

# NYLON LAD

Brand  
Excellence

by Hope Holland

MARYLAND'S LEGENDARY SIRE OF STOCK HORSES & BROODMARES



Courtesy Gene Hetrick

No doubt about it, the old west does have a certain romance. It is a land where a name stands for something. Wyatt Earp, Doc Holiday and Calamity Jane are names that invoke specific visceral reactions simply by being spoken. You might not agree with them, but you sure knew where they were coming from.

In the annals of fine western horses, several names stand out. The Matador Land and Cattle Company, for instance, can be represented in a pedigree with the simple notation "Matador Horse" or "Matador Mare." It does not matter that MLCC might not have bothered to name each and every horse and mare; we know those animals were of sterling quality or they would not have been on the Matador ranch—period.

The common phrase "brand name" calls up this western-born willingness to mark only the very best of one's stock with one's mark—or brand. The mere sight of the famous King Ranch's Running W brand on a horse is enough to stop you in your tracks. It raises the hair along your arms and across the back of your neck because you know that you are in the presence of an animal that must be taken seriously. There was never a bad horse with a Running W on it.

Likewise, if Hank Wisecamp ever bred a bad horse, no one ever found out about it. The man is hailed as a genius among breeders of fine stock horses and has been so since he was a badly kept secret in the 1940's.

In the forward to his book, *The Hank Wisecamp Story*, Frank Holmes said "Wisecamp had only an eighth-grade formal education, and yet he is one of the most literate and well-read men I've ever met. Hank Wisecamp raised himself out of poverty and built a multimillion-dollar land and livestock empire in the San Luis Valley of southern Colorado on the strength of his vision and energy."

### Like To Like To Beget Like

In another analysis of Wisecamp's breeding philosophies, Holmes wrote in an article for the *Paint Horse Journal*: "*Linebreeding is built on the principle of "breeding like to like to get like." It affords the serious horse breeder the opportunity to set a type in the shortest amount of time. The breeder's craft comes into play here, in honestly and accurately assessing the strengths and weaknesses*

*of the breeding herd, and making the crosses that will accentuate the strengths and offset the weaknesses.*

*Hank Wisecamp... was the undisputed king of the linebreeders. Utilizing Skipper W. [a registered Quarter Horse]...as the cornerstone of his program, Wisecamp linebred a "family" of Paints, Quarter Horses and Appaloosas that were so easily distinguishable by coloring and type that they are more often described as "Wisecamp horses" than as members of any single breed.*

The greatest danger in a linebreeding program is that it intensifies all of the genes—good and bad. In a linebreeding program, you, as the breeder, find out what is good and bad about your program in a hurry.



Nylon Lad was a real good-looking "using" horse.  
(photo courtesy Paul Babington)

The only way to offset the intensification of undesirable traits in a linebreeding program is to ruthlessly cull the undesirables from the herd.

...as Hank Wisecamp repeatedly told those who made the pilgrimage to southern Colorado to attempt to glean from him the "secret" to his longstanding success as a horse breeder: "There is no secret, and there is no magic formula. It's knowing your horses, studying them every day and being honest with yourself when it comes time to make your breeding decisions," Wisecamp would say. "Horse breeding is not a science. It can't be taught in school. It comes from deep inside you, and that's the way it should be."

### Maryland Gets A Skipper W

It is only right that we deal with all of the tedious foregoing before we discuss Nylon Lad. Nylon Lad was the first of the great

linebred Skipper W horses to arrive in Maryland. He may have been the only one, but that is disputable. Nylon Lad's picture from a 1985 Maryland State Quarter Horse Stallion Service Sale book shows a horse already 16 years old. He has the short head, tight muzzle, small ears and big jaws that typify the Skipper W horses, as well as the heavily muscled shoulder, deep heart girth and huge hip that complete the Skipper W picture. An old-time cowboy would say, "Nylon Lad was a real good-looking using horse" and he would be right on the mark.

Nylon Lad was linebred—all right, some might say "inbred." His sire, Lad's Image by Skipper's Lad went directly to Skipper W. His dam, Elm's Nylon Lady was a daughter of Skipper's Lad and therefore herself a granddaughter of Skipper W. In essence, Nylon Lad was the product of a half-brother and half-sister mating. On the dam's side, Lad's Image outcrossed to Bar Mount and Elm's Nylon Lady to Handy Britches.

There is an old horseman's saying, "When it works, it's linebreeding; when it doesn't work, it's inbreeding." It's as good a rule as any and by that rule, Nylon Lad was linebred. What Nylon Lad had, worked.

This is not to say that any of Nylon Lad's breeding was without merit of its own. From an early pedigree done by Pat Maloney, a lady long known as the pedigree wizard of New Windsor, Lad's Image is listed as

an AQHA Champion and Show ROM as well as a sire of point earners of 279 Halter and 593 Working Points. Elm's Nylon Lady was herself an AQHA Champion and dam of a Superior Halter-Show ROM horse and at least 2 point earners. Skipper's Lad was the sire of 3 AQHA Champions and a Superior Halter Horse as well as 8 other Show ROMs and 14 Producers. Skipper W himself is listed as a Leading Sire of 13 AQHA Champions, 4 ROM Race, 5 other Superior Halter and 15 other Show ROMs. In Maloney's pedigree Skipper W is credited with being a "Modern Foundation Sire" (not a term that lady would use loosely) of an outstanding line of Halter and Performance Horses with 20 Producers already to his credit.

### Maryland Quarter Horses in the 70s

In the Maryland of Nylon Lad's day, most

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Sire: *Lad's Image*, by *Skipper's Lad* by *Skipper W*, shown by Paul Babington, was a AQHA Champion and Show ROM, sired major point earners in both Halter and Working (photo courtesy Paul Babington)



Dam: *Elm's Nylon Lady*, by *Skipper's Lad* by *Skipper W*, was also shown to AQHA Champion by Paul Babington and was the dam of one Superior Halter-Show ROM horse and at least 2 point earners (photo courtesy Paul Babington)

of the horses were pretty nicely bred. They had some King breeding (King the horse, not King the ranch), often a lot of Three Bars breeding. King was well represented by Poco Bueno and by old Joe Hank who did well around here. Silver Cash and Blondy's Dude were well represented. Some of the great names of Quarter Horse breeding show up in the pedigrees of those local stallions: Joe Reed II, Clabber Bar, Bar Mount and Doc Bar. Most of these local stallions were combinations of several bloodlines. Many of them were pretty good horses; some were darn good horses.

What Nylon Lad brought to the table was a bloodline that was set in stone. When he got off the trailer in Maryland he brought with him a set of genes that were going to arrive in his offspring with reassuring reliability.

Nylon Lad did sire winners, notably futurity foals as well as horses that eventually won more than 882 points. He sired sixteen halter point earners with a total of 314+ points and 23 performance point earners who earned over 200 performance points. The rest of the points were earned in Youth and Amateur classes. Today it is easy to yawn at totals like that. Back then in the Maryland area the shows were farther apart and showing wasn't the alternate life-style it is today. You had to make more of an effort to go showing in the days when Nylon Lad was siring horses and that has to be taken into account with his totals.

It is also true that many of the Skipper W bred horses sired horses that were tough minded and smart. They were performance bred and they wanted to go do ranch work. It was easier to make those big-muscled horses into halter horses than it was to get them to like trailing their tails around a show pen. Many of the Nylon Lad horses rode better the farther west they got where people were more used to their mind-set. But Nylon Lad

wasn't purchased to be a sire of show horses. He was purchased to be a sire of broodmares and this is where he shone.

### The Believers

A good horse does not exist in a vacuum. To achieve his potential, a stallion must have people who believe in him and there are two Marylanders whose names are inextricably linked to Nylon Lad: Paul Babington and Gene Hetrick.

Paul Babington, of Union Bridge, was, back then, buying and selling horses for Walter Underwood of Fairfax Station in Virginia. Babington had selected for Underwood a mare named Elm's Nylon Lady from Colorado. At the time Elm's Nylon Lady had most of her Halter points in Colorado, but Babington finished her AQHA Championship, showing the mare in Halter, Reining and Working Cowhorse classes. Lad's Image, whom Babington also showed to an AQHA Championship, was purchased by Babington for Underwood as a breeding stallion. Elm's Nylon Lady was then bred to Lad's Image, producing Nylon Lad in 1969.

Babington remembers Nylon Lad as a stallion who was "Gentle as a puppy dog. I don't believe that I ever even put a chain on him and I could lead him through the broodmare pasture checking mares. You could breed him on a string."

Nylon Lad was injured as a yearling, resulting in an ugly calcification that precluded him from showing. Nevertheless, he was sound enough for Underwood's daughter, Gloria, to break him to ride, and, in addition to a working career as a breeding stallion, was enjoyed as a trail horse.

### Heady Times: Wall Street Endorses Broodmares As Good Investments

Around this time, Paul Babington, in company with an investor, created the Eagle

Cattle Company, based in Maryland. The Eagle Cattle Company was the Maryland answer to economic times that were so good that the purchase of a Quarter Horse broodmare was listed in the Wall Street Journal as one of the "best investments" that a person with venture capital could make.

The "boss hoss" of the Eagle Cattle Company was a horse named Capital Gain. He was a good horse, an AQHA Champion and Superior Halter Horse, by the Thoroughbred Custus Rastus and out of Miss Revenue by Teddy, but Babington knew that they needed another horse to cross onto the Capital Gain daughters to bring them back to the Quarter Horse ideal. That horse was Nylon Lad. The daughters of Capital Gain were crossed onto Nylon Lad and joined the horses that proudly carried the ECCO (Eagle Cattle Co.) prefix on their names.

Then the IRS changed the tax structure for horse breeding and those Quarter Horse mares began not to be such a good investment. While stocks and bonds will sit quietly waiting for times to turn again, a horse eats and requires other forms of upkeep. Babington's investment partner decided to withdraw from the horse market. In the autumn of 1979 the word went out across the Quarter Horse world that Eagle Cattle Company was going to disperse its horses.

### ON LINEBREEDING

"In his classic college textbook, *Horses and Horsemanship*, Dr. M. E. Ensminger defines outcrossing as "... the mating of animals that are members of the same breed but which show no relationships close up in the pedigree."

Linebreeding, [Ensminger] explains, "... is the mating of animals... usually directed toward keeping the offspring closely related to some highly admired ancestor, such as half-brother and half-sister, female and grandsire, and cousins."

Of the two breeding methods, outcrossing involves the least amount of risk. By mating horses that are unrelated, the chance of intensifying undesirable traits is minimized. Unfortunately, due to the heterozygous, or dissimilar, genetic nature of a group of unrelated horses, the chance of intensifying desirable traits is likewise diminished.

The breeder's craft comes into play here, in honestly and accurately assessing the strengths and weaknesses of the breeding herd, and making the crosses that will accentuate the strengths and offset the weaknesses.

—Frank Holmes, from "Crossing the Line" which appeared in the February 1998 issue of *The Paint Horse Journal*

## Dispersal

I vividly remember that sale. The huge tent, the windy, cold and rainy evening, the smell of sawdust, and yes, of money, was in the air. So many of the local and national Quarter Horse folk were gathered to watch that sale to see if there was something there that would catch their fancy and fit their wallets that seating was at as much of a premium as were the horses themselves.

Among those gathered were the Hetrick family of Robin's Nest Quarter Horses (then in Frederick, now in Preston, MD). Gene Hetrick, Elaine and their boys had come, like so many, to try to buy Capital Gain. Well, it didn't happen for the Hetricks, nor for most of us. Economic downturn or not, the bidding on Capital Gain shot past the wallets of nearly every person gathered under that big, cold tent. When the bidding finished, we were dizzy from the figures whizzing passed us in the air and Capital Gain left for Iowa with a private buyer who took him back to within fifty miles of his original home.

And then Gene Hetrick did one of the smartest things he could have done. He bought Nylon Lad. Nylon Lad was as good for Robin's Nest and Gene Hetrick (and later, Gene and Elaine's son, Carroll Hetrick when he took over the management of Robin's Nest) as he had been to the Eagle Cattle Company.

Interviewed years later, Hetrick says, "Nylon Lad paid back his sale price in breedings in the first year we owned him. Besides breeding him to outside mares, we crossed him onto an own daughter of Tobano King that we had, Tobano Robin. We had a whole group of those mares, all full sisters. When the word went out that we were going to disperse our own horses years later, Sylvia Haines (a nationally known breeder of Appaloosa Horses) pulled up her horse trailer and bought every one of those mares and put them into her breeding program."

Hetrick goes on to say, "You know, Lad was always more of Elaine's horse in his own mind than he was mine. She could get him to do things like being vetted and all better than the men could. We kept Nylon Lad for the rest of his life and he is buried right here behind the mare barn."

## Proof Is In The Progeny

Babington and Hetrick were right, but only partly right. History, that great teacher, proves this. If you look at pedigrees today you will see Nylon Lad not only as a sire of broodmares, which he indisputably was, but also, so often that it cannot be merely happenstance, Nylon Lad's name shines from the upper right hand corner of a broodmare's pedi-



*Lins Skippin Pretty, Daughter of Nylon Lad with Paul Babington (photo Oscar Guenthoer photo)*



*Nylon Lass with Paul Babington  
Dam of many Appaloosa National Champions  
(photo Oscar Guenthoer photo)*



*Lins Cabin Fever  
Grandson of Lin's Skipin Pretty  
by John Sheperd's Ima Impressive Cabin  
(AQHA) (Photo Courtesy Sylvia Haines)*

gree on the third remove, the place where a sire of horses who can sire producers of broodmares resides.

And remember Sylvia Haines, the lady who purchased every one of the Hetrick's Nylon Lad broodmares? "I know I have 6 or 7 of his daughters out in the field. The mares aren't young anymore, of course. They are all get-

ting up into heir late teens and early twenties, but they are still really good, reliable producers and their daughters are as well. There is a virtual waiting list of people all over the nation for each of the coming crops of foals from these mares. They have certainly done well for me and for the stallions I have."

And that they have, as Haines is a respected breeder of both National and World rated champion Appaloosa horses. "The Nylon Lad mares cross well with just about any other bloodline," explains Haines, "and they have produced not only halter winners and champions for me, but top performance horses as well." This past July at the National Show in Oklahoma City, horses from Nylon Lad mares and bred by Haines placed 2nd in Junior Trail, 2nd in Senior Trail, won a children's pleasure class, and won an Open Jumping class.

"Lins Nylon Lady" was one of the best halters, recalls Haines. "She was a Superior Halter Horse and, in the Appaloosa point system, that means she got at least 100 National Halter points. Another mare in particular has produced 3 or 4 National Champion and/or World Champion Appaloosas for me."

Nylon Lad—a name that certainly stands for something: brand excellence. ■

## Maryland Stallions of Distinction

Each year, *The Equiry* recognizes a Maryland stallion that has had a significant and lasting impact on his breed. Previous honorees include

**INDRAFF**  
1938–1968  
Arabian

**NATIVE DANCER**  
1950–1967  
Thoroughbred

**OLNEY GEPETO**  
1967–1995  
Shetland

**THE STATESMAN**  
1967–1994  
Morgan

**WERTHERSON**  
1983–1999  
Hanoverian