt was born in early 1968 in a converted chicken house on the family farm of Howard Beissinger near Hamilton in southwest Ohio. He would go on to win the Hambletonian and spend his stud career at Lana Lobell Farms, first in Pennsylvania later in New York.



Speedy Crown winning the 1971 Hambletonian

Beissinger, who will be 92 in May, remembers Speedy Crown as a horse that never made a mistake.

"I can't recall him ever making a break in a training mile or in a race," he said.

One incident that stands out in the aging Hall of Famer's mind occurred in the second heat of the 1971 Hambletonian. Speedy Crown had won the first heat over arch rivals Savoie and Hoot Speed. In the second heat, Beissinger left the gate aggressively with Speedy Crown, only to find Glen Garnsey and Hoot Speed ranging up on his outside near the quarter pole.

"My plan was to let Glen go and then come right back out and retake the lead," said Beissinger. "Either Glen put on the brakes when he got Hoot Speed to the front or I came out too soon because Speedy Crown's left front hoof hit the right wheel of Hoot Speed."

Beissinger feared the worst. When a horse hits a wheel at full speed, the horse almost automatically breaks stride. But not Speedy Crown. He simply took a licking and kept on trotting. He went on to wrap up the Hambo in two heats.

"Not many horses could do that," says Beissinger, who was voted into the Living Hall of Fame 42 years ago.

When Speedy Crown was foaled on that cold January day in 1968, Beissinger had just returned from seeing his first National Finals Rodeo in Oklahoma City. He took such a liking for rodeo that he named the Speedy Scot colt from Missile Toe Heading And Healing after a rodeo event.

Today Beissinger cannot recall who nurtured Speedy Crown in his first few months of life.

"I had a guy who lived in the trailer on the farm and he did what needed to be done," says Beissinger. "There wasn't really much work around the farm then."

When the youngster being raised on his farm, Beissinger was in Florida developing a trotting colt named Galahad Hanover. He would undergo a name change and thereafter become known as Lindy's Pride. He won the 1969 Triple Crown with Beissinger as his trainer and driver.

When Speedy Crown entered training, Beissinger sold him to the Antonacci family's Crown Stable and the colt's name was changed, much to Beissinger's chagrin at the time. Speedy Crown had a splint bone removed as a 2-year-old and impressed few people with his performances. Ever careful, Beissinger was bringing him along slowly and never asking too much.

He blossomed as a sophomore, winning the Hambletonian and then he followed up as a 4-year-old by winning the International Trot and a follow-up match race over a pair of great mares in Fresh Yankee and the French amazon Une De Mai.

Speedy Crown's was hardly a hit from the start in his stud career. The fastest performer from his first crop was a pacer with a record of 2:03 in a time trial. That horse was from a mare by Star's Pride, then the reigning king of trotting sires. It was hard to believe that soon Speedy Crown would assume that throne when Star's Pride died.

The cross of Speedy Crown on Star's Pride was particularly effective as all three of Speedy Crown's Hambletonian-winning sons---Speedy Somolli, Prakas, and Armbrø Goal---came from Star's Pride mares.

The cat-quick Speedy Somolli arrived in Speedy Crown's second crop and he lit the fire of enthusiasm for the offspring of his sire. Beissinger won his third Hambletonian in 10 years by driving Speedy Somolli to the first 1:55 race mile ever in the 1978 Hambletonian.

Many stallions send forth fireworks in the first few crops and later taper off as age and advances in the breed relegate them to the shadows. Not so with Speedy Crown. The best performer he ever sired was the many-splendored Moni Maker, sired by Speedy Crown when he was 24.

In addition to his trio of Hambo winners, Speedy Crown sired such standout sons as Workaholic, Royal Prestige, Embassy Lobell, Crowning Point, Why Not, Giant Hit and the list goes on and on.

In addition to Moni Maker, Speedy Crown's daughters include Horse of the Year Fancy Crown and Grand Circuit stakes stars such as Britelite Lobell and Armbrø Fling.

In total, Speedy Crown's offspring have earned \$110.9 million and he has 19 trotters with 1:55 marks to his credit and 474 in the 2:00 list.

Speedy Crown's daughters have produced Hambletonian winners Muscles Yankee, Victory Dream, Giant Victory and Yankee Paco as well as Enjoy Lavec, Pegasus Spur and the standout mares Fern, Davidia Hanover, Jefs Spice and Act of Grace.



This tenant home on the Beissinger Farm in southwest

Speedy Crown's son Workaholic, winner of the first Breeders Crown in 1984, was purchased by the French government in 1988 and immediately became so popular that breeders in France had to enter into a lottery to get a chance to breed to him.

Workaholic is not the only injection of Speedy Crown blood into France, which has the strongest harness program in the world. Up And Quick, the winner of last weekend's Prix d'Amerique, is a grandson of Royal Prestige, a son of Speedy Crown. Two-time Prix d'Amerique winner Offshore Dream has an unusual pedigree in that Speedy Somolli is his maternal grandsire and Seascape Lobell, a sister to Speedy Somolli, is his second dam.

The influence of Speedy Crown is felt wherever trotters are raced.