



# Stallion **Selection** and **Breeding**: Behind the Scenes of DeGraff Stables at Liberty Farm

*When it comes to breeding, Robin DeGraff, of DeGraff Stables at Liberty Farm, certainly knows where it's at! Breeding since 1985, Robin, long enamored with the English equestrian events, has found a winning combination by proving her studs through breeding to her select broodmare band, which were chosen by type. The result has been the production of consistent "top quality, amateur-friendly prospects" for the English disciplines such as Hunter Under Saddle, Hunter Longe Line, Hunter In-Hand, Over Fence classes, Driving, and Dressage.*

*By Gabrielle Sasse*





Beginning her breeding business with World Champion and AWR Champion Indian Artifacts, DeGraff has taken the time to carefully select, by type, the perfect match. This results in an individual prospect that proves quite competitive in each of the English venues within the Quarter Horse, Paint, NSBA, AWR, USDF and USEF competitions. DeGraffs have achieved many outstanding Champions from homebred prospects and within their stallions.

Since 2000, the business has expanded to include outside stallions, and Robin credits the success at DeGraff Stables to the top quality and high caliber of stallions and breeding farm owners who have decided to stand their stallions with them. The addition of being responsible for another stallion's success has prompted DeGraff to continually reflect, make changes and improvements in an effort to attain perfection.

Beginning with this issue of Show Horse Today, Robin will be sharing some of her secrets to success, and just how DeGraff Stables runs such an expansive and successful breeding operation. This first article in the seven-part series will be sticking with our stallion theme, of course, and will be covering some of the fantastic stallions that DeGraff Stables is standing. These stallions have gone on to produce winners in every major event they represent. You'll learn that there is more to the breeding business than the "birds and the bees," and see what kind of thought process goes on in this operation to make it outstanding. The next few articles in the series will include Mare Care, Weanlings, A Day in the Life of a Yearling, and then on through how Robin prepares her babies for you, the horse show-er and trainer!

“When I take a close look at our stallion line-up for the season for mare owners who are looking to us as a breeding facility, I see a great diversity in bloodlines and exceptional performers across a wide range of competitions. This offers mare owners plenty of options for crossing on their mares,” Robin DeGraff shares with us. “As a stallion station and as reproduction professionals, we must also strive to make a difference for mare owners.” Robin adds, “We feel challenged each season to perform better and better for our stallion owners. Our measure as a business is reliant not only on the success or size of each stallion’s breeding season ‘book’, but on the result of the mating choices.”

“Mare owners have many great options across the nation when it comes to choosing a stallion and we are always available to actively participate in their selection process. With the advent of shipped cooled semen, stallions are able to compete equally with each other no matter their physical location. We believe many mare owners make breeding decisions based on where the stallion stands. Therefore the little things make a difference, and what we do reflects on the stallion, and as a breeding farm, we must give the best service possible when effecting a breeding in order to earn repeat business for our stallion owners. What it really comes down to, is that we serve two ‘masters’; both the stallion owner and the mare owner. We need to do a great job for both.”





“We have been so pleased to stand **multiple Superior and Futurity Champion; Frosty The Goodbar (AQHA/ARHA)** for a third season,” says Robin. His owners, Donna and Heinie Hendley, are long-time top AQHA breeders and show people and have bred and raised many top performers. Frosty The Goodbar is registered with both the AQHA and the Roan Horse Association. He has earned his Superior in Jr Western Pleasure and Amateur Western Pleasure, is a two time AQHA World Show Qualifier, and has taken multiple circuit championships. A leading son of Zippos Mr Good Bar, he offers much in the way the genetics that are found in the modern pleasure horse. A Congress Champion sire, multiple NSBA World and Reserve World Champions, AQHA Youth World Top Ten and also has numerous Futurity, Circuit and All Around Champions! The “Frostys” have won in Youth, Novice Youth, Amateur, Select Amateur, Open and Leadline classes! They have a great mind for Youth or Amateur riders.

*all things*®



The Nickersons, of SeaBreeze Pleasure Horses, have been with DeGraff Stables since their stallions were retired from the show pen in 2007. They are owners of unanimous APHA and NSBA World Champion **Hes A Cool Hotrod (AQHA/APHA)** the leading son of Certain Potential. Hes A Cool Hotrod is a multiple APHA World Champion sire and his offspring are proving themselves by winning in Western Pleasure, Hunter Under Saddle, In-Hand Trail and Longe-Line. The Nickersons also own APHA Reserve World Champion and Superior **Hot Lopin Sensation (APHA.)** This gorgeous young stallion sired APHA class winners and Futurity Champions in Halter, Longe-

Line and Western Pleasure.

Over the years, DeGraff Stables has had the pleasure to start young stallions in their breeding careers. "This type of promotion presents additional challenges, as we work daily to change the perception of the unknown to the known as it relates to fertility questions surrounding achieving conception when breeding the young stallions. Through coordination with mare owners and constant attention during collecting, processing and testing the semen, we are proud of the successful conception record we have achieved for the mare owners in working with the stallions," says Robin.



*M. Chris Leese*

“Last year we welcomed long-time and top AQHA breeder Judy Pryor and her homebred **PR Tells A Tale (AQHA)** to DeGraff Stables.” While unshown, PR Tells A Tale, by Vested Assets, the full sister to Britney Pine (Vested Pine x Assets Peaches) and out of Cute N Spree by World Champion, Cuiton, with Just Espirit by Deck Of Stars as his maternal grand-dam, we find a pedigree full of World Champions and World Champion producers. Homozygous for the Agouti factor, Robin states that “PR Tells A Tale is a great minded young horse, with extreme talent as a mover, and our goal is to help him achieve his breeding potential through his foals that show. Judy and I were very gratified by the top quality of mares that he

attracted in his first season at DeGraff Stables and look for great things to come from his first real foal crop.”



World Champion, **Invite The Artist (APHA)** was added to the DeGraff Stables line-up by owner Gina Wilson and Wilson Paint Horses in 2012 and returns for the 2013 season. "This is a young horse with a very exciting future," Robin states. "Retired after winning and accumulating an extensive show record including his APHA World Championship title in the 3yo Western Pleasure Slot Class, he has really matured into an outstanding individual. His owner, Gina, worked exceptionally hard to make the right promotion choices with him, catering to mare owners, and I think it paid off well for her as she achieved a great book of mares for 'Johnny's' first year breeding. On top of that, he proved himself in the breeding shed with



exceptional conception rates across the board", Robin adds. Homozygous for the tobiano gene, Invite The Artist offers mare owners guaranteed color with quality and class!



Since 2003, **5X World Champion HBF Iron Man (AQHA/APHA)** has been at DeGraff Stables. The leading double registered sire of APHA Hunt Seat Horses, he is on the APHA Leading Sires list and has sired multiple World and Reserve World Champions in APHA and PtHA competitions. Recently, since achieving his dual registration with AQHA, he sired his first All-American Quarter Horse Congress Champion in 2011 and in 2012 has an offspring leading the nation in AQHA Ranch Horse Pleasure and another in the Top 5 for Hunter Under Saddle. HBF Iron Man has foals competing in both English and western venues, halter and longe-line. He truly is a great out-cross for both Quarter Horse and the Paint Horse breeds.

These great sires join the DeGraff Stables owned stallions that have made DeGraff synonymous with champion: **AQHA World Champion and AWR Inspection Champion; Indian Artifacts (AQHA/AWR)**. Indian Artifacts has sired World/Reserve World or National Champions in AQHA, APHA, PtHA, NSBA, Appaloosa and in USEF competitions. **A son of Indian Artifacts, Futurity Champion DGS IndyGo (AQHA)** has been chosen by Robin as their Junior Hunt Seat stallion and offers the maternal pedigree which includes Invitation Only and Top Vantage bloodlines. We are excited about the first of DGS IndyGo's foals as they enter the show pen in 2014. **DGS Vestastic (AQHA)**, also home-bred by DeGraffs, offers an exemplary pedigree to the discerning breeder for western pleasure. By Vested Pine and out of the full sister to One Hot Krymsun and Repeated In Red; Krymsun Hot Invite, who has quite a show career herself. She boasts 200+ pleasure points, a Congress Reserve Championship title and a Top 10 at the AQHA World Show. "We look for great things from his foals as the first of them arrive in 2013!"

DeGraff looks forward to each new season and the challenges of the breeding business as they present themselves. "In the years since 1985, we have experienced much to overcome," shares Robin. "[This includes] the economy as it fluctuates up and down, over-breeding and the resulting market corrections, the trials of maintaining an older proven stallion's marketplace position, as well as developing a market for the young stallion as he is retired and enters the breeding business."





Robin speaks about life as a breeder: “I see us labeled as psychics. We must not only guess the future of what the marketplace will want, but we must constantly work, through our mating choices between stallion and mare, to improve the breed. This aspect of breeding is one of the most difficult challenges we face because of the time involved to review the result of your choices. Once the mare is bred, it takes years to get the foal grown, under saddle, trained and to the show pen; as many as five years may go by before you know ‘if it worked’. This means we must be constantly vigilant and unafraid to make changes in future matings. We must be critical and unbiased in our review and assessments of conformation and form to function based on the interim results we see in the foals as they grow, develop and prove their ability to compete. It truly can be a lifetime devoted to breeding.”

So, what does this mean? For the business of standing stallions at DeGraff Stables, it is the commitment to work hard to stick to and concentrate on the basics of the business. Namely, promotion to attract mare owners, service to efficiently effect the breeding and the result is the creation of winners!

Each season is started with a promotion plan for the stallion. Whether he is an older proven stallion, or a new up and coming



stallion, DeGraff’s with the stallion owner’s goals must determine, create or expand the niche for the stallion to fill. There are flyers and advertising to develop, websites to update and with the stallion owner’s input a determination must be made as to which incentive funds and futurities to enter for foal eligibility. Equally as important, a competitive breeding fee must be set and associated discounts to offer that would be advantageous to the mare owner.

DeGraff Stables staff looks forward to filling mare owner requests through the season, such as printing and mailing breeding contract packets, completing mare owner breeding certificate requests and expediting each customer semen order.

As stallion managers, DeGraff Stables believe that their main responsibility to both the stallion owner and to the mare owner is to provide quality semen shipments, ...on time! Communication is the key between veterinarians/mare owners and the farm. DeGraff Stables presents detailed collection information with each shipment and tracks the shipment through delivery, as this, too, is critical to achieve the goal of 'first-cycle' pregnancies. Additionally, DeGraff Stables is well-known to maintain an efficient collection/shipping schedule at the stud farm and to provide flexibility when needed to meet mare ovulation schedules. Lower breeding costs are the result, and who doesn't love that?

Mare owners who choose a DeGraff Stables stallion enjoy a certain standard of care and amenities. In addition to cooled transported semen, is the ability to obtain on-farm inseminations or frozen semen options for both domestic and foreign shipments. DeGraff Stables is USDA Certified for frozen semen for Australia, New Zealand and the European Union. Canadian shipments are easily processed with the close proximity to

the USDA office and veterinarians required to process all proper documentation.

At year's end, there is a flurry of information provided to the stallion owner proving that there is a lot of careful record keeping and paperwork for all involved. This includes a Profit-Loss Statement for the season, a worksheet which includes customer contact information and mailing addresses, the mare bred, her registration number(s), color, sire, dam and dam's sire and breeding exposure dates. The stallion season individual semen collection information is provided including individual breeding dose detail, shipment tracking number and a season's semen collection summary is prepared for volume, concentration, percent motile and total sperm cells. These items are critical to track in order to make educated decisions from breeding year to breeding year.

To complete the paperwork trail, rebreed packets are prepared and per registry association, the stallion breeding report(s) is/are prepared for stallion owner signature and payment.



“What else do we do at DeGraff Stables? I constantly question, what else can we do to set ourselves apart? What else would be important to potential breeders?” Robin asks herself. “I look back and I look forward and I am proud to find that in addition to our standard services and as a result of customer input ...

We are entering our 4th year of our annual Quality Survey, complete with tracking customer responses and feedback per shipment

Our breeding statistics are tracked annually

We find that with multiple stallions there are opportunities for stallion owners we are able to effect which hold down advertising costs by taking advantage of joint promotion opportunities

The DeGraff Stables Charity Program is in its third year, donating a portion of each futurity booking fee collected to such worthy charities as the V Foundation, Black Stallion Literacy Program, Horses For Heroes, Big Brothers Big Sisters, PARA Equestrian and others. Hopefully mare owners appreciate that they too are part of helping those in need

The young stallions at DeGraff Stables participate in our Share The Future Program, providing lifetime half-priced breedings according to the terms

With our location, we additionally provide the ability to participate in the KyQHA and KyPHC Breeders Incentive Funds and have been certified locally for the Kentucky Proud program and the benefits offered for promotion of Kentucky-bred both national and international.”

The real question Robin asks continually is: “what REALLY keeps breeders coming back?” And the answer? “The proof is in the foals! At DeGraff Stables, we have been blessed to be able to stand these top performing stallions that are passing

along their exceptional genetics and the result is success in the show ring. Service results in winners; that is our recipe for creating champions and obtaining repeat business. A win-win situation!”

Please visit [www.DeGraffStables.com](http://www.DeGraffStables.com) for the latest in information regarding all stallions: DGS IndyGo, DGS Vestastic, Frosty The Goodbar, HBF Iron Man, Hes A Cool Hotrod, Hot Lopin Sensation, Indian Artifacts, Invite The Artist and PR Tells A Tale. Flyers, contracts, breeding fees, discounts and the ability to book and pay on-line are all available. The [www.WhatWork4.com](http://www.WhatWork4.com) website has detailed stallion information, offspring photos, and offspring for sale information for the DeGraff Stables owned horses: DGS IndyGo, DGS Vestastic, Indian Artifacts and HBF Iron Man (co-owned). Visit often for deals and the latest updates!



***Readers, be sure to look for the next article MARES, THE ‘SECRET’ INGREDIENT!  
We hope you will enjoy learning more about the behind the scenes of breeding  
as much as we have.***