

Ted Ressler

and the Blackburn Mares

A half-century ago, a bold move on the part of a Northern Plains horseman resulted in the introduction of a vaunted performance line.

By Frank Holmes

In the late 1950s, Harold Schafer of Bismarck, North Dakota, decided to get into the Quarter Horse business. Schafer was a talented businessman whose Gold Seal Company was responsible for such products as Snow Bleach™, Mr. Bubble™ and Glass Wax™.

When it came to establishing a horse breeding program, however, Schafer was quick to realize that he was going to need some help. So he turned to Ted Ressler of Mandan, N.D. – one of the best-known horsemen in the state – for help.

The results of this shrewd move was the establishment of one of the most unique programs of its day – the Blackburn Ranch – and

the introduction of a line of horses to the Northern Plains that remains very much a part of the regional scene.

And, although Schafer was definitely the money behind the operation, Ressler was the master planner.

The Right Man for the Job

Ted Ressler was born on November 17, 1929, on a farm 20 miles southwest of Mandan. Growing up in an age when “horsepower” was not just a word but a way of life, Ressler learned to handle horses at an early age.

When he was 18 years old, he went to work for legendary rodeo contractor Leo Cremer of Big Timber, Montana. “My job was to



Above Right: Scar Face S, the outstanding dam of Scooter S and Poco Eagle. See profile.

Above: Blackburn mares and foals in 1954.



take care of the pickup horses,” Ressler says, “and Leo also gave me a three-year-old filly to train in my spare time.”

After leaving Cremer’s employ, Ressler went to work for Jerry Boren of Mandan. Then, in 1950, the Korean War broke out and the 21-year-old was drafted into the service in 1951. Returning home in 1953, he was married to Carolyn in 1956.

The young couple exchanged their vows in Las Vegas, Nevada, and then spent part of their honeymoon looking at horses. During a visit to the Spanish Springs



ABOVE AND RIGHT: Poco Eagle, by Poco Rey and out of Scar Face S, was an outstanding sire for Ressler. Unshown due to an injury he proved his worth siring multiple AQHA Champions.



Ranch of Reno, Nevada, they happened upon a weanling colt named Poco Eagle that would soon find his way to North Dakota.

"Around this same time," Ressler says, "Punch Oglesby of Jonesboro, Texas, brought a stud named Motor Scooter up to some of the first North Dakota Quarter Horse shows. Between Punch and his wife, Faye, they won about everything at the shows. This made an impression on me and I set my sights on getting a horse of similar breeding. And this is how came to get 'Eagle.'"

Poco Eagle, a 1956 brown stallion by Poco Rey and out of Scar Face S., was a maternal half-brother to Scooter S. Although he was injured as a young horse and consequently never ridden, he did go on to become a multiple AQHA Champion sire.

One year after getting Poco Eagle home, Ted Ressler went to work for Harold Schafer, and the Blackburn Ranch was born.

Yellow Jacket

From a horse standpoint, the Blackburn story rightfully begins with a stallion that antedates the registry by several decades. Yellow Jacket, a 1908 red dun stallion by Little Rondo and out of Barbee Dun, was a famous early-day racehorse and longtime sire for the renowned Waggoner Ranch of Vernon, Texas. W. T. Waggoner purchased the stallion in 1916. After utilizing him as a herd sire for eight years, he gave him to Lee Bivins of Amarillo, Texas.

In 1926, Bivins bred the then 19-year-old stallion to five mares belonging to Edgar Thomas of Stinnett, Texas. The next spring, four colts and a filly were born. Of the quartet of sons, three would go on to become top sires in their own right.

Cowboy P-12, a 1927 dun stallion by Yellow Jacket and out of Roan Lady by Stalks, sired Hard Twist – the 1946-47 Champion Quarter Running Stallion, and 1951 Co-Champion Quarter Running Stallion. Cowboy P-12 is also listed as the sire of Shue Fly – the legendary three-time World Champion Quarter Running Horse. This claim has always been, and no doubt will always be, a matter of considerable dispute.

Yellow Boy P-18, a 1927 dun stallion by Yellow Jacket and out of Bonnie Wilkins by John Wilkins, was the main herd sire of the famed JA Ranch of Paducah, Texas, for years. Known as a potent broodmare sire, he contributed such well-known maternal grandget as Lucky Bar, Bartender B, Ike Rude and Toots Mansfield.

Blackburn

Blackburn, a 1927 dun stallion by Yellow Jacket and out of Siss by Peter McCue, is officially recorded as being bred by J. L. Fuqua Jr. of Amarillo. Edgar Thomas did in fact breed Blackburn; Fuqua was simply the owner at the time of registration.

Regardless of who the breeder was, it is a matter of fact that the Waggoner Ranch acquired Blackburn from Fuqua when he was seven or eight years old. The stallion's first registered foals were born in 1933 and his first Waggoner-bred foals in 1936.

AQHA records show that Blackburn sired 168 registered foals. Among his better-known sons were Red Waggoner, a performance Register of Merit (ROM) qualifier; Buster Waggoner, a performance ROM qualifier and NCHA earner of \$1,660; and Evans' King Edwards, owned by Will Evans of Tatum, Oklahoma.

Blackburn's greatest contribution to the breed was not as the sire of sons however; it was as the sire of broodmares. Bred to such Waggoner Ranch sires as Pretty Buck and Poco Bueno, the Blackburn daughters produced the likes of Snipper W - 1953 NCHA World Champion Cutting Horse; Poco Mona - 1958 NCHA World Champion Cutting Mare; and Poco Lynn - 1958 High Point Halter Horse.

"Beginning in 1958, Ressler went about quietly burying all of the Blackburn mares that he could locate."

In addition, the Blackburn mares produced such Waggoner Ranch-bred AQHA Champions as Snipper W, Poco Mona, Poco Bay, Poco Doll, Poco Nadine, Poco Robin, Poco Bob, Poco Lynn, Buck Deuce, Poco Pico, Poco Speedy and Strummer.

Midway through the 1948 breeding season, the Waggoner Ranch sold Blackburn - then a 19-year-old - to the Cowan Ranch of Seymour, Texas. The stallion's last full foal crop would hit the ground in 1950, with single foals born in 1953 and 1955.

By the late 1950s and early 1960s, Blackburn was the leading maternal grandsire of AQHA Champions and one of the breed's over-all top broodmare sires. And it is for this reason that Harold Schafer and Ted Ressler decided not only to build their breeding operation upon the blood of the renowned stallion, but to name it after him as well.

The Blackburn Ranch

"I had gotten interested in the Blackburn mares several years before I went to work for Harold," Ressler recalls. "I had even made a trip to Texas in search of some of them. It had been proven by such top breeders as the Waggoner Ranch and Paul Curtner of Jacksboro, Texas, that the cross of Poco Bueno stallions on the Blackburn mares was a winning one, and this is what I wanted to bring to the North Country."

Beginning in 1958, Ressler went about quietly burying all of the Blackburn mares that he could locate. Treks to the Waggoner and Cowan Ranches netted numerous mares, as did visits to Paul Curtner; Wilbur Lecklider of Kingman, Kansas; and the G. W. Sams Estate of Fort Worth, Texas. These mares were in foal to such noted stallions as Poco Pine, Poco Mos and Poco Birthday.

"There have been numerous stories told in print about how I came to bring all the Blackburn mares to North Dakota," Ressler says. "Some of these accounts are not 100 percent accurate. I was able to buy 49 Blackburn mares for the ranch. This is the total and I have the names of each and every one of these mares."

"One account stated that all the mares I got from Paul Curtner had Poco Pine foals at side and were

bred back to him; this is not true. Some did have foals at side, and some were bred back; but not all of them.

"Another story says some of the Curtner mares were hauled to Kansas to be bred to Poco Birthday. Again, this is inaccurate. In 1960, I bought several Blackburn daughters from Wilbur Lecklider, and they were already bred to Poco Birthday.

One of the mares I bought in Kansas was Waggoner II, the dam of two AQHA Champions - Lecklider's Little Buck and Corky Waggoner. She was 17 years old when I bought her, and she wound up producing five foals that were born on the Blackburn Ranch."

In need of a senior stallion to head their program, Ressler and Schafer journeyed to Dallas, Texas, in the fall of 1961 to attend the G. W. Sams Estate Dispersal Sale. There, they were able to purchase Pretty Buck - one of the industry's best-known and most-accomplished sires.

Pretty Buck

Pretty Buck, a 1942 dun stallion by Pretty Boy and out of a mare by Buck Thomas, was bred by the Waggoner Ranch. Successfully shown at halter in the late 1940s and early 1950s, he was also utilized as an all-around ranch and rope horse.

As the sire of Snipper W - the NCHA World Champion Cutting Horse; and the earners of nine AQHA Championships, four Superior Halter awards, two Superior Performance awards and 30 performance ROMs, Pretty Buck was arguably the highest-profile stallion to stand in North Dakota up to this time.

Joining Pretty Buck as part of the Blackburn Ranch stallion battery was Poco Nino, 1956 buckskin stallion by Poco Bueno and out of Patsy Buck by Pretty Buck. With Ressler's Poco Eagle also



A rare photograph of Pretty Buck, with Ted Ressler in 1960. Pretty Buck would prove to be a magic cross on the Ressler Blackburn mares. Bred and raised on the Waggoner Ranch, Pretty Buck's daughters crossed spectacularly on Poco Bueno, producing such greats as Poco Bow Tie.



ABOVE: Pretty Buck on the Blackburn ranch, shown as an aged horse with his Blackburn mares behind him.

Poco Eagle also in use as a breeding horse, the ranch was set up to give a big boost to the genetic base of the North Country Quarter Horse.

Pretty Buck's first North Dakota foal crop hit the ground in 1963 and from it would come the AQHA Champions Mr Blackburn 37, a 1963 dun gelding out of Lady Black by Blackburn; and Mr Blackburn 40, a 1963 bay stallion out of Lady Cowan by Blackburn.

As outstanding a set of horses as the Blackburn Ranch's first Pretty Buck crop was, it was far from the operation's only contributions to the breed. Over the course of the next decade - from 1961 through 1969 - the following Blackburn horses made their mark as performers:

- Mr Blackburn 15, 1961 dun gelding by Poco Mos and out of Lady Black 119 - AQHA Champion.
- Mr Blackburn 28, 1962 bay stallion by Poco Eagle and out of May Blackburn - AQHA Champion and Superior Halter.
- Mr Blackburn 88, 1967 dun stallion by Mr Blackburn 40 and out of Vinita Kay - Superior Western Pleasure (138 points).

In addition, Blackburn 28, Blackburn 77, Mr Blackburn 57, Mr Blackburn 62 and Mr Blackburn 110 all earned performance ROMs.

Mr Blackburn 101, a 1968 bay stallion by Mr Blackburn 40 and out of Poco Pepsi (Poco Rey x Scarface S), is another stallion worthy of being singled out. An AQHA champion himself, he went on to sire such top performers as:

- Debonaire Lady, 1972 bay mare out of Silver State - 1977 Reserve High Point

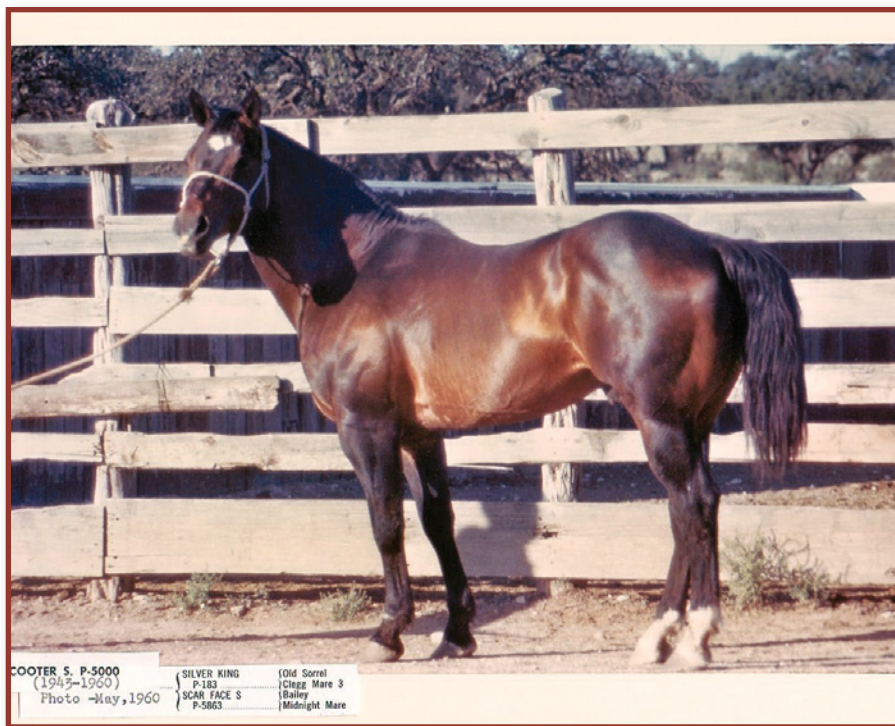
Halter Horse, Superior Halter, Youth Superior Halter and Showmanship, 813 total points.

- Debonair Lass, 1975 bay mare out of Silver State - AQHA Champion.
- Winmore Jack, 1978 bay gelding out of Brewer's Tattoo - Youth AQHA Champion, Superior Showmanship and Western Pleasure; 342 total points.
- Blackburns Peach, 1979 buckskin mare out of Bert's Sonja Baby - Youth Versatility award.
- Mac Nasty, 1979 gray stallion out of Gee Tee Jody - Superior Halter, 104.5 points.
- Jackie Bee Slick, 1984 brown mare out of Jacque Bee - Superior Western Pleasure (Open and Youth), 196.5 total points.

But the real value of the Blackburn breeding program does not lie in the show realm; it lies instead in the powerful set of working horse genetics that were assembled and made available to breeders and exhibitors throughout the Northern Plains.

Harold Schafer was in the financial position to go out and get any horses that he wanted; and Ted Ressler had the knowledge and determination to ferret out and acquire the type of breeding animals that he felt the program needed.

As a result, one of the most impressive set of Quarter Horses to be imported into the state of North Dakota up to this time came about. The effects of the move were both immediate and enduring. Descendants of the program can, in fact, be found throughout the region to this day.



Scooter S in 1960. Scooter S was the sire of 7 AQHA Champions, many superior performance and 39 show ROMs. Poco Eagle and Scooter S were half brothers out of the great mare Scar Face S.