

# History of the leading sires of North America

Waves of imports have dominated American sire lists until recent years

by John P. Sparkman

THE HISTORY of the Thoroughbred in North America officially began with the importation to Virginia in 1730 of the stallion \*Bulle Rock, a son of the Darley Arabian out of a Byerley Turk mare. Volume 1 of the *American Stud Book* is filled with compiler Sanders Bruce's plaintive notes like "I cannot find this horse," and dates are notoriously unreliable. But, since the next stallion for whom there is a more or less reliable date of importation is \*Crab in 1746, it is a fairly safe bet that \*Bulle Rock was also the first stallion who could have been described as "leading sire" in North America.

That supposition assumes that progeny of \*Bulle Rock won races in Virginia, where he stood, but there are few records of such early racing. In fact, the first stallion who can be reliably credited as a leading North American sire by earnings (as shown in the accompanying table) is Revenue in 1860, more than 100 years later. Before that date, leading sire records were kept by number of individual winners, not by earnings.

The first really epoch-making stallion importation was that of \*Diomed, first winner of the Epsom Derby (in 1780), who was imported to Virginia in 1799 at the venerable age of 22. \*Diomed sired the great racehorse and sire Sir Archy, Ball's Florizel, and Duroc. Sir Archy in turn sired Timoleon, who sired the great four-miler Boston (out of a Ball's Florizel mare), who in turn sired the even greater Lexington. And, through Lexington, the blood of \*Diomed is in virtually every stallion found in the pages of the *THOROUGHBRED TIMES Stallion Directory*.

Even unbeaten Nearco, progenitor of the Northern Dancer and Bold Ruler lines, has a cross of Lexington in his pedigree, although his ancestors were purely European-bred for at least three generations. Nearco's fourth dam was the American-bred Saluda, who was imported to England, where she produced Sibola, winner of the classic 1899 One Thousand Guineas and third dam of Nearco. Saluda's second dam, Maiden, was one of Lexington's best daughters.

As shown in the accompanying table, Revenue's sire championship in 1860 preceded by one year Lexington's 14-year reign as America's leading sire, the longest consecutive winning streak by a sire in Thoroughbred racing in any major racing country. Sadler's Wells led the English-Irish sire list for 13 consecutive years through 2004.

It was Lexington—with an assist from the natural advantages of soil and climate and the devastation of other areas by the Civil War—who succeeded in centering the United States breeding industry on his eponym, Lexington, Kentucky. Bred by Dr. Elisha Warfield in Lexington, he was purchased as a stallion by Robert A. Alexander, owner of Woodburn Stud, located about ten miles from Lexington on (now "Old") Frankfort Pike. It was Lexington's prowess as a stallion that drew buyers from all over the country to Woodburn's annual farm yearling sale and that encouraged breed-

ers to establish farms in the area to take advantage of his services for their mares.

No son of Lexington ever emerged from the gargantuan shadow cast by his success. No direct male-line descendant of the "blind hero of Woodburn" ever led the American sire list. Lexington had been so dominant that Himyar (out of Hira, by Lexington) in 1893 was the first leading American sire to carry his blood. The Lexington male line died a long, agonizing, and ignominious death. The last direct male descendant of Lexington to serve at stud was El Tesoro, who never sired a winner from 55 named foals and died in South Dakota in 1982.

Dating back to Himyar, 55 of 70 leading American sires have carried some of Lexington's genes, right up to Smart Strike in 2008. All but two (Bull Lea and Sir Dixon) of the 52 American-bred leading American sires since Himyar have carried the genes of Lexington to future generations.

## Wave upon wave

Since England was the birthplace of the Thoroughbred, it is natural that the history of the leading sires of this country is mostly a history of waves of importation gradually swamping homegrown lines. Of course, over very few generations, descendants of those rude immigrants, like the Irish, Italian, and Eastern European human immigrants who accompanied them, became the next wave of native Americans.

\*Diomed and his descendants were merely the first representatives of this phenomenon. Lexington's successor as leading sire was \*Leamington, who sired Aristides, the first winner of the Kentucky Derby, and Iroquois, the first American-bred winner of the Epsom Derby, as well as Perfection, the fifth dam of Nearco. Both Iroquois and \*Leamington's great son Longfellow led the American sire list, but neither sired a son capable of succeeding him, and the \*Leamington line soon was overwhelmed by the descendants of his successor as leading sire, \*Bonnie Scotland, and those of \*Glencoe, \*Eclipse, and \*Australian.

\*Bonnie Scotland sired the great racehorse Luke Blackburn, who won 22 of 24 starts at three but was a failure as a stallion. \*Bonnie Scotland's good son Bramble sired 1896 Kentucky Derby winner Ben Brush, leading sire in 1909. Ben Brush in turn sired leading sires Broomstick and Sweep.

The last leading sire from \*Bonnie Scotland's line was Sweep's son The Porter in 1937. The last important representative of the line was The Porter's great-grandson Smart, who sired four stakes winners and died in 1973. \*Bonnie Scotland's tribe, too, had been overwhelmed by later imports.

\*Glencoe's line did not last as long despite an attempt to transplant it back to Europe. \*Glencoe's grandson Virgil led the list in 1885 and sired the brilliant Hindoo, whose equally brilliant son Hanover dominated the sire list in the '90s. Hanover sired a great son in Hamburg but the last good American sire from this line was Hanover's great-grandson Wise

Counsellor, who died in 1941. Hanover's 1895 Kentucky Derby-winning son, Halma, was imported to France, where he sired a number of good racehorses but no important sires.

The lines descending from \*Australian and \*Eclipse have fared only marginally better. \*Australian's grandsons Kingston and Hastings each led the sire list twice, and Hastings sired three-time leader Fair Play. Fair Play in turn sired leading sires Chatterton, Chance Play, and the great Man o' War. Of those three, only Man o' War did his duty, passing the line on to War Admiral. The 1937 Triple Crown winner, however, did not sire a comparable son, and the \*Australian-Man o' War line now hangs by the thread of War Relic's great-grandson In Reality, and his sons and grandsons Relaunch, Known Fact, and dual Breeders' Cup Classic (G1) winner Tiznow, leading freshman sire of 2005 champion two-year-old filly Folklore. He ranks among the leading sires.

\*Eclipse (a foal of 1855 by Orlando and not to be confused with his legendary unbeaten namesake) sired the brilliant miler Alarm, who fathered Himyar, leading sire in '93. Himyar founded two lines that have produced leading American sires. His immortal son Domino sired Commando, who set a record for earnings by progeny of a sire in 1907 when his unbeaten son Colin was a juvenile. Commando's son Celt also led the list (in 1921), and other descendants of Domino such as High Time and Equipose kept the flag flying for many years. But, like those of \*Bonnie Scotland and \*Diomed, the Domino line appeared destined for oblivion until Broad Brush, a 12th-generation, male-line descendant of \*Eclipse, led the general sire list in '94.

Himyar sired 1898 Kentucky Derby winner Plaudit, who was not an outstanding sire but begat a line that has hung on by its fingernails ever since. Plaudit's seventh-generation, male-line descendant Dr. Fager led the sire list in 1977. And Plaudit is now represented at stud by 1994 Horse of the Year Holy Bull, a ninth-generation male-line descendant and sire of 2005 Kentucky Derby (G1) winner Giacomo and '00 champion two-year-old male Macho Uno.

## 20th-century immigrants

Early 20th-century imports such as \*Meddler, \*Star Shoot, and \*McGee failed to found enduring lines but, beginning with 1926 import \*Sir Gallahad III, a long series of importations dominated American sire lists and founded lines that slowly strangled the native American lines founded in the 19th century. \*Sir Gallahad III failed to get a leading sire, but his line persisted through such important stallions as Roman, Crafty Admiral, Victoria Park, and Kennedy Road.

\*Sir Gallahad III's brother \*Bull Dog sired five-time leader Bull Lea, but the latter's sons were uniform failures as stallions.

\*Blenheim II sired \*Mahmoud as a leading sire successor, and \*Mahmoud's line continues to be influential through The Axe II and Al Hattab.

\*Blenheim II's contemporary \*Sickle established a line that has ascended to international prominence through the exploits of \*Sickle's great-grandson Native Dancer. Native Dancer's male-line descendants Exclusive Native, Mr. Prospector, and Alydar all led the sire list in their time; the great gray is also broodmare sire of Northern Dancer.

\*Sickle's full brother \*Pharamond II never

made the top of the list (he was second to his brother in 1938), and the only representative of the \*Pharamond II line to head the U.S. list was Buckaroo, who rode the coattails of his son Spend a Buck (assisted by a \$2-million bonus) to the championship in '85.

\*Heliopolis was not successful as a sire of sires, but \*Nasrullah and \*Princequillo were instrumental in establishing new American

lines of their own. \*Princequillo's great son Round Table, whose dam carries crosses of Lexington through Hanover, led the sire list in 1972, but the \*Princequillo sire line now appears to be fading rapidly.

\*Nasrullah was sired by Nearco, who carries that cross of Lexington. \*Nasrullah actually carries two other crosses of the hero of Woodburn through his fourth dam, Americus Girl, whose sire, Americus, was inbred 3x3 to both Lexington and \*Glencoe's daughter Novice. \*Nasrullah's descendants Bold Ruler, T. V. Lark, What a Pleasure, Raja Baba, and Seattle Slew all have been leading sires in the U.S., and the line also persists through Blushing Groom (Fr) and Caro (Ire). Bold Ruler holds the modern record of seven consecutive sire championships from 1963-'69.

\*Nasrullah's three-quarter brother \*Royal Charger sired \*Turn-to, whose son Hail to Reason led the list in 1970 and in turn sired two-time leader Halo and Roberto, sire of 2003 leader Kris S.

Halo's son Saint Ballado—who was euthanized due to the effects of cervical myelopathy at age 13 in 2002—was leading sire of '05 thanks to champion older female Ashado and Horse of the Year Saint Liam. Retired to stud for 2006, Saint Liam covered 115 mares before he was euthanized after a paddock accident.

Bad luck also hit Roberto's line in 2006 when Barbaro, a colt by Roberto's son Dynaformer, suffered a badly broken right hind leg at the start of the Preakness Stakes (G1) two weeks after becoming the sixth undefeated Kentucky Derby winner. He was euthanized in January 2007 because of acute laminitis.

But it is Nearco's son Nearctic, who was imported in utero in 1953, who has fathered the most dominant male line in the world today. Nearctic's great son Northern Dancer led the list only once in North America, but his progeny dominated classic racing in Europe in the 1970s and '80s, and he led the list four times in England. Northern Dancer's sons and grandsons have led sire lists all over the world. In addition to three-time American leader Danzig and 1986 leader Lyphard, Sadler's Wells, Nijinsky II, Fabulous Dancer, Caerleon, Linamix, Fairy King, Northern Taste, Danehill, and Storm Cat have led lists in major racing countries in recent years.

The only interlopers on the list in recent years have been His Majesty and Nodouble, both sons of imported sires. His Majesty, by \*Ribot, has established an important line, while Nodouble, by \*Noholme II, did not.

After years of domination by imports, the U.S. general sire list has been led exclusively by native-bred horses beginning with Bold Ruler. As the U.S. grew to be the largest producer of Thoroughbreds in the world, it has become a net exporter. And, as evidenced by such stallions as Sadler's Wells, Sunday Silence, and Riverman (two-time leader in France), America long ago turned the tables and began sending leading sires to other countries.

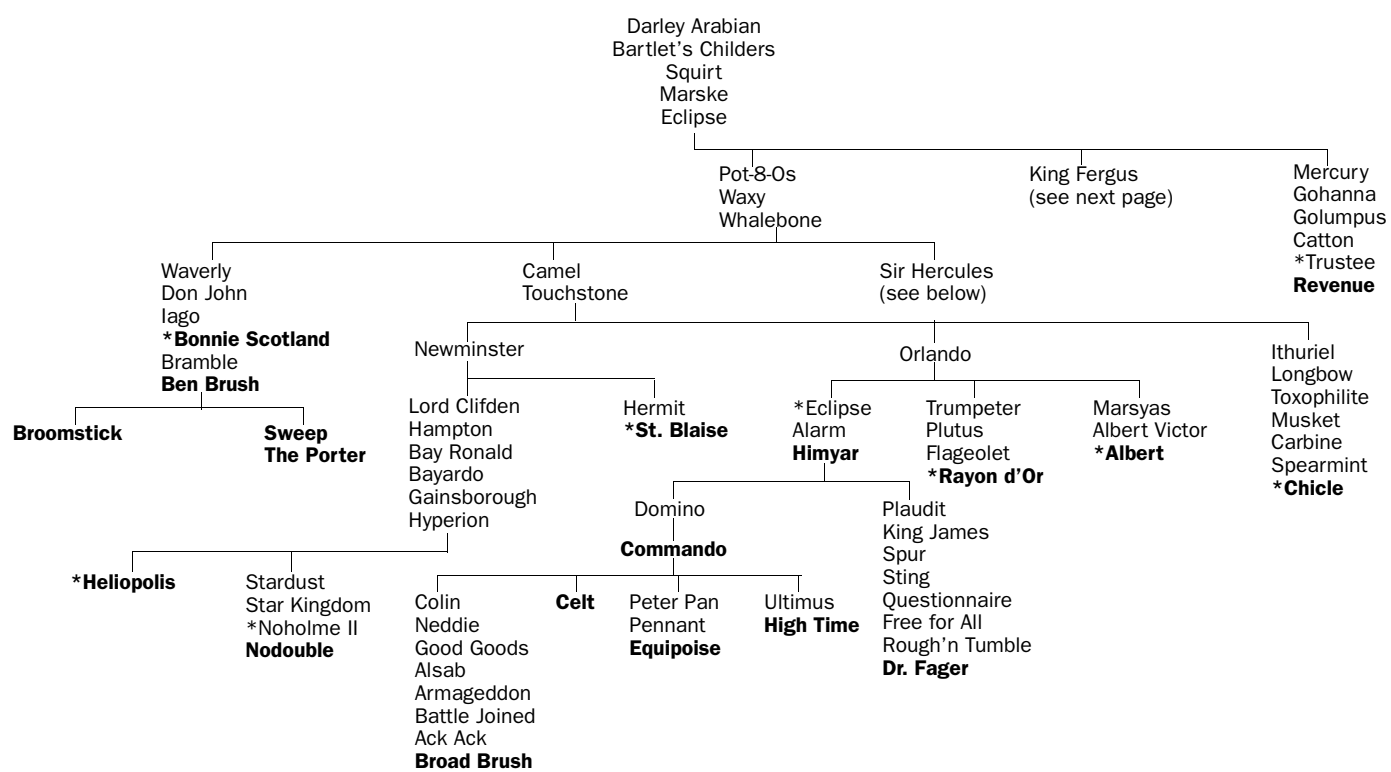
The THOROUGHBRED TIMES Stallion Directory is a catalog of the leading sires of the future. They are in here. The challenge is to find them. ④

America's leading sires									
Year	Name	Performers	Wins	Earnings	Year	Name	Performers	Wins	Earnings
1860	Revenue	10	46	\$ 49,450	1934	*Sir Gallahad III	55	92	\$ 180,165
1861	Lexington	13	27	22,425	1935	Chance Play	38	88	191,465
1862	Lexington	5	14	9,700	1936	*Sickle	48	128	209,800
1863	Lexington	10	25	14,235	1937	The Porter	45	104	292,262
1864	Lexington	13	38	28,440	1938	*Sickle	43	107	327,822
1865	Lexington	31	87	58,750	1939	*Challenger II	42	99	316,281
1866	Lexington	34	112	92,725	1940	*Sir Gallahad III	63	102	305,610
1867	Lexington	33	86	54,030	1941	*Blenheim II	30	64	378,981
1868	Lexington	33	92	68,340	1942	Equipoise	36	82	437,141
1869	Lexington	36	81	56,375	1943	*Bull Dog	75	172	372,706
1870	Lexington	35	82	129,360	1944	Chance Play	71	150	431,100
1871	Lexington	40	102	109,095	1945	War Admiral	26	59	591,352
1872	Lexington	28	82	71,915	1946	*Mahmoud	47	101	638,025
1873	Lexington	23	71	71,565	1947	Bull Lea	61	128	1,259,718
1874	Lexington	23	70	51,889	1948	Bull Lea	63	147	1,334,027
1875	*Leamington	18	32	64,518	1949	Bull Lea	73	165	991,842
1876	Lexington	12	34	90,570	1950	*Heliopolis	77	167	852,292
1877	*Leamington	21	49	41,170	1951	Count Fleet	64	124	1,160,847
1878	Lexington	16	36	50,198	1952	Bull Lea	65	136	1,630,847
1879	*Leamington	24	56	70,837	1953	Bull Lea	56	107	1,155,846
1880	*Bonnie Scotland	35	137	135,708	1954	*Heliopolis	76	148	1,406,638
1881	*Leamington	23	67	139,219	1955	*Nasrullah	40	69	1,433,660
1882	*Bonnie Scotland	36	169	103,475	1956	*Nasrullah	50	106	1,462,413
1883	*Billet	17	48	89,998	1957	*Princequillo	75	147	1,698,427
1884	Glennelg	32	108	69,862	1958	*Princequillo	65	110	1,394,540
1885	Virgil	24	56	73,236	1959	*Nasrullah	69	141	1,434,543
1886	Glennelg	34	136	113,638	1960	*Nasrullah	64	122	1,419,683
1887	Glennelg	33	120	120,031	1961	*Ambiorix	73	148	936,976
1888	Glennelg	33	134	130,746	1962	*Nasrullah	62	107	1,474,831
1889	*Rayon d'Or	27	101	175,877	1963	Bold Ruler	26	56	917,531
1890	*St. Blaise	27	105	185,005	1964	Bold Ruler	44	88	1,457,156
1891	Longfellow	52	143	189,334	1965	Bold Ruler	51	90	1,091,924
1892	Iroquois	34	145	183,025	1966	Bold Ruler	51	107	2,306,523
1893	Himyar	27	138	249,502	1967	Bold Ruler	63	135	2,249,272
1894	*Sir Modred	36	137	134,318	1968	Bold Ruler	57	99	1,988,427
1895	Hanover	40	133	106,908	1969	Bold Ruler	59	90	1,357,144
1896	Hanover	42	157	86,853	1970	Hail to Reason	53	82	1,400,839
1897	Hanover	54	159	122,374	1971	Northern Dancer	44	93	1,288,580
1898	Hanover	43	124	118,590	1972	Round Table	65	98	1,199,933
1899	*Albert	19	64	95,975	1973	Bold Ruler	41	74	1,488,622
1900	Kingston	33	110	116,368	1974	T. V. Lark	98	121	1,242,000
1901	Sir Dixon	24	94	165,682	1975	What a Pleasure	90	101	2,011,878
1902	Hastings	29	63	113,865	1976	What a Pleasure	85	108	1,622,159
1903	*Ben Strome	24	91	106,965	1977	Dr. Fager	79	124	1,593,079
1904	*Meddler	21	55	222,555	1978	Exclusive Native	63	106	1,969,867
1905	Hamburg	30	60	153,160	1979	Exclusive Native	71	104	2,872,605
1906	*Meddler	21	54	151,243	1980	Raja Baba	108	149	2,483,352
1907	Commando	12	34	270,345	1981	Nodouble	92	115	2,499,946
1908	Hastings	36	93	154,061	1982	His Majesty	56	86	2,675,823
1909	Ben Brush	19	67	75,143	1983	Halo	69	86	2,773,637
1910	Kingston	13	41	85,220	1984	Seattle Slew	46	49	5,361,259
1911	*Star Shoot	36	103	53,895	1985	Buckaroo	49	50	4,145,272
1912	*Star Shoot	44	126	79,973	1986	Lyphard	50	49	4,045,447
1913	Broomstick	31	114	76,009	1987	Mr. Prospector	81	104	5,877,385
1914	Broomstick	31	90	99,043	1988	Mr. Prospector	82	106	9,575,605
1915	Broomstick	47	108	94,387	1989	Halo	93	114	7,525,638
1916	*Star Shoot	87	218	138,163	1990	Alydar	98	111	6,661,455
1917	*Star Shoot	81	167	131,674	1991	Danzig	68	109	6,997,402
1918	Sweep	33	69	139,057	1992	Danzig	62	83	6,932,569
1919	*Star Shoot	55	108	197,233	1993	Danzig	110	142	5,082,552
1920	Fair Play	27	72	269,102	1994	Broad Brush	92	151	5,397,181
1921	Celt	52	124	206,167	1995	Sadler's Wells	144	70	5,862,410
1922	*McGee	57	125	222,491	1996	Palace Music	28	27	5,231,734
1923	The Finn	16	31	285,759	1997	Deputy Minister	110	119	8,581,511
1924	Fair Play	45	84	296,204	1998	Deputy Minister	109	115	8,337,302
1925	Sweep	65	185	237,564	1999	Storm Cat	140	145	10,383,259
1926	Man o' War	26	49	408,137	2000	Storm Cat	128	124	9,269,521
1927	Fair Play	38	77	361,518	2001	Danehill	419	187	13,542,612
1928	High Time	55	109	307,631	2002	Dehere	278	297	8,099,500
1929	*Chicle	41	88	289,123	2003	Kris S.	130	126	11,497,747
1930	*Sir Gallahad III	16	49	422,200	2004	Elusive Quality	141	125	10,876,981
1931	*St. Germans	15	47	315,585	2005	Saint Ballado	180	168	10,409,467
1932	Chatterton	47	93	210,040	2006	A.P. Indy	171	160	9,830,318
1933	*Sir Gallahad III	49	78	136,428	2007	Smart Strike	216	171	14,491,073

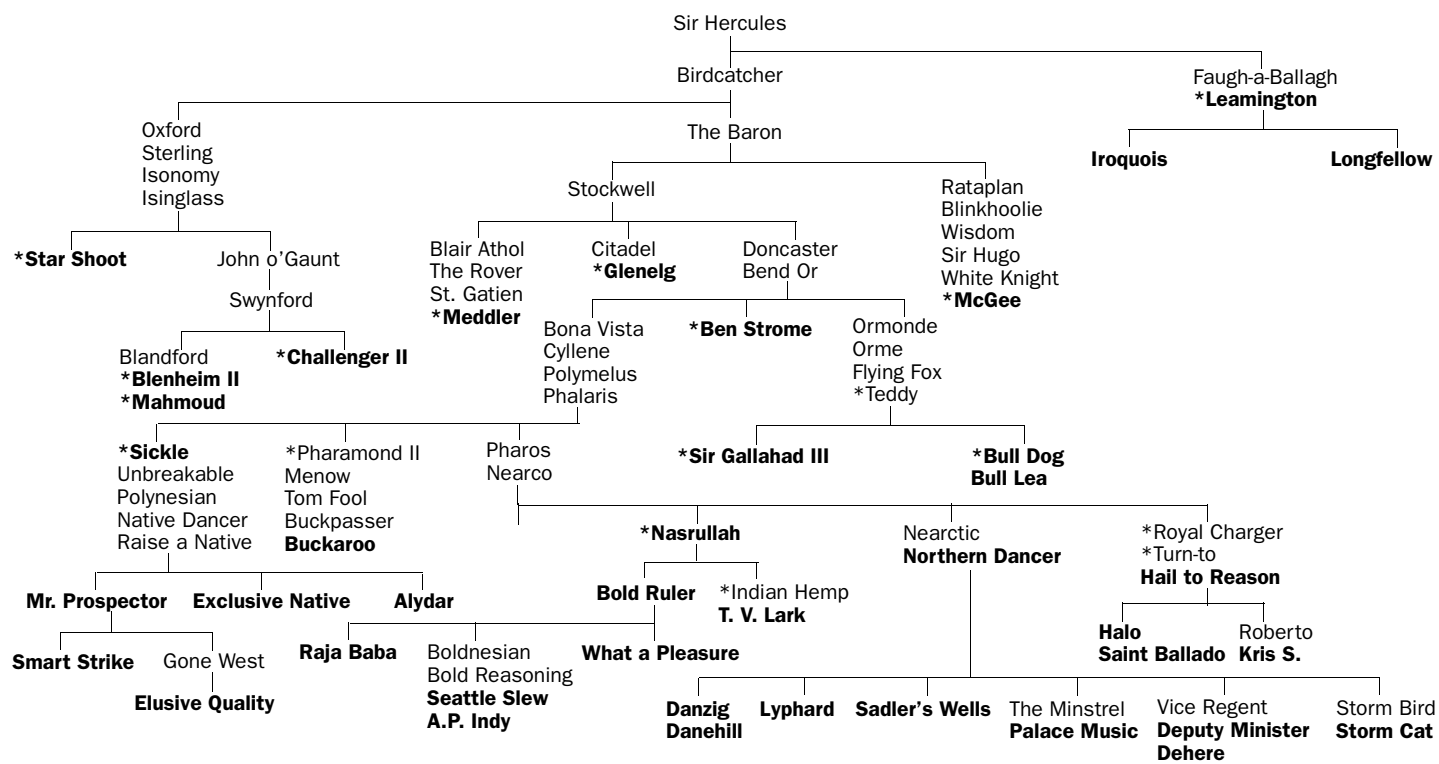
John Sparkman is bloodstock editor of THOROUGHBRED TIMES.

# Sire lines of leading American sires

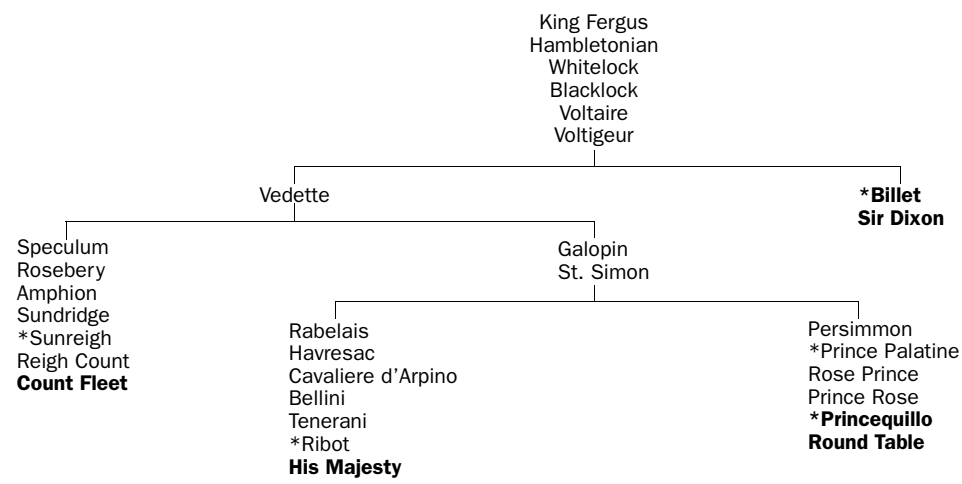
## Darley Arabian line



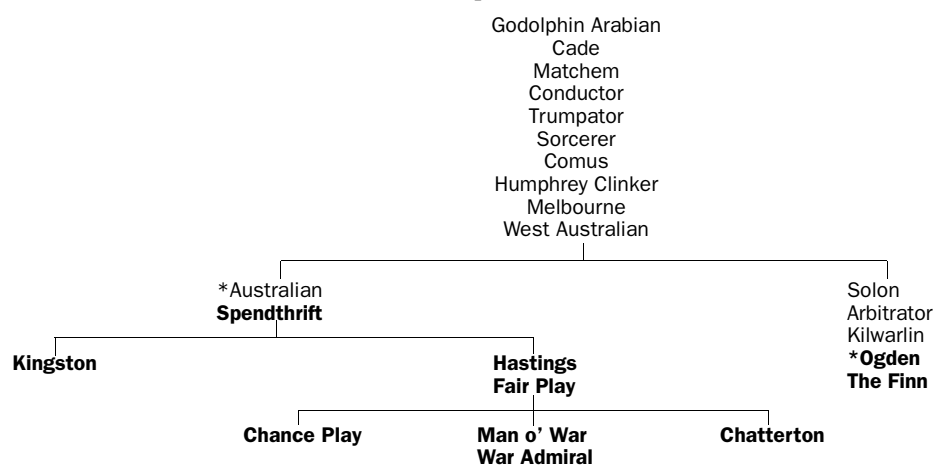
## Sir Hercules line of Eclipse



### King Fergus line of Eclipse



### Godolphin Arabian line



### Byerley Turk line

