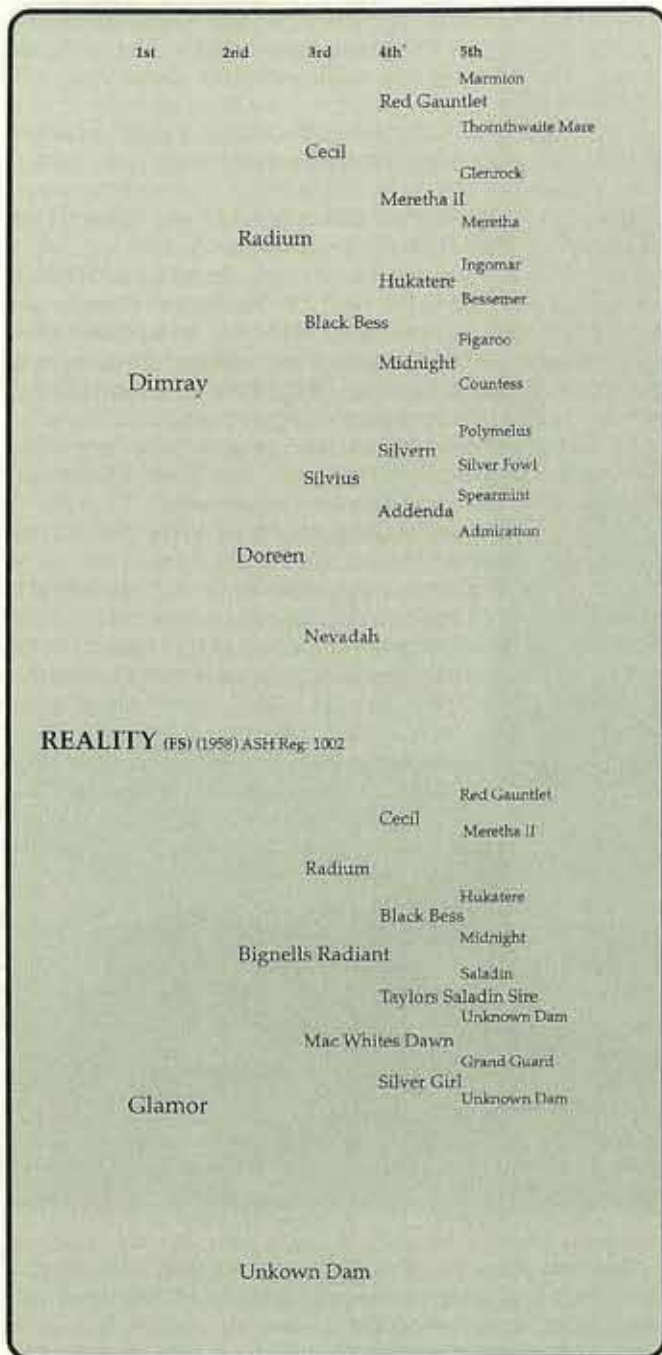




REALITY

By JOY POOLE (OAM)



REALITY (FS) (1958) ASHF Reg. 1002

a colt that Alf had bought as a two year old, while still at Gresford, from Mac White.

"We had REALITY for a month before he was fit enough to break in," said Mel. "Apparently, REALITY was still running on his mother when he was about 18 months old. They were running in hilly country at Cyril Keeley's at Summerhill, (between Maitland and Gresford) and the mother Glamor had gone blind. They had a terrible time trying to get the mare and foal in, it took them over a week."

"REALITY was never any trouble to break in," said Mel, "I wanted to buy the horse off Alf when I was breaking him in but he didn't want to sell him so the horse went back to Maitland."

REALITY then found his way to Throwley Station at Merriwa in the West of the Hunter Valley where he was put to some mares and produced some excellent progeny. Pop Amidy had two great campdraft mares POPS DELIAH and POPS DUTCHESS. POPS DUTCHESS then went on to produce BROWN TODDLE who was a champion working mare. Ken Brown had a great campdrafter, BROWN LUCK, and the Ninness Family had PARKWAY ALLABY who was also the sire of PARKWAY ALARAY.

"I had bullocks on the road at Moree," said Mel, "and Alf sent him up again with Tiny Fitzsimmons for me to ride. He was about three or four years old then."

Alf then shifted to Moree with his job with Oldhams.

"The opportunity came for me to buy REALITY and I couldn't get there quickly enough to hand over the money," said Mel. "I didn't pay a lot of money for him, he was only 14.2 hh but when you rode him he was so powerful he was like a 16 hand horse but he was so soft with it."

As Mel is describing REALITY to me, powerful but soft, I think back to Simon Knight describing REALITY's son, WARRENBRI ROMEO and he described him the same way, powerful but soft.

"REALITY had a terrific mind," said Mel, "and his progeny were the same, you could teach them anything. He had terrific balance, you couldn't tip him off his feet. I remember once I had cattle on the road near Narrabri and they were short of pick up men for the rodeo so I took REALITY in to help."

"The whip went and I went in to get the rider, the buckjumper jumped the fence and REALITY went over the fence with him."

"I saw one of the greatest exhibitions I've ever seen one night at a rodeo at Moree," said Artie Hall. "The boys had been having a drink at the bar and it had been raining. There was a big pool of water out from the bar and Alf Bignell jumped on REALITY and spun and turned him in that slippery pool of water and REALITY never missed a beat. I saw Mel Bates cutting out bullocks on a cattle camp. I never saw a horse do what he could do."

"REALITY lived on the road with me and my job," said Mel, "I also had another stallion by him with me, BATES LITTLE JOE. I used to give the stallions a little bit of corn and people were

I think I've killed Cornstalk, said Joyce Bates, Mel's wife as Cornstalk lay stretched out on the back lawn being treated by the vet.

"Cornstalk had arrived to be broken in, a poor, weedy 20 month old colt. Mel was away for the weekend and I kept feeding him. I almost killed him with kindness!" said Joyce.

If Cornstalk had succumbed to Joyce's kindness on the Bates' back lawn at Gunnedah over 40 years ago, one of the greatest chapters in Australian Stock Horse history would never have been written, for the weedy colt, nicknamed Cornstalk, was to later become the mighty REALITY.

"Alf Bignell and I were mates," said Mel Bates, "Alf had a good mare, Glamor, that he campdrafted. He bred a foal out of her by Dimray and sent it up with Tiny Fitzsimmons, another cattle buyer, to Gunnedah for me to break in. This foal was REALITY."

At that time Alf Bignell lived just out of Maitland and was a buyer for Oldhams but was also a very keen campdrafter and often campdrafted in the North West (NSW), where Mel lived. Alf was born, raised and for a time worked at Gresford, a small village, 50kms from Maitland. This was significant in the breeding of REALITY, as REALITY's dam, Glamor was by Bignells Radiant,



Above: Mel and Joyce Bates at their Gunnedah home
Opposite Page: REALITY and Terry Hall



Mel Bates buckjumping

amazed when they'd come along and the two stallions would be eating the corn out of the same feeder."

Artie Hall said, "I've never seen a much better horseman than Mel so he always had REALITY going well."

Joyce also is appreciative of her husband's riding skills, "Mel won the saddle bronc ride twice at Sydney as well as the bareback, the bulldogging and the steer ride. Mel would contest whatever there was. Stumpy Timmens and Mel were a great pick up team."

A lot of Mel's work consisted of droving bullocks for Henry Bell. The Bells had two or three places but Mel would fatten the bullocks on the road. Mel also put in a few years at Caroon feedlot.

"That's where I met Mel," said Fred Miles, who now has a team of Bates bred REALITY horses, (by BATES ALL STEEL) that are all good types and good performers.

"Mel had BATES ALL STEEL by REALITY at Caroon," said Fred, "and I'd been working there for quite a few days before I realised he was a stallion, he had such an outstanding temperament. As I got to know Mel better, I realised he wouldn't put up with any rot from colts, any silliness and they were gelded."

Joyce also comes from a horse family, the Cantrells, who trained gallopers at Warwick Farm and won Group 1 races including the Sydney Cup with Maidenhead. It was from one of the Cantrell's gallopers that REALITY got his name.



Mel and REALITY on an outing

"When we married," said Joyce, "if dad was having trouble with a galloper bucking or not working right, he'd say, Mel, when are you and Joyce coming down again. Mel was always able to fix the problems."

Mel has had great experience with cattle and horses including three or four years in the Territory working over the Flinders at Normanton.

Steve Dunn who finished school with Mel and Joyce's boys now has 11 of Mel's REALITY bred horses.

"Mel would say when he was showing me a horse, 'He'll suit you, you'll have a lot of fun with him,' and he was always right! When I bought a colt from Mel I asked him how I would know what mares to take as I know how fussy Mel is taking mares to his horses. Mel said, 'Don't look at the mare look at the bloke. If he's fair dinkum he'll do the right thing by the horses'."

"I'd like to be able to employ a young Mel Bates up here where we're getting the Murgon Abattoir going," said Steve, "I'd fast track him through to the top. Mel is a very clever man."

"The trouble with us," says Joyce, "is we fall in love with our horses and hate to sell them."

As we are sitting there, Joyce lets in a pup that has arrived to replace Mel's good dog that unfortunately was run over a short while before. Mel is still grieving the loss of his old dog but the way he talks and handles the young pup you can see he is a true animal lover.



REALITY

"The thing about the REALITY horses was they were all good types, neat shouldered horses that travelled well," explained Mel, "All our kids horses we bred, they were so versatile, they could jump, hack, sport do anything."

Mel and Joyce have three boys, Barry, Kevin and Bryen who are all married with families and still live in Gunnedah.

"I've got to admit I got out of sorts with the Australian Stock Horse Classifiers years ago when I saw what they were putting in. This country has more good horses than you can poke a stick at, they didn't need horses from other breeds," said Mel.

"In the early 70s I sent REALITY out to Artie Hall's at Bar None on a gentleman's agreement," said Mel.

"I never rode REALITY," said Artie, "Mel preferred him not to be ridden anymore and that was fair enough. Most of the time he just ran in the paddock but in the winter I would feed and rug him. Mel had broken him in right and worked him right and he was always a good horse to handle."

"We performance tested the REALITY horses from Longreach to the Victorian Border in our work," continued Artie, "they were good horses for 14 hours a day and at the weekend you could have sport on them. They had terrific constitutions, they were always in good condition."

"It was Mel who got TEX for us. He broke him in and handed him over to us after six weeks. TEX was the best horse I've ever ridden. I didn't ride TEX as much as Terry but when you were cutting out on him his ears would prick as he got near the fence and you'd have to hang on and get ready to ride."

TEX went on to win 101 campdrafts for Terry Hall and in 1974 was named ABCRA Campdraft Horse of the Year. TEX was out of a Bobbie Bruce mare and this always proved a very good cross with REALITY.

"The other thing," said Artie, "we were breeding champions by REALITY and they weren't out of very flash mares. We bred two mares by REALITY out of a mare by a Hordern Pony out of a quarter draft mare. We called them BAR NONE RECEIVE and HALLS REFLECK, they lived to 35 and 32 and were the dams of HAZELWOOD LEXCEN and HAZELWOOD LEX. A mare out of Refleck by RIVOLI RAY, BAR NONE RAY LEE, was the dam of HAZELWOOD RELIABLE."

"REALITY horses were the best horses we've ever had. We never wanted any others as we had what we wanted with them."

Artie doesn't joke about how good the REALITY horses were as some of the others they had were TERRY'S REX who won over 100 campdrafts and was ABCRA Campdraft Horse of the Year in 1980, 1982 and 1992. In 1987 he won the Warwick Gold Cup. In 1982 when TERRY'S REX was winning the ABCRA Horse of the Year another REALITY horse campaigned by the Halls, KRUI

ROULETTE was runner up. KRUI ROULETTE won two Australian Campdraft Championships, the Ladies at Mansfield in Victoria in 1978 and the Open at Capella, Queensland in 1987. He was also Champion Ridden Stallion at Sydney Royal in 1982. HIGH REGARD also by REALITY won the ABCRA Horse of the Year in 1979. It would be interesting to see if any sire has sired more winners of this prestigious event!

"In 1991," continues Artie, "we brought 1,500 bullocks from Longreach to Innaminka. It took us 18 weeks. There were 25 or 26 horses on the camp but I rode only three, all REALITY bred. And one of these was tied up every night as the night horse. Those three horses arrived at the end of the trip in good condition."

"The thing I liked about the REALITY horses was you could be riding along as quiet as you like and you picked the reins up and they switched on like a light. I'm still riding a horse by SEVENTY SEVEN REVENGE a son of REALITY."

"After REALITY, Terry and Chris continued to do well with REALITY's son's progeny, WARRENBRI ROMEO."

REALITY was born in 1958 and died in 1977. He was classified in May 1972. Despite living the greater part of his life before The Australian Stock Horse Society was formed he still had 179 progeny recorded. On 13th February 2002, he had 6,367 descendants making him the second most influential sire to that point.

Well what are the genetics that have made the REALITY line so powerful and so sort after?

REALITY was by Dimray. Alf Bignell borrowed Dimray from his owner/breeder, Carl Mitchell to campdraft for a short period around Maitland. At one stage he won five campdrafts from five starts to give some idea of this horse's ability and consistency.

"Mr Bignell used to put his horses on the truck with Dad, (Harold Willard)," said Joan Lawrence (nee Willard), "We had to unload them before Mr Bignell's house and my sister, Heather, (Heather Mitchell) used to ride Dimray home bareback and I would ride his other horse."

It would seem that the REALITY temperament was also the Dimray temperament.

However, Carl Mitchell mainly campaigned Dimray, winning many campdrafts and when he represented Hunter Valley at the Royal Easter Show in 1948, his winning score of 93 stood



Mel Bates on BATES LITTLE JOE

as the highest score at Sydney for a number of years.

Dimray was by Radium and as Bignells Radiant, the sire of the dam of REALITY, Glamor, was also by Radium, he had a double infusion of this great taproot sire, or was line bred to him, whichever you prefer. Bignells Radiant was out of Mac Whites Dawn, who was by Taylors Creamy Saladin which then tapped REALITY into the Saladin line that was very influential in the Hunter Valley. Dawn was out of Silver Girl who was by the Thoroughbred sire Grand Guard owned by Bill Sparkes. Silver Girl was also the dam of Dinkum a well known sire in the Gresford area in the 30s, 40s and 50s.

Just to give you an idea as to what type of nursery this district was for great horses in this era, only a stone's throw from Gresford was Glendonbrook where Bobbie Bruce was bred around the same time.

So in summary, REALITY had some very powerful breeding behind him. Carrying on his outstanding work were his sire sons the legendary WARRENBRI ROMEO, PARKWAY ALLABY, REAL BOBBY, SILVERWEIR MR REALITY, HAZELWOOD TEXACO, RUSSIAN ROULETTE, SEVENTY SEVEN REVENGE, HALLS REPEAT, BATES LITTLE JOE, LUCKENOUGH DESTINY, RAYS SWAGMAN, KRUI ROULETTE, BATES ALL STEEL, BATES CEDAR BOY, GLEN OAK RIVOT and GRAVEL to name a few and the great mare HIGH REGARD.

All these stallions have done their part to enhance the name of REALITY even further, with WARRENBRI ROMEO also producing winners of the Warwick Gold Cup and record priced mare at Dalby. SEVENTY SEVEN REVENGE has produced the top priced gelding at Dalby and the success of the REALITY horses goes on unabated.

Cornstalk, the little colt from Maitland, who today is spoken of in hushed tones and respect by all the people who have had the pleasure of either watching or riding his descendants has put one of the foundation stones into the Australian Stock Horse Breed. Today REALITY horses can be found throughout the length and breadth of Australia, serving notice of the high esteem in which they are held. *A.*