

Challendon Arabians: A Lifetime Achievement

By Arlene Magid

Fans of western pleasure horses will always remember a big bay stallion who dominated the arena for a decade and set the standard for performance in that division. C A Hermoso, whose name in Spanish means “handsome”, won the “Triple Crown” of championships at Scottsdale, Canadian and U.S. Nationals his first year under saddle, in 1998, at age ten. Remarkably, he continued competing successfully through 2006, when at age 18 he was named Canadian Reserve National Champion Western Pleasure AATR 18-39 with Jill Mohr riding him. Hermoso was also one of the few national champions in performance in recent years to also have titles in stallion halter, both open and amateur to show. Hermoso was renowned for his wonderful temperament., as his barn name from babyhood was “Sunny” to describe his easygoing, willing attitude towards life. His busy show career kept his total number of registered get to just 113, but of those 48 are champions (an excellent percentage of 38%) and 33 of his champions are regional and/or National winners (thus 69% of his champions have gone on to regional and/or National wins with many still actively competing). Many of his younger get have not yet entered competition. Hermoso was thus as much of a success in the breeding barn as he had been in the show ring.

C A Hermoso+++//’s beauty and athletic ability and ability to pass on his best traits were no accident, but the culmination of the efforts of one of America’s most successful small breeders, Priscilla Richardson-Normington, According to the A.H.A. official record, Priscilla bred just 85 Arabians, but the horses carrying the Challendon Arabians “C A” prefix have become sought after for their beauty and athleticism as well as their soundness for over 30 years. What were the secrets of her success?

Priscilla was first and foremost a hands on horsewoman. She did all her own barn work and halter training. She began showing her Arabian geldings in 1974 and decided to start breeding in 1978. Her knowledge of form to function conformation was well developed by then and she had an eagle eye for faults that would affect a horse’s usability. Although Priscilla was by her own admission breeding to produce halter horses, she always did so with the intention that they would later be excellent riding horses. “She never bred pedigree to pedigree, “ recalls her husband Bill Normington. “She bred horse to horse”.

Priscilla’s early mares included pure Polish Brusally Orzelawa (*Orzel x *Bulawa), and the Polish/Gainey Overlook Burgatza (Gazort x Bur-Valissa), a Legion of Merit winner who Priscilla bought as a yearling and showed to many championships in halter and western pleasure. Priscilla’s initial breeding efforts involved mating these mares to straight Spanish stallions. “Priscilla wanted to experiment to produce the best horses she could, “says Bill. “She found the cross of a Polish stallion on these mares worked far less well than the Spanish lines”.

Overlook Burgatza produced the National Champion producer Challendon Flame (dam of C A Hermoso). Brusally Orzelawa is the dam of two National winners and a National winner producer. Her pure Polish daughter C A Solidarity (by *Eukalptus) is the dam of National Champion producer C A Sedosa (by the pure Spanish C A Astro). C A Sedosa in turn is the dam of National winner producer SA Bandara, making three generations of mares who have produced National winners from the same breeding program-a rare achievement.

Priscilla's first National winner was the lovely C A Regala, by the straight Spanish *Barich De Washoe son Jdar Bari Brita out of Brusally Orzelawa. She was named a 1987 U.S. Top Ten Futurity Filly. She was unlike any other filly in her class.. Sadly she died the following year without having a chance to breed on, but Priscilla already had some future star producers waiting in the wings. Challendon Flame, another Jdar Bari Brita daughter (out of Overlook Burgatza) was one of the first foals Patricia bred. Although she had just four offspring of her own, three became champions, and two of them were National winners including C A Hermoso.

Challendon Flame's full brother C A Fuego won 14 halter championships and was the only horse to defeat U.S. National Champion Stallion Fame VF as a youngster. C A Fuego was also second in a huge two year old colt class at Scottsdale in 1985. He went on to sire three time National winner in hunt pleasure and regional halter champion C A Espada (out of Brusally Orzelawa) and the National winner producers C A Carmen (also out of Brusally Orzelawa) and regional reserve champion halter S A Bandara (out of C A Sedosa).

Priscilla bred a number of times to Jdar Bari Brita and she also used Wayne Newton's *GG Samir to produce some of her best horses. Bill remembers: "Jdar Bari Brita was a big, strong, powerful stallion who was handsome rather than pretty. *GG Samir was classically typey and passed on his good neck, smoothness and balance to his get for us." Bill and Priscilla also acquired two imported Spanish mares, *Abha Bahia and *Pimintilla. *Abha Bahia's best daughter was C A Bellezza (by Jdar Bari Brita), the dam of 2010 Arabian Breeders World Cup Top Ten Mare ATH C A Amorosa (by *Regal Actor JP), who was sold to a Saudi Arabian owner. *Pimintella (Zorba x Yidda) was the dam of C A Astro (by *GG Samir), sire of National Champion producer C A Sedosa and of his full brother C A Acierto, sire of the full siblings C A Tapatia and C A Hermoso, both National winners. C A Acierto is alive and well at age 26.

As time went on the main stallions used at Challendon was the *GG Samir son C A Acierto, the Jdar Bari Brita son C A Fuego, and later of course C A Hermoso. Priscilla and Bill also added some Bey Shah mares to the mix, including their top producing mare Citation of Merit (Bey Oro by Bey Shah x Shelimar). "Citation of Merit's previous owner was very ill so we got her for a bargain basement price," recalls Bill. "Her dam is all old CMK breeding and that was a big factor in her success as a producer. She'd already had a foal by Hermoso so we knew she

was a good nick with him.” And what a cross her foals with Hermoso proved to be! All four of her sons who have been shown are National winners: U.S. Top Ten Hunt Pleasure Maturity AOTR and Canadian Top Ten Hunt Pleasure JTR 14-17 and Hunt Pleasure JOTR 14-17 C A Galan, U.S. National Champion Hunt Pleasure Junior Horse C A Elegante (who has 8 National titles), C A Hermano (14 titles including U.S. National Champion Hunt Pleasure and Hunt Pleasure AOTR 55 and Over and Canadian Reserve National Champion English Sidesaddle), C A Ultimo (44 titles including 22 National Championships or Reserves in hunt pleasure and English sidesaddle, the four most recent won at the 2011 Canadian Nationals at age16).

The success of Citation of Merit’s cross with C A Hermoso made Priscilla seek out more Bey Shah blood, and the Bey Shah daughter Evita Bey (x Ma Mars Magic) and granddaughter GG Jewelstone (Blackstone Bey by Bey Shah x GG Love by Garis) were purchased Evita Bey is a full sister to National winner sire Blackstone Bey and to Tuscany Bey, dam of multi-National Champion Western Pleasure Alerro and multi-National Champion halter FF Tuscarro Bey (both of whom won their titles after Priscilla bought Evita Bey). GG Jewelstone is a 3/4 sister to the National winner producers MA Unique, GG Gypsy Rose and Sequoia Bey, all sired by Bey Shah out of GG Love. GG Jewelstone is the dam of regional western pleasure winner C A Illustre by C A Hermoso, while Evita Bey’s two offspring by Hermoso are yet to be shown.

Priscilla’s excellent preparation of her horses and hard work helped them create many happy memories of their time in the ring. Bill remembers Hermoso’s first show as a yearling: “We took two colts to a show in Sacramento. Priscilla showed Hermoso to junior champion, and we loaded him into the trailer because we figured we were done for the day. Suddenly an announcement came over the barn’s PA system asking for Hermoso to return to the ring for the supreme championship. Priscilla unloaded him and raced to the ring, where he was named supreme champion of the show!” Another favorite competition was Scottsdale in 1991, the first year amateur halter classes were offered. Bill and Priscilla took their two horse trailer with C A Carmen (C A Fuego x Brusally Orzelawa) and C A Hermoso in it. C A Carmen was top five in her class of 19 mares in halter ATH and C A Hermoso was named the first Scottsdale Champion Stallion AOTH. Priscilla was so proud to have shown two horses of her breeding to their titles.

In later years Bill and Priscilla slowed down their breeding program as the market slowed down and as Priscilla’s medical needs increased. The last Challendon bred foal is the three year old CA Ultimatum, poised to start a stellar show career to equal his National winning full brothers C A Galan, C A Elegante, C A Hermano and C A Ultimo. In their final years of breeding Priscilla and Bill used some excellent outcross sires including *ZT Shakfantasy, *ZT Faa Iq and *Jullyen El Jamaal and they retained their offspring, including the two young stallions CA Brillante (*Jullyen El Jamaal x C A Amara by C A Fuego) and C A Luxor (*ZT Faa Iq x C A Alejandra by C A Hermoso).

Perhaps the greatest testament to the quality of the Challendon horses is the joy they have brought to their owners and handlers. Bill Porcher, who had C A Hermoso in his barn for a decade, commented "It was easy for him to do what we were asking him to do, so there wasn't any stress on him. ..his neck, his hip, they were what they were looking for at that time. He was one of the first horses to go around the ring on a loose rein, he set the standard for years to come. He was a very kind horse, an intelligent horse, and he would try so hard for you each time." Bill also remembers how good Hermoso was with children: "The last national championship I won with him, I put my daughter up on the saddle with me and she and I rode the victory pass. I thought that was so cool, here was this big breeding stallion on finals night, just went National Champion, and here's my daughter riding him out. I've been around thousands of horses in my life but never one like him."

Cheryl Yokum owns C A Ultimo, the top-winning son of C A Hermoso with 44 National titles through 2011, 22 of them National Championships or Reserve National Championships, all earned in hunt pleasure and English sidesaddle. He has more National titles in hunt pleasure and English sidesaddle than any other purebred.

"Hootie" has a temperament like his sire's, spending his time at the shows sticking his head out of his stall, mooching peppermints off visitors, entertaining them by drinking beer, nickering when they talk to him, and sticking his tongue out to beg more peppermints. Cheryl says of him: "I was really thrilled with "Hootie" right from the start. He reminded me of NDL Pericles (the breed's top National winner in performance with 57 National titles), with his big round movement. He had just stunning beauty and that is so important in the huge class sizes of the hunter division. The bonus was his personality - he was just such a gregarious horse, really, sticking his tongue out, nickering back when I talked to him, I really couldn't get over him. I not only had a national champion prospect but a great friend. The decision to buy him was easy. The Spanish Arabians have smooth bodies, very beautifully shaped heads and necks, and gorgeous eyes, and CA Hermoso offspring really are typical of this style. Also, they are known for having excellent minds and are a delight to train. Hootie's happy, social attitude actually pays off in the show ring because he has his ears up and is always looking at people, giving him a pretty look. Judges' comments frequently include "prettiest hunter I have ever seen." Cheryl has recently purchased C A Ultimo's full brother, C A Ultimatum, and looks forward to competing with him in the future, although "Hootie" shows no signs of slowing down, as he won four titles at the recent Canadian Nationals, including Reserve National Champion Hunt Pleasure AATR 40/Over and Hunt Pleasure AOTR 40/Over.

Irene Deem first met Priscilla and Bill when she interviewed them for the Arabian Horse Association of Northern California newsletter, and worked with them at the

2006 Western States Horse Expo. She later became their website designer and public relations expert. "I so enjoyed Priscilla as a friend, and I admired her because she was so serious about her horses but so unpretentious. She did not gossip ever, she always had cute stories about her Jack Russells and the wild turkeys on the ranch, and just a real horse person, happy to have her horses. She loved to win of course, but the deeper joy for her was breeding. She loved pretty, but she never sacrificed anything for it. They had to be nice minded, they had to be sound. Just old school, good legs, feet, you know, no excuses ever and no fads. She wore a pink T shirt and a matching pink ball cap at the Horse Expo and stood outside his stall ready to sell breedings. No aloof, fancy or snob thing at all, just ready to book a breeding and answer questions. She was also an unfailing good sport- I was with her when one of her prettiest young fillies was shown and was not used by the judges at all. She was so gracious about it all, no badmouthing anyone, just very calm."

JoEllen Erickson and her daughter Jill Mohr have owned several Challendon horses and bred to C A Hermoso multiple times. JoEllen's involvement with the Challendon horses evokes strong emotion. "If my passion were a stallion, for me, it would have to be CA Hermoso. It all began in 1998 for us, the year that CA Hermoso was the triple crown western pleasure champion, an accomplishment of which we all just dream. Watching that magnificent animal go down the rail took me to higher plateau than I had ever been. To this day, I can thank Bill and Priscilla Normington for the chance to own, breed and show get, siblings and grand get of that famous stallion. "

JoEllen explains: "It started simply as a business venture but quickly we turned into fast friends and eventually we were "family". I was thrilled to be able to acquire a full sibling to CA Hermoso, CA Tapatia, who turned out to be a superstar hunt pleasure horse. My daughter, Jill Mohr, showed her to her first U.S. Top Ten Hunt Pleasure AOTR title in 2001. After that, my husband and I flew out to California and spent time at the Challendon Ranch. That trip we bought another mare, C A Flama (C A Hermoso x CA Carmen), later a western pleasure champion, and two yearling geldings, CA Especial (GG Domecq x C A Favorita by C A Acierto) and C A Cimarronn (C A Hermoso x Nura Fadlana). C A Especial was out of a full sister to C A Hermoso and went on to have eight regional western pleasure titles including several championships. C A Cimmarron was a western pleasure champion. In recent years we purchased several more horses from our dear friends, including regional western pleasure winner C A Illustre (C A Hermoso x GG Jewelstone) and CA Jula, a *Jullyen El Jamaal daughter out of C A Amara.

We also bred our Half-Arabian western pleasure mare Date With An Angel to C A Hermoso and got a colt who we aptly named Famoso. He now has four National titles in Half-Arabian western pleasure. Angel was rebred that year and the future Canadian National Champion Half-Arabian Western Pleasure Junior Horse an

Western Pleasure AOTR 40/Over Victoriosa was born. She now has a total of seven National titles.

The biggest thrill in all the years of our friendship came in 2006. On Priscilla's insistence, our daughter Jill Mohr was asked to show with Hermoso's longtime trainer, Bill Porcher and ride the stallion at Scottsdale in the ATR class. It was an incredible feeling to watch them be the last one standing as they called out the top 8, reserve and then Jill and Hermoso as Champions. Jill has always said it was the thrill of a lifetime. After success at Scottsdale, Priscilla was not about to stop, so we went on to Region 7 where Jill rode again and she and Hermoso won the western pleasure ATR championship there. Canada was next on the list and Jill and Hermoso won the Canadian Reserve National Champion Western Pleasure ATR title. I have no doubt if Priscilla could have made it happen, there would have been an ATR class at U.S. that year so Jill and Sunny could be there.

It was an emotional roller coaster in the spring of 2007 when Sunny was at Region 7 again with Bill to be shown. The night before his class Bill noticed he wasn't right. He had colicked. After surgery he never regained his health, and the decision was made to say goodbye. It was a very sad day for not only Bill and Priscilla but for Bill Porcher, his family, my husband, myself and Jill and all the others who had loved and admired that incredible animal thru the years.

I felt Priscilla's fight with Parkinson's started to take a turn for the worse after Hermoso was gone. He wasn't a just a horse. He was their life, part of their family, their past and their future and part of mine too.

These last few months have been hard for us. Priscilla was my mentor, my advisor and friend. Bill's courageousness throughout her illness has been an inspiration for us. He stood by her through the days when she couldn't speak or communicate. He is my hero now.

I intend to carry on the legacy of CA Hermoso+++ and Challendon Ranch. I now am proud to have a new addition, the youngest full sister to C A Hermoso, CA Gaviota. A beautiful gray mare, she is the epitome of elegance with the true look of *GG Samir. We have bred her to our stallion HJ Famoso for her first foal to be born next spring. Both she and her full sister are both in foal to our stallion and you can be sure Bill Normington will be the first person we call when the foals arrive."

Another longtime friend of Priscilla and Bill's is Russ Taylor, who came to meet the Normingtons because a friend had recommended Hermoso as a breeding stallion. Taylor was just getting back into horses after a long hiatus and made the trip from Texas to California to meet Hermoso in person. He was deeply impressed by him: "I loved the way he wore his neck, and the way he moved. He really did have this huge stride and quite a lot of knee, but was slow and soft at

the same time. I also loved his personality around the barn. He was nonchalant, laidback, and very easy going. That may not be everyone's ideal for an Arabian stallion, but it definitely is mine. I'll take let down and relaxed over hyperactive snort and blow every time. "

Taylor decided he had to breed to Hermoso, and the hunt was on for the right mare to produce a future superstar western horse. He found her in BJ Outrageous Girl, a daughter of Desperado V and Padruska, herself a national champion western pleasure winner. Her first foal by Hermoso, TS Hermoso Girl was U.S. Reserve National Champion Hunt Pleasure Futurity, and is now on her way to being a top western horse. Taylor reports: " Not many breeders can claim that their first foal was a National winner, and we are very proud. Hermoso Girl has two full brothers at home, both equally impressive."

Taylor remembers Priscilla with great fondness. "Priscilla was a fascinating character, half tiger and half puppy. From the moment we met she told us with great finality that certain horses were not for sale and some were. She was a very earnest salesman on the ones she wanted to sell, and completely unwavering on the ones she didn't. Priscilla and I would talk for long periods on the phone, solving the problems of the world, or at least of the horse world. I miss our long talks, which we struggled valiantly to continue until the progression of her Parkinsonism made it impossible. Priscilla was a terrific friend, and someone I would dread having for an enemy. Her thinking was clear and her tolerance for monkey business extremely low. She had been around the horse industry long enough to know monkey business when she saw it. I didn't have the pleasure of knowing her before she became ill. Yet, seeing her spirit soar, her eyes focus on the future, and witness her incredible strength of will all while seeing her deal with her ever worsening disease, has inspired me like few experiences in my life. My respect for her is intense. My admiration for her is huge, and my affection complete. My prayers and blessings go with her and Bill. "

Most of all, Taylor respected Priscilla as a horsewoman. "As a breeder, I think Priscilla was one of the first to break free of the "pure this" or "straight that" way of thinking. She started off with Polish horses, and then fell in love with Spanish horses. Instead of selling off her Polish horses and going "straight Spanish," as was the fashion of that time, she had to good sense, and innovative instincts, to combine the two and see what she got. What she got was outstanding, so she carried on. She was as loyal to her horses as she was to her friends. Once a mare or stallion earned a place in her program, she left them in the program, and integrated new blood around those horses. She stayed with the blood of the great horses she started with and built on that over the years. She didn't keep starting over like so many people do; she just allowed the horses already in her herd to take her program in new directions as each year's crop added resources to the breeding pool. I also give her a lot of credit for listening to her horses. For most of her career, Priscilla was a halter breeder, and an avid amateur showman

at halter. Sunny's first Top Tens were at halter, and one was with Priscilla on the lead. When fortune intervened and Sunny started winning national championships in western pleasure, Priscilla was delighted, and immediately started adjusting her program in that direction. A lot of breeders would have been disappointed. Not Priscilla. She knew Hermoso was a great horse, and was delighted to see him prove it. She was equally delighted when a number of Sunny's get, such as CA Ultimo, proved themselves as hunt pleasure national champions. Priscilla was thrilled and reveled in Sunny's accomplishments."

Priscilla was many things: a great friend, a wonderful partner to Bill, a consummate horsewoman and breeder. Her legacy can be seen in show rings all over North America. As a celebration of her life's work, Bill will be dispersing her horses via online auction on September 20th. This will be a never to be repeated opportunity to buy horses with unlimited potential in the show ring and others who have proven their worth as breeding stock. Don't miss your chance!

CHART 1: National Winners Bred by Challendon Arabians

C A Regala U.S. Top Ten Futurity Filly

C A Coronado Canadian Top Ten Hunt Pleasure AOTR 18-39

C A Sultanna Canadian Top Ten Hunt Pleasure

C A Tapatia U.S. Top Ten Hunt Pleasure AOTR 18-39

C A Espada 3 National titles: U.S. and Canadian Top Ten Hunt Pleasure Junior Horse and Canadian Top Ten Hunt Pleasure AOTR 40/Over

C A Galan 3 National titles: U.S. Top Ten Hunt Pleasure Maturity AOTR and Canadian Top Ten Hunt Pleasure JTR 14-17 and Hunt Pleasure JOTR 14-17

C A Elegante 8 National titles including U.S. National Champion Hunt Pleasure Junior Horse

C A Hermoso 11 National wins including U.S. Top Ten Stallion and Stallion AOTH, twice U.S. National Champion Western Pleasure, Canadian National Champion Western Pleasure, and Canadian Reserve National Champion Western Pleasure AATR 18-39 at age 18

C A Mejor 12 National wins in western pleasure, 4 of them National Championships

C A Hermano 14 National titles including U.S. National Champion Hunt Pleasure and Hunt Pleasure AOTR 55 and Over, U.S. Reserve National Champion Hunt

Pleasure AOTR 18-39 and Hunt Pleasure AOTR 18-35 and Canadian Reserve National Champion English Sidesaddle

C A Ultimo 44 National titles including 22 National Championships or Reserves in hunt pleasure and English sidesaddle (the breed's top purebred National winner in hunt pleasure and English sidesaddle)

CHART 2: National Winners Sired by C A Hermoso

C A Coronado Canadian Top Ten Hunt Pleasure AOTR 18-39

C A Sultanna Canadian Top Ten Hunt Pleasure

Mosquito V U.S. National Champion Working Cow Horse Futurity

TS Hermoso Girl U.S. Reserve National Champion Hunt Pleasure Futurity

Broadway Joe 2 National titles: U.S. Top Ten Hunt Pleasure Junior Horse and Hunt Pleasure AOTR 18-35

Sheza Perfect Star 2 National titles: U.S. Top Ten Half-Arabian Western Pleasure Futurity and Western Pleasure Maturity AOTR

C A Galan 3 National titles: U.S. Top Ten Hunt Pleasure Maturity AOTR and Canadian Top Ten Hunt Pleasure JTR 14-17 and Hunt Pleasure JOTR 14-17

Famoso 4 National titles: U.S. Top Ten Half-Arabian Hunt Pleasure Futurity, Hunt Pleasure JOTR 13/Under, Hunt Pleasure JTR 13/Under and Hunt Pleasure Walk/Trot

SS Kharben Khopy 5 National titles including U.S. Reserve National Champion Hunt Pleasure AOTR 36-54, Top Ten Hunt Pleasure Maturity AOTR and Hunt Pleasure JOTR 13/Under

Caliente Virtuoso 7 National titles including twice U.S. National Champion Half-Arabian Western Pleasure Junior Horse and Western Pleasure AOTR 40/Over, U.S. Reserve National Champion Half-Arabian Western Pleasure/Walk Trot and U.S. National Champion Half-Arabian Western Pleasure Maturity AOTR

Victoriosa 7 National titles including Canadian National Champion Half-Arabian Western Pleasure Junior Horse and Western Pleasure AOTR 40/Over

C A Elegante 8 National titles including U.S. National Champion Hunt Pleasure Junior Horse

C A Mejor 12 National wins in western pleasure, 4 of them National Championships

Karomoso 12 National wins including Canadian Reserve National Champion Western Pleasure AATR 40/Over

Aur U Ready Tu Rumble 13 National titles (10 National Championships or Reserves) including U.S. and Canadian National Champion Half-Arabian Western Pleasure, twice U.S. Reserve National Champion Half-Arabian Western Sidesaddle and U.S. and Canadian National Champion Western Pleasure Walk/Trot

Lyfe of Riley 14 National titles in Half-Arabian hunt pleasure including 3 National Championships or Reserve National Championships

C A Hermano 14 National titles including U.S. National Champion Hunt Pleasure and Hunt Pleasure AOTR 55 and Over and Canadian Reserve National Champion English Sidesaddle

C A Ultimo 44 National titles including 22 National Championships or Reserves in hunt pleasure and English sidesaddle (the breed's top purebred National winner in hunt pleasure and English sidesaddle)