

Hope for Injured Stallions and the Story of R Cor Ray

By Mary Daniels
as told by Ken Borden Jr.



Little Bit Farm's R Cor Ray by Raymeister.

It was one of those heart-chilling moments when you want to stop time and reverse it to how things were just before it happened: a promising young horse, the result of a carefully planned breeding, takes one wrong step and its future is altered, perhaps even done for.

It doesn't happen only to Thoroughbreds on the track. It happens as well to Warmbloods, as distinguished breeder Ken Borden Jr. of Little Bit Farm in Wilmington, IL can testify.

On top of it, "I saw it happen," he says, to what without doubt he considers his best stallion to date, R Cor Ray, by Raymeister out of Condina, by Cor de la Bryere, a jumping sire legend, and one of Germany's *Jahrhunderthengste* or once-in-a-hundred-year stallions, of which there are merely 23.

When he was a yearling, R Cor Ray jumped over a pasture gate. No other horses were in the pasture with him. He just wanted to get out to the other side to join the other horses being brought in from daily turnout. "He cleared the five-foot gate with no trouble, but unfortunately he landed awkwardly on the opposite side," says Borden.

"Oh my God," was his immediate reaction. "I saw him land and he jerked his head, thereby injuring his neck. The very next day he was dead lame in one hind leg. He appeared to have developed neurological symptoms overnight," he adds.

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He'd had high hopes. "I leased his mother at 20-some years old and later bought her. It was so sad; it was her last foal." And a super one – "just breathtaking, very elastic," says Borden. Even now, "he has all the presence in the world."

Several veterinarians examined the colt to rule out all the usual suspect diseases such as Wobbler's, EPM, etc. All x-rays were clean except for one of his neck, which showed he had suffered a cervical fracture resulting in permanent spinal cord injury.

The veterinarians recommended Borden either put the colt down or wait to see how the injury might heal. "We were told he could one day just be found dead in his stall, depending on how he moved his neck," says Borden. "We would have put him down immediately, even with his incredible conformation and pedigree, if he had shown any signs of being in pain," he adds. Though he was not in pain, he is now handicapped with a hind leg that does not move as correctly as his other legs.

Such tragedies in the breeding world are not uncommon. "Hundreds of breeders can tell you about their 'amazing stallion' and how he did not reach his full potential because of an injury," says Borden. "I can tell you about at least three on my own farm where careers were impacted by injury."

Still, he does not believe in keeping a young horse no matter how promising "in a glass box." "Although we feel stallions should be treated like all other horses and have a social life, they are like young boys who often play hard and get into more trouble (than geldings or mares). Sometimes this results in permanent injuries that prevent them from proving their worth in the show ring or at the stallion testing, obligatory if you want to license him for breeding."

After nearly a year of stall rest, with minimal hand-walking, the colt had improved enough that he was allowed free movement. He managed to walk, trot and canter and later even jump four-foot fences of his own volition. But the one hind leg still did not move correctly. New x-rays taken at this point, a year later, confirmed the cervical lesion had calcified and he would forever be what he is now.

"We tried various forms of treatment with veterinarians and other 'gurus,' using electric and shock wave therapies, to no avail," adds Borden. At this juncture he accepted reality. "We saw no future for a riding career for him, but were glad that all along we planned to keep him as a

potential breeding stallion. I just don't want to give up on the ability he has," he comments.

So he proceeded with his plans to present R Cor Ray for stallion approval with the American Holsteiner Horse Association (AHHA). Certainly the colt's pedigree justified it.

His pedigree is 100% Holsteiner, though he is registered Oldenburg. R Cor Ray's mother is a full sister to Condino, a Holsteiner stallion who won his stallion inspection in Europe. Condina has produced in her lifetime 13 premium foals, three approved stallion sons, 6 approved stallion grandsons, and several International Jumper Futurity (IJF) winners. One son, Creighton, is the leading grandsire of IJF-winning foals.

Borden had bred, and later sold, R Cor Ray's sire, Raymeister, who for three years, won at every show he entered. His wins include high score of the season at First Level at Lamplight Equestrian Center in Wayne, IL, wins at Regional Championships, and three victories at Dressage at Devon, twice under saddle. Raymeister was high score of the 2002 Stallion Test and has gone on to win annual Horse of the Year (HOY) awards for his new owner.

Another Raymeister son, Rashka, did not score as high as R Cor Ray as a foal, but has continued his sire's winning ways, winning the 2007 Stallion Test with the highest score in the history of US testing, and many USDF HOY awards.

So in 2008, when R Cor Ray was presented to the AHHA for stallion approval, the judges and the veterinarian deemed him unable to be evaluated for stallion approvals. Since he will most likely not improve with additional healing time, the AHHA board agreed to inspect and possibly approve R Cor Ray, as long as 10 of his foals were presented and the majority of them scored above average in quality, i.e. were Merit foals, as compared to other Holsteiner offspring.

If it comes to pass, says Borden, "this will not be the first time the AHHA makes history. They also did so by approving their first and only thoroughbred stallion, Coconut Grove. AHHA has recently made radical changes in terms of the approval of stallions, to be more closely in line with the German Verband."

Whatever the outcome, "we know R Cor Ray's situation will not be a trend for stallion approval," he adds. "But at least it gives hope that in the future injured stallions might have a chance to prove their worth through their offspring. There is nothing (currently) for the horse that is handicapped. There has to be an alternate route. It is more important what stallions produce than what they do themselves." 