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# CAPTAIN AL

## A SOUTH AFRICAN LEGEND

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By John Freeman

*The influence that a successful sire has on the fortunes of his home-base is the stuff that legends are made of. Throughout the 300 years of thoroughbred breeding history, top sires have been revered for the contribution they have made to the fortunes of those lucky enough to have been associated with them.*

**A**rthur "Bull" Hancock, the master of Claiborne who inherited and built on the legacy of stallion supremacy in America which his father had established, famously commented on the effect that stallions have on breeders' fortunes: "a good bull is half the herd, a bad bull is the whole herd". His opinion is undoubtedly more apt in the modern breeding world than it was in his time because the top sires in the world nowadays serve books as high as 400 mares a year in dual-hemisphere duties. In Bull Hancock's time a top sire would cover no more than 60 mares as a full book. If a stallion fails in today's times, his effect on 400 mares could be catastrophic.

Sires that become great producers of champion racehorses don't always pass their genes to the next generation through their offspring. When they do it's not always through both sons and daughters. Very few succeed as sires of sires and others make top broodmare sires but very few make both. Most of the world's top





sires don't get progeny to carry their genes to further generations so when you get a sire line that does both, it is pure gold.

I was researching how many sire lines in South Africa had succeeded as sires of sires and champion broodmare sires. Undoubtedly Al Mufti and Fort Wood are standouts in modern breeding in South Africa in both regards. That is why I decided to pay tribute to Captain Al, a truly great South African sire. His profile as a producer of top racers is well known and serialised as a record breaking sire and now his emergence as SA's next top broodmare sire is even better news. Happily it's true to form as he fits a near idealistic profile of a broodmare sire. It's early days to comment on his future as a sire of sires as, unlike Dynasty and Jet Master, he has no commercially syndicated sons at stud – yet!

Because he was a home-grown local-bred sprinter miler he didn't have the luxury of a queue of top stud farms competing for him to join their stallion barn. South African bred sires at that stage, even as classic winners, were considered to be lower value than poorly-raced, well connected imports. Happily Captain Al, Dynasty and Jet Master have changed that in a very big way in the last 15 years. Captain Al was fortunately close to the heart of his breeder John Köster who equally fortunately enjoyed close ties with the heirs of Captain Al's late owner and dear Köster friend "uncle" Manny dos Santos. And that's where this modern day success story that is closer to the heart of more South African breeders than any

other stallion success story I can remember began.

He and Jet Master entered stud in the same year, with Jet Master as winner of more Gr1 races than any other horse in South African history at the time – his record has ironically only subsequently been bettered by his great son Pocket Power. Jet Master, by virtue of his status as a great champion of the turf, retired at a service fee almost the same as Captain Al's share price. There is a big difference in the price of shares and service fees to all stallions and very often today, share prices can be worth 10 times a top stallion's service fee.

Because of his popularity amongst the breeding community John Köster was a huge draw card in laying foundation to "The Captain's" stud career. I was in the fortunate position of being offered the job to form the syndicate and act as syndicate manager. We had no idea how popular the horse would be when we invited potential shareholders to lunch at Kenilworth Racecourse to present his credentials. We planned a 40 share syndicate but during the share offering we were swamped by breeders wanting to take multiple shares and ended up with a 45 share syndicate to try and accommodate as many as possible. The die was cast, he had a good team on board.

In Captain Al we saw one of South Africa's most rewarding stallion syndicates formed. He subsequently influenced and even changed



the course of some peoples lives. The syndicate recently presented past and present shareholders a keepsake at a function in Cape Town to celebrate his continuing success and to thank them for their contribution. That occasion, like so many previous syndicate get-togethers, heard stories recounted of share sales, top yearling prices, Gr1 wins and great partnerships that had huge impact on peoples lives. One day these stories will be saved in writing but that's not the object of this piece because that story can only be told when the game is over and it's far from over.

An exciting new chapter has just begun for Captain AI as the first of the new generation sire to be credited with Gr1 winners through his daughters. Another fine feather in his cap of firsts. Gr1 winning colt Potent Power (National Emblem – Solar Galleon, a winning half-sister to Gr3 winner of 2 races Hard Rock ) from only Captain AI's 3rd producing daughter at stud was followed with a Gr1 winning filly, Same Jurisdiction (Mambo in Seattle – Diana de Carlo, one time winner, her dams only winner from 3 foals) in the Thekwini Stakes this year. Like his sire, Captain AI's early start to his career as an emerging broodmare sire is surely as much to do with his well-founded pedigree as it has to do with the all-round superior physical stature of his daughters.

Before I get into how Captain AI has started to make his mark as an emerging broodmare sire, we should be reminded that some of the world's top racehorses, like Secretariat, failed at stud and

yet became top broodmare sires – not only from the help of the genes that enabled them to succeed on the track, but because that prowess on the track attracted the very best mares in large numbers when they began their stud careers. The superior matrons they covered are well documented as succeeding despite the failure of their sires because of the enormous power and depth of their own pedigrees.

When it works it works: Captain AI upgraded the fortunes of some really mediocre mares in his early years and produced Gr1 horses when given the chance. There is no question that his early books of mares included some prominent mares and well related families, but pound for pound his early books didn't compare to most of the other young stallions that commanded higher fees at the time. Despite that, his first crop saw him compete stride for stride with Jet Master as they rewrote the South African record book of 2yo sire earnings and obliterated previous freshman sire records. It was a heads up heads down duel to the wire; Jet Master prevailing on the stakes side, a short head in front, and Captain AI beating him by number of winners. The team behind Captain AI were elated, especially when they analysed the strength (or lack thereof) of the dams that produced his early stakes horses.

Suffice to say that Jet Master went on to become the most successful sire in history and arguably one of the greatest sires in the world. Twice crowned Equus Outstanding Stallion, Captain AI



on the other hand serialised the SA 2yo sire championship with a record 6 consecutive victories and 31 Gr1 horses to his credit. He broke more records of win ratios and strike rate of winners, at all levels, than any sire on record.

Like his champion father Al Mufti, it was said that his fillies were better than his colts. That's easy to understand when you see a top filly like Carry On Alice take on the colts in a race like the Gr1 SA Nursery: a race respected as a king maker, and beat them and then take them on again in another Gr1 soon after and beat all bar one of them home.

I remember the early days when it was almost considered a loss to get a colt by Al Mufti, but then along came the horses that stamped him as a sire of sires like Captain Al, Victory Moon, The Sheik and Cataloochee. It's amazing how the market perceives sires to be the opposite of what they really are. The Captain has had more colt winners than fillies and 4 of his 9 Gr1 winners are colts. His average Merit Rating for 239 colts is 82.9 compared to 80.5 for 235 fillies. His career MR average of 81.7 sets him as only one of 5 sires in the history of the Merit Rating System to achieve an overall average of over 80 in a list headed by Western Winter at 82.3, Var at 81.9, Captain Al at 81.7, Jet Master at 81.3, National Assembly at 80.3, Fort Wood at 79.9, Dynasty at 79.7 and Silvano at 79.5.

So what in his pedigree makes Captain Al so successful? Karel Miedema called his dam "a rare specimen". She is the dam of seven winners, three stakes winners (including two Gr1 winners Captain Al, a colts Guineas winner; and Shadow Dancing, a fillies Guineas winner) and her daughters have produced two more stakes winners including the duel Gr1 winner Thunder Dance.

Captain Al's pedigree is free of the all pervasive Northern Dancer and Mr Prospector blood which makes him such an obvious choice as a broodmare sire. He has multiples of the explosive Lady Josephine tribe: Off To War is inbred 4x4x4x4 to Nasrullah and his full sister Malindi - Al Mufti is inbred 3x4 to Turn To and therefore 2 lines of Nasrullah's three-parts brother Royal Charger and 4 more lines of Lady Josephine with "balancing agent" My Babu. More importantly Captain Al's pedigree is inbred 3x4 to Buckpasser and his half sister Oak Cluster which became a proven "nick" with Al Mufti and other sires that shared Buckpasser as damsire, like National Assembly.

He gets well balanced individuals that are easy to prepare for sale. A sire of top class colts and fillies, he gets them to sprint and to stay. They are tough, genuine and honest types. He now ascends the ladder in his new quest to being a top class broodmare sire too. What a stallion, what a privilege, what a pleasure and honour to be associated with him.