

The Early Days of the Thoroughbred in Santa Ynez Valley

By Pat Roberts

In 1927 **Charles Jackson** purchased what later became known as the **Alisal Guest Ranch**. The **Jackson** family loved the valley and Thoroughbred racehorses. In 1933, Mr. Jackson won the **Kentucky Derby** with his horse, **Flying Ebony**. There were a few other properties in and around the valley breeding and raising Thoroughbreds at that time, but they were very small operations.

The **Gardner Ranch**, then owned by **Peggy Gardner**, had a small track located near the river bottom of her property. Match races were held there, but most of the time they were for Quarter Horses. Peggy's husband, **John**, trained a few of these horses and friends from around southern California would bring their horses there to compete. These were similar to what became fairground races in later years.

Quarter Horse breeders such as **Katie Peake** raised some of these early sprinting Quarter Horses who later became well known for their speed and quick ability in the arenas competing in horse shows and rodeos. She and her then husband **Channing Peake** purchased the Quarter Horse stallion, **Driftwood**, who became well known and sought after as the sire most likely to pass on to his progeny these attributes.

It was around during the late 1940's that **Monty Roberts** traveled from his home town, Salinas to the Santa Ynez Valley with other students to enter and compete at horse shows held at the **Alisal Guest Ranch arena**. Prior to becoming old enough to drive, he and the other competitors would be driven by the local high school agriculture teacher, **Roy Lanini**, along with other teachers.

Among these instructors were **John Schwab** and **Lyman Fowler**. While the students were busy competing these men, because of their keen interest in soils and topography, would drive around the valley and take

core samples of the various soils in different areas. This became very important in 1965 when **Hastings Harcourt** gave Monty the task of choosing the best location to build a multi-million-dollar Thoroughbred racehorse facility.

Harcourt owned some property in the eastern portion of the valley and proposed that site should be where this project be erected. Monty insisted, because of the information he gained from his years of listening to the knowledgeable professors, that building in the eastern portion would be a mistake. Harcourt listened and began to purchase properties on which to build based on Monty's suggestions.

The area between Buellton and Solvang was pointed out by these college professors as having 17 feet of uninterrupted top soil, which was some of the highest quality they had seen anywhere in California. They termed it an "alluvial fan" and advised Monty that it would be extremely favorable for rearing young horses. The properties in this area also offered an abundance of water which was easily assessable.

There were only 20 trees between the two towns of Solvang and Buellton, but today as we can see it is landscaped in a most profound manner. Cedros deodars line Highway 246 and the various entries to the property. Sycamores, olives, various types of pines and California live oaks make up the almost 200,000 trees which eventually were planted between the two villages.





Early days at Flag Is Up...note the famous line of trees in the background



At this time, **Curragh Stock Farm**, owned by **Peggy Goeman's**, and only a few other small Thoroughbred operations were in existence. Later, **Fletcher Jones** would purchase and build **Westerly Stud** in Santa Ynez. The name Westerly was owned by a lady who had about two mares and a very small operation. Fletcher had to purchase the right from her in order to use the name "Westerly."

In 1966, **Flag Is Up Farms** held an open house to introduce to California breeders the state-of-the-art facility that had been built. The first year in existence the farm celebrated the entry into the racing world with two important winners at Hollywood Park. Harcourt purchased the first million-dollar stallion to come to the west coast. His name was **Successor**; he was by **Bold Ruler** and out of **Misty Morn**. Harcourt paid \$1,050,000 for him after he was named **1966 Champion Two-Year-Old Colt**.

The years have been kind to Flag Is Up Farms, having had hundreds of winners started at the facility. Monty and Pat led all consignors for 18 years at producing Two-Year-Old-In-Training at Hollywood Park. They would purchase yearlings at mostly Kentucky sales and bring them back to their farm to start and condition. Then in March all would be shipped to the sale to be sold. This program produced numerous champions and stakes winners.



People began to recognize that the Santa Ynez Valley could offer to those who wanted to raise healthy Thoroughbred horses the best climate, soil and water. Properties began to move at an accelerated rate and more and more new facilities were built. Anticipating an abundance of clientele, in 1972 **Alamo Pintado Veterinary Clinic** was established by **Doug Herthel** who was followed by other outstanding veterinarians and new clinics.

Today there are not as many Thoroughbred farms in existence as there were ten years ago. Some beautiful Thoroughbred farms have become wineries and others are privately owned and do not take outside horses to breed or train. California racing still offers some of the largest purses at three major tracks: **Santa Anita, Del Mar and Golden Gate**. The **Cal Bred** program is as strong as any in the 50 states. Hopefully in future years the Santa Ynez Valley will continue to be known as the utopia for the Thoroughbred.

Pat & Monty Roberts own and operate Flag Is Up Farms in Santa Ynez Valley