



Tim Smith saw enough potential in a young WR This Cats Smart that he convinced then-owner Don Dubin not to geld the 3-year-old stallion. Today, WR This Cats Smart has offspring earnings of more than \$5 million.

Selecting the Stallions

Two top horsemen talk about the factors they use when deciding whether or not to geld a young prospect.

By Lycrecia Cunningham Atkins

Cool, November air surrounded cutting horse trainer Tim Smith as he sat in a round pen at the home of friend and fellow trainer Phil Rapp in Weatherford, Texas, almost 12 years ago. Smith, from Temecula, Calif., was in Texas to catch ride for Rapp in the 2002 National Cutting Horse Association (NCHA) Futurity. The pair was working horses and Smith was about to watch Rapp ride a then 3-year-old horse named WR This Cats Smart (High Brow Cat x The Smart Look x Smart Little Lena), which had been trained throughout his 3-year-old year by Scott McClurg, of Lipan, Texas.

Wiens Ranch, of Sedalia, Colo., bred the

sorrel stallion and owned him at the time, and due to a paperwork error, he would miss out on being shown in that year's Futurity. McClurg had originally intended to bring the horse to Rapp's to practice, but after the mix-up was discovered, he had been given the go-ahead to sell him. As Smith sat watching from a turnback horse, he quickly recognized the stallion's exceptional talent.

"I saw him and I thought, 'That's a good-looking horse.' He moved like he was on glass," Smith said. "Scott worked him on a cow, and he was great. Phil got on him and he asked him for a little bit more, and he went from second gear to sixth gear. I

was about 10 feet away, but I could see the look on Phil's face. I said, 'Stop. I'm going to buy him.'"

The chance meeting with Smith and eventual purchase would soon unfold into a pivotal decision for what is now a top 10 sire in the reining and reined cow horse junior stallion statistics, according to **Equi-Stat**. Smith was purchasing "WR" for Don Dubin, of Bonsall, Calif., a client of his. Like many horsemen, Dubin prefers the behavioral characteristics of a gelding, particularly in a hauling scenario. So, they purchased WR This Cats Smart with the understanding that Dubin would potentially have the stallion castrated.

"We were basically a week away from gelding him," Smith said. "Then, I took him to a small derby and won it on him. I told Don, 'This might be an even better horse than I thought he was. Let's hold off a little bit on cutting him.'"

Dubin would go on to sell WR This Cats Smart, a 1999 stallion now owned by Wagonhound Land and Livestock of Douglas, Wyo. He stands at the Four Sixes Ranch in Guthrie, Texas, and his foals have since generated an estimated \$5 million in earnings. Smith, who is one of the top 10 riders in the NCHA and a career winner of more than \$5.3 million, had the experience to make a definite talent call in WR's case. If not for Smith's consideration, WR This Cats Smart would certainly have had a very different career.

Defining characteristics

While scenarios of this kind don't often result in a top-producing sire, there are certainly special colts born every year that deserve a little more consideration as stallion prospects. Whether trainers and breeders are assessing colt crops or analyzing young horses at various stages in their training process, there are a multitude of characteristics to consider as they contemplate which horses have what it takes to sire the next generation. So, how do some of the performance horse industry's top trainers and breeders make those calls?

In Smith's case, his experience honed in on an element that has become particularly important to him throughout the years when addressing whether a stallion should remain a stallion – an extensive capacity for concentration. Smith said that even as a 3-year-old, WR displayed a great deal of ability to focus on his task at hand.

"If they are good-minded and have that level of mental capacity, I think that is really and truly what separates the horses that have the potential to be a breeding horse," Smith said. "There is nothing better than showing a good stud, and there is nothing worse than being around a bad stud. But very few deserve to be a stallion."

Reining horse trainer Thiago Boechat, 38, of Xtra Quarter Horses LLC in Purcell, Okla., also looks toward the horse's aptitude for concentration as a stallion. For him, it is a priority for health and a determining factor in the horse's ability to perform at his best.

"The main thing is when it [being a stallion] keeps you from getting the full potential out of the horse and keeps the horse



Several people tried to buy Wimpynedsacoktail with the intention of turning him into a top non-pro gelding. Thiago Boechat and Xtra Quarter Horses never questioned their decision to keep him a stallion, and are promoting him alongside his famous sire, Wimpys Little Step.

from being healthy," Boechat explained. "Some horses are, physically, a little more fragile and need ridden a lot more if they are still a stud. They get distracted by mares or by other horses. That keeps them from reaching their full potential."

Boechat's dynamic career has been successful, with National Reining Horse Association (NRHA) earnings of more than \$400,000 so far. He previously worked for NRHA Hall of Fame trainer Doug Milholland and has experience that spans various countries. Boechat began his training career in his native country of Brazil, and coached the 2001 and 2002 Brazilian Reining Teams in international competitions. He is also a trained veterinarian, having completed his schooling in Brazil.

His many wins in the United States included last year's Levels 4 and 3 Open Championships at the 2013 National Reining Breeders Classic (NRBC) in Katy, Texas, on Xtra Quarter Horses' Wimpynedsacoktail (Wimpys Little Step x Seven S Mimosa x Hollywood Dun It). The 2007 stallion is the highest-earning stallion sired by Wimpys Little Step (Nu Chex To Cash x Leolita Step x Forty Seven), the NRHA Hall of Famer and \$6 million sire also owned by Xtra Quarter Horses.

Like Smith, Boechat found himself in

the position of seeing fate intervene in the career of a great stallion.

Xtra Quarter Horses purchased Wimpynedsacoktail as a 4-year-old prior to the 2011 NRHA Derby, when Boechat was riding the stallion for a previous owner. During the months leading up to the purchase, several people approached Boechat with the idea that Wimpynedsacoktail would make a great gelding, hoping to buy him for that purpose.

"Several people liked him a lot and wanted to buy him and make him a non-pro gelding," Boechat said, laughing. "We bought him with no intentions of gelding him. Even after we bought him, I had so many people that approached me and asked, 'Is that horse for sale?' And say, 'I have this non-pro that wants a really great non-pro gelding.'"

"We've never really thought he needs to be a gelding. It's just that was everybody's vision for him – a gelding," Boechat explained. "And he probably would make a great non-pro gelding. But he would make anybody a good horse of any kind. He's made a great stallion for us."

Emphasis on conformation

Boechat says Wimpynedsacoktail, now a career earner of \$285,000, was chosen



Owners, breeders, trainers and veterinarians may take different factors into consideration when deciding whether or not to castrate young stallions.

for Xtra Quarter Horses' breeding program because he possesses the combined qualities important in a stallion. Among those qualities is conformation. Boechat looks for balance and correct structure, particularly in stallion prospects.

"A good stallion cannot have any [structural] problems," he said. "Any structural issues that can be passed on to their offspring are a problem and can give cause for not using them as a stallion. They need to be close to perfect conformation wise."

While there are a multitude of things that contribute to good conformation, Boechat looks for a very well-balanced

horse, and one with short cannon bones. He also believes horses with thicker necks have a tendency to be less supple in their front-end movement and face, and are hindered by a lofty build.

"A studier [acting] male horse can often have a thicker neck, and it is harder to get them broke in their face. When that is combined with an attitude, that is a problem. By gelding them, it especially changes their neck, and they have a thinner, less strong neck that they will give to you softer."

Smith has the same regard for conformation. He places emphasis on balance, as

well as neck-to-shoulder placement.

"When you look at [a horse] from the withers to hips, I like them to have a nice, balanced topline, and I also like them to be low-hocked," Smith said. "I personally, don't like short-necked, heavy-fronted horses. I really like an agile horse whose neck ties in nicely and hangs out there, allowing them to remain balanced. They have to have exceptional conformation to be able to move and remain collected. To be a stallion, it needs to be a notch above."

A look at pedigrees

Smith also applies his "notch above" philosophy to pedigrees when considering whether a horse should be gelded. Ultimately, he said, his two main criteria for stallions end up being ability to focus and conformation; however, pedigrees are another important area for him. Smith gives special attention to how the horse is bred on the dam's side when deciding whether or not to geld.

"The mare is 75-80 percent of the colt, to me," Smith said. "Obviously, there is an exception to every rule, but I really take a very close look at the dam. If that mare is something I remember as being extra special, then I will go look at what the stud is."

Boechat said he often considers how certain bloodlines may affect a stallion's disposition prior to gelding. Some pedigrees, he said, have a tendency to come with their own personalities.

"Some bloodlines make stud colts a little more studey," Boechat said. "Depending on how a horse is bred, you may want to try not to geld it, because if you can make it to the other side of [behavioral or training issues], you are going to have a stud to breed."

On the other hand, a stallion who is too "feely," or reactive to your legs, can be improved by making him a gelding.

Boechat said he will give pedigrees more emphasis in unique situations, but his outlook regarding pedigrees is comparable to Smith's, in that talent is the determining factor when evaluating young horses.

"If you have a son of a stud that just passed away and a great mare..." Boechat said, giving an example of when he places emphasis on pedigrees. "But at the end of the day, if it doesn't work for you, you need to geld him."

A different perspective

Like most trainers, Boechat often evaluates young horses that are already going well under saddle as performance pros-

pects. But as the head trainer and general manager at Xtra Quarter Horses, Boechat also sees about 70 babies per year and helps with the responsibilities of standing three stallions – Wimpys Little Step, Wimpynedsacocktail and Shiners Voodoo Dr (Shining Spark x Voodoo Chic x Smart Chic Olena).

The babies call for a breeder's perspective, although he said they generally sell most of their colts as stallions to give buyers the option to geld. In considering babies to hold back as stallion prospects for Xtra Quarter Horses, Boechat said he has a tendency to rely more on pedigree and individual progress as decision makers.

"It is really such a small percentage that we keep as stallions," Boechat explained. "The first thing I look at when they are babies is pedigree. They change so much when they are babies, I don't geld them before they are 2 years old.

"You are always expecting that next stud," Boechat added. "You are always expecting to make another great one. There are a few here that we really think can be that horse. The older they get, it narrows down to a smaller number. We try to sell them before we get to the gelding point. As a breeder, we don't have the goal of owning a bunch of show horses."

Deciding to geld

Both Smith and Boechat agree gelding is something that deserves extra consideration. For many horses, it can be the best option to help attain peak performance. Boechat said in many cases, owners will miss an opportunity to have a great gelding by trying to maintain an average stallion.

"There are some owners out there that will not let you geld a horse, even though you know that horse will not make a breeding horse," Boechat said, speaking from a trainer's perspective. "I bet there is a small percentage [of horses] that probably were wasted because they were not gelded. They were distracted and weren't able to perform their best because they were not gelded."

For those hoping to alleviate studdish behavior, gelding earlier works best to stop behavioral patterns from becoming fully engrained, said Patrick McCue, DVM, PhD, Dipl., ACT, who is a professor of equine theriogenology and heads up the mare and stallion clinical services at the Equine Reproduction Laboratory for Colorado State University.

The best time, McCue said, is "prior to



QHN File Photo

Many breeders prefer to leave colts intact until they are at least 2 years of age, especially if they are going to be sold at auction.

puberty, [which is] reached around 14-18 months of age. Then those masculine behaviors wouldn't have a chance to be manifested.

"It may take many weeks to change his behavior if he is an older horse, because he has a lot of behaviors that he has learned and they have been directed by testosterone all his adult life," McCue added. "It will take a while before those behaviors adjust."

However, late castrations are often necessary and proven to be of value, allowing time to further assess talent. They have also become more prevalent due to medical advancements for the procedure.

"Castration is a very routine surgical procedure," McCue said. "It's associated with very few side effects. The complication rate is very low. There can be some significant complications, but they are very rare."

Delaying castration is something Smith said has become more common in his sport, but obviously, times for castration are often chosen based on many different elements including personal preferences, industry demands, individual facilities and business needs.

"I'd rather cut them early and have a good show gelding," Smith said. "A lot of people will try to go through the [NCHA] Futurity, and then the stallions will be cut the spring of their 4-year-old year."

Selected sires

As new colts continue to arrive this spring, the potential prospects among them stir excitement.

In the round pen, their older brothers may be gaining or losing ground and giving rise to decision time. However, making adequate assessments to consider whether a horse is a potential stallion prospect can help identify a particularly talented individual.

Stallions have been a popular choice for pursuing championships in the past. Since the NRHA's first Futurity in 1966, 21 stallions have won the coveted Open title, versus 10 geldings and 17 mares. More stallions than geldings have won the NCHA Futurity Open as well, with 22 stallions having won since 1962, while eight geldings and 22 mares have been champions.

"They are a different animal," Smith says of stud horses. "I think really what separates those that should be studs is that everything they do is just a beat quicker. They have something extra that they can't be taught. They just have 'it.' They have a greater ability to concentrate. They have more eye appeal. They can get another gear.

"But they take a lot of time," Smith concluded. "If they're that good, though, they are worth it." ★