

Battle of the Breeds

Saddlebreds Shine After Fires Recede



Main and left inset photos: California firefighters filled the site of the Battle of the Breeds as nearby wildfires encroached on the competition, which was held at the Earl Warren Show Grounds.

Above right: Lisa Siderman and her horse All The Money after the competition.

By Barbara Molland

There are some things for which there is no planning ... or at least no planning for contingencies approaching that may occur in Southern California in late fall. Always a place of drama, from the silver screen of Hollywood to the spectacular views of Big Sur, the southern half of the golden state can lure anyone into balmy daydreams of waving palm trees and sun-drenched beaches, beach boy vistas and lazy days with no purpose. But, given the ever-present drama, I should have known better.

And yet, when that e-mail from the American Saddlebred Horse Association (ASHA) arrived in early fall letting me know that the Trail Blazer Festival in Santa Barbara, California, had issued an invitation to ASHA, along with other

American horse breed organizations, to pick two horses and two riders to compete in a Battle of the Breeds in mid-November, it seemed like an easy challenge, an inviting gathering to do what I loved: trail riding! All I had to do was call a few people, pick a few horses, and come up with an adult rider and a child rider – easy, right?

After the usual bumps in the breed promotion road – riders backing out at the last minute, horses with behavior problems – I, along with Denise and Jennifer Blacklaw from Oregon found ourselves on Highway 101, following two horses in a seven-horse trailer, with lots of props stored in the tack and feed rooms (banners, framed photos, welcome mats and lattice keeping intimate company with bales of grass hay, rolled

oats, and probiotics). We were a traveling road show, bent on sucking up every drop of diesel between San Francisco and Santa Barbara. So far, so good!

It was a warm and gusty late afternoon when we pulled into the Earl Warren Show Grounds in Santa Barbara, where we were to meet the other half of our effort, Lisa Siderman of Malibu, California, and her inimitable Saddlebred gelding, All The Money. There was an oven-warm, evil smell to the wind as it gusted through the dusty aisles in between shed rows on the fairgrounds. Even the horses seemed edgy, the people cranky, and we were all tired. We opted to get the horses unloaded, fed and watered, set up only one of the information booths and leave the rest until morning, once we had a chance to sleep.

We had made pretty good progress when we detected the faint smell of smoke in the air. After living in California for a while, a person becomes adept at differentiating the smells of fire. There is building-on-fire smoke, grass-on-fire smoke, brush-on-fire smoke, fireplace smoke, and barbecue smoke. This was definitely a brush-on-fire smoke smell.

About 5:45 PM, against a dark sky, a faint glow appeared on the hill above the fairgrounds. The wind picked up. Within 30 (very short) minutes, the entire hillside above our stabling area was flaming, sirens wailing, and anxiety building in all the residents of the Earl Warren Show Grounds. Some people claimed the fairgrounds were an evacuation center, so we were in the safest possible place we could be; others who had less faith in the declarations of government officials ran for their horse trailers, hooked them up, and were ready to roll should the need arise. Suddenly, out of the dark, a woman rode in dressed as if she had just come from the Pampas of Argentina – gaucho hat, high boots, and all. It was only her sweated-up horse and frantic young Arabian ponied behind that indicated this was something other than another Californian bent upon starring in her own movie. She told us she had just come off the hill, escaping the fire that was threatening her home and stables. We gave her pails for water for her two horses, helped her get her mounts into stalls next to ours, and supplied her

with hay. Things were getting very serious. We ordered Chinese take-out and someone made a quick run to pick it up. We ate huddled around a folding table in the tack stall, all wondering whether we could safely retire to the hotel.

Within two hours the parking lot above the stabling area turned into a parking lot for half the fire trucks in California. At this point it seemed safe to go to our hotel, so we tucked in the horses and headed for the Best Western.

We returned the next morning to find the entire fairgrounds surrendered to California firefighters. Handsome men in yellow jumpsuits (well, they looked handsome to us!) occupied all available space and we weren't about to complain. The row of convicts in orange jumpsuits concerned us a bit more, and we wondered if they had any interest in stealing saddles ... or whether the Toshiba TV we had brought should have been left in the tack room. I kept recalling that harmless e-mail from ASHA, the ease of acceptance, the mushiness of my brain in saying yes.

But it was now Friday, and tonight was the first night of our competition. Lisa Siderman, our dauntless competitor and her horse, All The Money, were there to make a name for the Saddlebred breed. No, the American Saddlebred was not just a hot house plant! It could stand up to the best that the west could muster. No matter how rigorous the trail obstacle course, the Saddlebred would prevail and save the day, fire or no fire!

Finally that morning, Lisa was schooled on the layout of the course. It had been a big secret. Was it to be an “extreme” trail obstacle course with waterfalls and trenches, pits large enough to swallow horse and rider, or was it something in between the typical and the absolute worst?

When the time arrived for her appearance, Lisa and All The Money (Cash) shone like two beacons in the smoke billowing out of Santa Barbara. John Lyons, internationally known horseman, was “master of ceremonies” for the Battle of the Breeds, and he repeatedly noted how beautiful *Cash* was. Though *Cash* didn't finish the course with the speed of some of the other breeds (which hurt his overall score), he was nonetheless fabulous; and, he made sure everyone knew that though he *could* back through the line of straw bales set up to confuse him, he thought it was a far better idea to lift his leg and shove the last bale out of his way. That brought a gale of laughter from the crowd! Lisa had trained “Mr. Personality” perfectly for this competition, and in the company of professional trainers who did this for a living, Lisa and *Cash* represented the Saddlebred breed sensationally.

Saturday dawned early – the fires in Santa Barbara were on retreat to the South, flaming again in Sylmar and Carbon Canyon. For now, we were in safe territory. There were fire trucks in the parking area ... and God be praised, the convicts were gone!



A nearby resident rode in out of the darkness, ponying a second horse to escape the fire which ultimately destroyed her home and stables.

Today was the day we were to meet our junior competitor, whoever she might be. About mid-day, a smiling English woman named Alix Lawson appeared with three lovely young girls and their parents in tow. They were her riding students and Pony Clubbers. Heavenly Ponies (Alix's riding instruction business) had come to the rescue of the American Saddlebred breed. In an hour's time, we had to find which of three horses and which of three young ladies would make an ideal child/horse combination. Tactical considerations came into play. The other junior riders in the competition were all 12 or 13 years old. They were wearing makeup and sparkly outfits, not to mention the gleam of hardcore competition in their eyes. They disdained our offers of Saddlebred coloring books. Their mothers were stealing cornstalks in the middle of the night from the obstacle course to help them win ... we were in deep water here! They had been practicing for months, perhaps years, for this event. We had three hours. We decided to go for the "cute" appeal. Automatically, the answer presented itself. Little Katelyn Parker, eight years old and four feet tall (with her own gleam of prize-winning in her eyes!) paired with King's Lady In Black (Sammy) offered the perfect combination. It was heartbreaking to

make the decision because the two other little girls were wonderful riders and so eager to help. We felt so badly that we tried to find other horses for them to ride, only succeeding for the oldest, who rode but was not an official competitor. Don't we all recall how much we loved horses and wanted to ride? These three little girls, Katelyn Parker, Brett Decker, and Kirby Martin, were an instructor's dream come true – such devotion!

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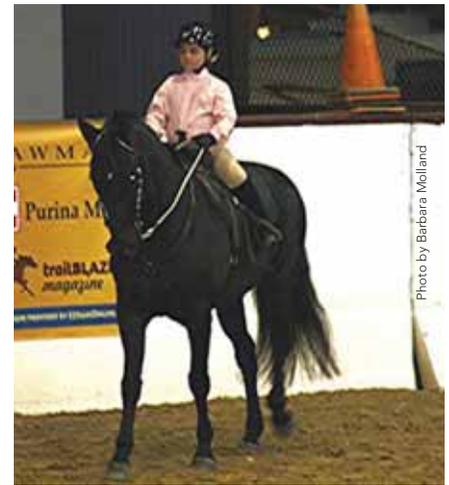
– Barbara Molland

the only horse in the ring. *Sammy* carried her around and around the arena, walking faster than any other horse, and gently passing on the inside, but always returning to the rail. She was third to ride the obstacle course and *Sammy* did everything asked of her, backing, surviving the corn stalk course, the stalking backpacker with his towering camping gear, the in-and-out of the trot course. Not to mention, the crazy mountain bike rider, the ground tying, and finally, the standing for mounting, as Katelyn scaled first down and then up, her 16.1 hands-offside.

John Lyons was mounted on a Saddlebred gelding, Far Field Hustle Time, for the narration of the child/horse competition. He repeatedly said to an attentive audience that *Sammy* was the perfect kind of horse for a child, and that Katelyn was a remarkable young equestrienne. We were all behaving like grinning fools! Though *Sammy* and Katelyn did not win, it was obvious from the wildly applauded crowd that they were the most popular. There was not a single person in the audience who thought about the Saddlebred the way they did before the competition, and that was our intention.

While all this inner ring excitement was going on, Denise Blacklaw and her daughter, Jennifer, were in the warm-up ring with their horse, Wine Spritzer (Spritzer). They trailered *Spritzer* all the way from Portland, Oregon, in a seven-horse trailer, and were now exercising him to the admiration of Festival attendees. Denise managed to get Linda Tellington-Jones (of "T Touch" fame) on *Spritzer* for several rounds around the arena as well as anyone else who was willing to take a spin. *Spritzer* became the focus of attention whenever he was worked; at the age of 19, he still is a beautiful horse to watch.

Ah, such memories! There is simply nothing to compare with the shared excitement of Saddlebred breed promotion. Whether that be promoting the best of our saddleseat show horses at



Eight-year-old Katelyn Parker aboard King's Lady In Black (*Sammy*) during the competition on Saturday night.

Washington, D.C., contributing to the Massachusetts Equine Affaire, or showing up for the Battle of the Breeds. For each Saddlebred born, there is a job to perform: to return to a multi-faceted breed, the horse once known as the Kentucky Saddler.

After we had returned home, and had time to digest all that we had seen and done, I sent e-mails to Tom and Susan Neese of Frankford, Missouri, who raised and trained King's Lady In Black (*Sammy*) from the time she was a young horse. I told them how happy we were with her performance and how pleased I was that they had offered the mare to us for purchase. Tom sent me the following statement, which I feel describes why we need to expand the uses of the American Saddlebred breed beyond the show ring. I quote:

"When you were at the show grounds in Springfield, Illinois, did you feel it? It's a special place, history abounds there. One can almost feel ghosts flitting through the city streets and meandering down the barn aisles. In the coliseum from the sixties, I remember Tom Moore, Chat Nichols, Don Harris, The Parkinson brothers, among others battling it out in the ring. ^{CH} Yorktown, ^{CH} My Starlight Hour, ^{CH} My-My and others have trod that tanbark.

But what makes Springfield a special place and not just another show-ground is that less than a mile away Abraham Lincoln lies in his grave surrounded by many from his armies —

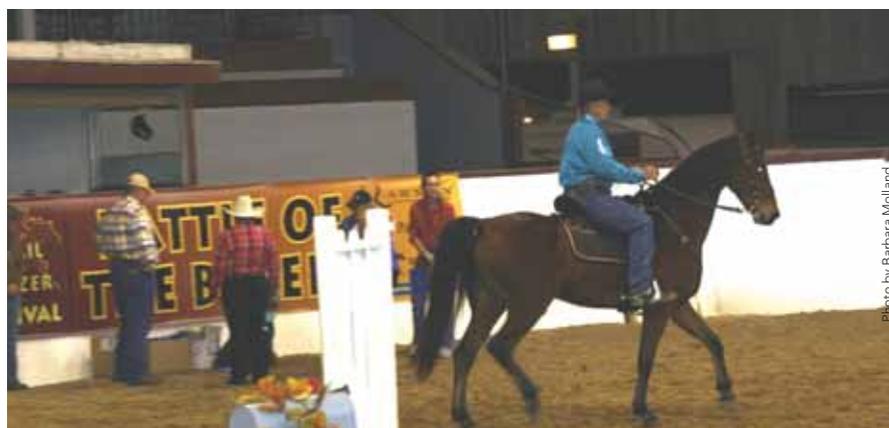
young men long dead from the Civil War. For some reason, two names I remember: Virgil Hanks, 7th Illinois, John Clendennon, 7th Illinois, both killed on the same day in 1863. I couldn't help but wonder if their last vision on Earth was of other young men from Tennessee, Virginia, or Alabama, riding ancestors of the horses we see competing in the ring today; horses whose calling was not to put on a show but to gallop willingly into cannon fire.

Sam is one of those cannon fire horses. She's not real fancy. She doesn't have the big showy trot. But she has never 'chickened out' on anything she was asked to do."

That statement says it all. Courage and dignity come in many packages. Would we deny the Sammys or the Wing Tempos of our breed the right to tread their own paths to success? Would we tell others that such horses lack the ability to take anyone anywhere? After all, wasn't it the American Saddlebred that began in the trenches of warfare, fighting our Civil War, a battle between people rather than a battle between breeds? Would we send to auction the Sammys of the Saddlebred world and breed on those who may have a higher trot or be more beautiful, but haven't half the heart? To do that would be harmful to the health and genetic diversity of our breed, and would also take away the peaceful moments, the excitement, and the joy such horses have given for centuries to people who may never set



Carlos Siderman on Far Field Hustle Time. Carlos treated the entire Saddlebred crew to a delicious Argentinean dinner and talked John Lyons into riding his horse for the competition!



The world famous horseman and clinician, John Lyons, riding the American Saddlebred, Far Field Hustle Time, owned by Carlos Siderman.

foot in Freedom Hall. Not all Saddlebreds have the beauty of All The Money, gifted with heart and appearance. In her absolutely steady way, Sammy proved her mettle alongside All The Money on Saturday night, and

next year when I need to get out of Montecito with a raging fire flicking at my ankles, I want to have one of this pair for my mount on the way down the dark mountain. They have made their ancestors proud. as

In other Trail Competition News...

By Marsha Hayes of theHORSE.com
37-year-old Half-Arabian Elmer Bandit trotted under the finish line to set a new competitive trail mileage record of 20,720 miles, at The North American Trail Conference, October 25-26, at Kanopolis State Park near Lindsborg, Kansas.

Elmer Bandit broke the competitive trail lifetime record of 20,710 miles, set by American Saddlebred Wing Tempo.

Wing Tempo displayed exceptional soundness and skill during his long successful career. He won 22 consecu-

tive national championships. In addition, the North American Trail Ride conference awarded him the President's Cup, their highest honor, seven times.

Now 32, Wing Tempo lives a full and rewarding life teaching long-time owner Shirley Sobol's 6-year-old granddaughter, Sabrina Ortiz, to ride.

From her Black Mountain, North Carolina, home, Sobol said, "Wing Tempo's patience and gentleness with Sabrina astounds me. He teaches Sabrina how to enjoy and respect

nature and learn to be one with the horse, a team player."

Sobol said she chose competitive trail competition for her horse, because, "It's 50 percent soundness and 50 percent in the heart of the horse and his ability to team up-up with a rider."

"Wing Tempo set many records," Sobol noted. "Having them broken flatters me and lets me know that someone else has the tenacity and drive to accomplish things unheard of.

Two great horses, so many miles.