

BREEDING'S STRANGEST SECRET

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In 1956 the American radio speaker and author Earl Nightingale recorded his classic work *The Strangest Secret*, which sold over one million copies and is now, quite rightly, considered by many to be one of the most powerful messages ever recorded. It was almost certainly the catalyst for today's huge market in personal development and self-improvement material.

The modern-day giants of the personal development world, the likes of Anthony Robbins, Brian Tracy, Bob Proctor and the late and great Zig Ziglar, would often refer to the words that Nightingale had gleaned from Napoleon Hill's greatest work, *Think And Grow Rich*, including the famous six-word phrase, 'we become what we think about'. He quoted Marcus Aurelius: 'A man's life is what his thought makes of it,' and Ralph Waldo Emerson: 'A man is what he thinks about, all day long.'

What does all this have to do with breeding racehorses, you might well be asking yourself.

Well, as alluded to above, in order to be successful in any undertaking, you have to have a plan. In Nightingale's own words, 'success is the progressive realisation of a worthy ideal'. He also points out that the opposite of the courage needed to be different and stand out from the crowd, so to speak, in terms of success is not failure or cowardice but conformity.

This is exactly what I see in the bloodstock world: conformity. I see the majority of breeders sending their mares to the latest 'hot' or fashionable first-season sires, whose popularity seems to be dictated by the same bloodstock agents who might decide at some point in the future that the same sire is now 'dead in the water', to use a phrase that I have heard on numerous occasions at the yearling sales.

How can breeders possibly expect to breed stakes horses on a consistent basis if they're relying on luck, fashion or 'by chance' matings?

Perhaps this is the main reason why only one in approximately every three hundred racehorses goes on to become a stakes-class performer.

Do you believe for one second that Federico Tesio, who bred the outstanding champions Ribot, Nearco and Donatello and other top class horses, did so purely by chance; or that the genetic power and deliberately-reinforced ancestors within those pedigrees can be properly understood from the three generations of a sales catalogue page?

Or that H H The Aga Khan and his family, who have bred the winners of ten Epsom Derbys, (via Blenheim, Bahram, Mahmoud, My Love, Tulyar, Shergar, Shahrastani, Kahyasi, Sinnandar and Harzand) achieved those great successes without having a plan?

I would very strongly recommend that any breeder who has aspirations of breeding a champion racehorse studies the pedigrees of the horses listed above in great detail – exactly what I have been doing for approximately the last 30 years.

I have dedicated my professional life to snooker and was rewarded by becoming World Champion in 2002 and UK Champion in 2006, greatly helped by applying the principles taught by some of the great mentors listed above. My true passion has always been for pedigrees, though, and identifying how the great breeders chose to reinforce certain ancestors and their siblings in deliberately-designed matings.

The Strangest Secret in thoroughbred breeding is that the genetic potential of any given racehorse is dictated by the degree and quantity of its linebreeding. That is exactly why, in my honest, professional opinion, the whole industry, which is governed by the whims of commerciality, has got it completely wrong.

Commerciality follows success, not the other way around, which is why I recommend to my clients (at Designer Pedigrees Ltd) that they plan their matings for the racecourse, even if they intend to send the resulting horses to the sales instead of keeping them to race.

Surely, the goal of any breeder should be to breed stakes horses and champions, which, long-term, greatly improves the value of their mares?

How can that be possible if the majority of breeders send their mares to mainly commercial stallions, without a thought of whether or not their mare might actually suit that stallion, genetically?

History tells us that it is not about being a certain 'physical type' because top-class racehorses come in all shapes and sizes. However, any top professional pedigree consultant will tell you that there have always been – and always will be – consistent patterns that appear in the pedigrees of the world's greatest athletes because breeders skilfully employed the linebreeding techniques which produce speed, class, stamina and courage in the racehorse.

I applaud wholeheartedly those breeders – and those of the smaller studs in particular – who use professional pedigree consultants to put in their favour the percentage chances of breeding stakes horses on a consistent basis. Every time I am asked to recommend potential purchases at the sales to my own clients, it is the foals and yearlings of these breeders which are my first port of call.

A proper plan and strategy are necessary. I consider H H The Aga Khan to be one of the most intelligent and successful breeders of all time, and as he famously said: "Breeding thoroughbreds is like playing chess with nature." ■