

# The Breeding Program That Produced Theodore O'Connor

By P. Wynn Norman

I originally started in the horse business to buy and sell "ladies mounts," smaller horses that I'd buy less expensively and then train to higher levels (I'm an upper level dressage rider). At the time (late 80s), I owned a share of Theodore, but not all of him, and he stood in the state of Michigan (I was first in Florida and then in New York). I didn't breed to Theodore at all in his first season because I thought of myself as a trainer and rider, not a breeder.



*The 'original' Teddy - Theodore was a 16.2hh Thoroughbred stallion (deceased 1994) Jockey Club registered as Witty Boy. Sired by Anticipation (Bold Ruler) out of Miss Witty (Better Bee)*

However, by the time Teddy was born, I'd discovered that "the size of the mare dictates the size of the foal" and had a larger property to raise horses on, plus I had developed an association with the equine studies program at the State University of New York (SUNY) at Cobleskill (I was teaching in the English department there). So all of those things started me on the track of raising small horses instead of buying them.

My business plan basically coalesced into the idea that it is less expensive to breed a large stallion to a pony mare than vice versa (in spite of the fact that the latter is actually more common). Moreover, I figured that 1.) it was a heck of a lot easier to find a talented and proven large stallion—I already had one and I had access to another, Teddy's maternal grand-sire) than a talented and *really* proven pony stallion, and 2.) I had a lot more faith in pony mares' temperaments than in Thoroughbred mares' temperaments when it came to raising a foal with a decent temperament.

However, when I'm asked about the breeds I use in my program, I have to say that the only breed I actually *chose* was the Thoroughbred. By the time I started focusing on breeding pony mares to Thoroughbred stallions, I'd already suspected I had an exceptional pony mare. She just happened to be a registered half-Arabian, half-Shetland. I'd bought her (Chelsea) from her breeders in Michigan because she just floored me with her beauty. It was only after living with her a while that I came to realise she was a lot more than a pretty little thing

(she stands 11.3h). Chelsea has the kind of determination coupled with intelligence that can make a pony a real pain in the butt, plus she's hot and sensitive. She had four foals (for me) before I bred her to Theodore and I liked them a lot. They were quick and agile, but smart enough to stay out of trouble—and at the time her first son was also winning in short stirrup hunters as a four-year-old, packing a four-year-old child!



*Chelsea*

I kept every filly out of Chelsea and bred them, plus Chelsea herself, to Theodore. Every colt Chelsea had went into the show ring and won, usually thanks to an automatic lead change and a forward, brave, yet generous attitude toward jumping. Alas, few were very good movers—and that continues to be the most significant weakness in my program. Teddy himself is the first son of Chelsea's daughter Melody. Melody was by a Thoroughbred stallion who, coincidentally, shared a few bloodlines with Theodore—so Teddy is somewhat closely line bred on top. He's also VERY line bred on the bottom as Chelsea herself is sired by an Arabian stallion who traces back to the same progenitor (Raffles) in every line of his pedigree!

I think the result of breeding Theodore to Chelsea and Chelsea's daughter was an intensity of type and temperament which produced Teddy, plus a slew of other successful ponies. I also had a small Thoroughbred mare whom I bred to Theodore eight times and produced eight above average jumpers, all of whom were winners in the show ring to. I should note that Theodore also produced, out of Chelsea, a U.S. National Champion in the pony hunters, out of another mare an FEI level dressage horse (but unshown) who also won some money as a jumper, and out of yet another, a multi-champion Endurance horse who his owned and ridden by the 2000 Pan Am Games gold medalist. All in all, Theodore produced over 300 offspring and many of them were successful in competition.

Meanwhile, Melody crossed with Theodore has produced, besides Teddy, some super athletes who are his full siblings. One mare is being aimed toward the Combined Driving World Championships by long-listed rider Vivian Creigh. Another brother is eventing novice level and moving up the levels of dressage with his rider/owner who is a professional in the business. Another mare is also a driving pony. Yet another brother, deceased, sired several winning pony hunters for me



"Teddy" warming up for the dressage section of the Rolex 3DE

and is replaced now by yet another full brother whose first crop was just born. That brother is headed for a jumper or dressage route when it comes to performance. He'll start showing this fall. And still one more full brother was purchased through Indian Olympian Imtiaz Anees for a client to develop as an eventer. Unfortunately, Melody was a bit jinxed and lost four foals to accidents or the MRLS disease that hit Kentucky in 2001/2002. I do have the very last "teddibaby," a Teddy-look-alike two-year-old, whom I've sold but keep a share in. I'm hoping he'll become the next Teddy in the eventing world.

Chelsea's other daughters have also been solid producers, although two seemed to put out the pony hunter type more than the sport pony type and so I ended up selling them after they'd had a few foals; however, they were all good producers whose babies sold well and went on to win at decent levels. I say this not to brag, but to illustrate that my foundation mare, Chelsea, is really what is behind the successes—she and her daughters just seem to have crossed well with Theodore. None were what I'd call kids ponies, but raised in professional hands, their numerous offspring have been the forward, quick types who become enthusiastic about their jobs—and learn their jobs very well indeed. Their strengths are their stride lengths, their jumps and their lead changes. Their weaknesses are that they are often "too much pony" for the average American child to handle or ride safely and they just haven't had the extravagant movement that is increasingly important in today's competition arena.

It's partly because of that lack of extravagant movement, and partly (frankly) because of fear of politics that I do not register my ponies with any sport pony registry. Melody is registered with the American Remount Association as a half Thoroughbred, but that is all. (I also have a line of Welsh ponies—strictly aimed at the hunter ring—due to an association with the owner of a top Welsh stallion. Those ponies are all registered half- or full-welsh, but I do not consider them part of my sport pony breeding program). Since I've been frank about this publicly before, I'll be frank about it again now: The fact is that I do not feel that I need someone

to tell me, via an inspection process, what I already know about my ponies. Nor do I see any value-added through the current nature of inspections. I do see the threat of politics and circumstances which can harm reputations and businesses due to subjective judgments.

I'm not arguing that sport pony registries should be avoided for those reasons. I just find that what they offer and what is risked is simply not worth it *for me*. In the U.S., having a pony registered as a sport pony can actually decrease its value in the hunter ring, and currently, that's where the big-dollar sales are made. So that is yet another reason why I just have little use for the registries right now. A far better investment of my time and money is linking up with proven trainers to get my ponies into the show ring and beyond. That's expensive and so I prefer to reserve my resources for that, rather than "waste" them (IMO) on registrations which don't advance my business prospects. I've no doubt that things are different in other countries, but the domination of hunter ponies in the American market makes us have to consider carefully how we align and utilise our assets.

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