



Shattering Records As The Sire Of Champions

UNDULATA'S Nutcracker

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BY BOB FUNKHOUSER

“There’s never been another one like him. Wing Commander, Supreme Sultan, Oman’s Desdemona Denmark all collectively did not sire what Nutcracker has. Never in any breed, including race horses, has a stallion produced like he has,” said Undulata’s Nutcracker’s longtime manager and closest human, Joan Lurie. “And as many great horses as he’s sired, not one is as good as he was on their best day. I was longlining him one morning and he got so big and put on a show that I have nothing to

compare to. I’m an old lady and have seen a lot of great ones. He was just not like any other horse.”

What a statement for the horse who for the past 15 years has been the Number One ranked stallion on Saddle Horse Report’s World’s Champion Sire Rating and every other industry ranking that tracks the success of American Saddlebred sires via their offspring’s success in the show ring. And, unless all of a sudden there is a ban on those offspring at the World’s Championship Horse Show, there is no reason to believe

top left The majestic Undulata’s Nutcracker stood at Willowbank for nearly two decades, rewriting the history books as a sire.

top right Even with a surgically repaired ankle, Nutcracker was one of the most gifted stallions as evidenced in this picture with Darrell Case.

bottom right His first Fine Harness World’s Grand Champion was Jim Stachowski’s Nutcracker’s Nirvana, himself now a Top 20 World’s Champion Sire.

he won't still be topping the charts for years to come with the great number of young horses by him showing now, the youngsters that are waiting for their show ring debuts and those still to be born.

In a deal with Betty Weldon, Hoppy Bennett bred Christmas In New York ERB (BHF), a The New York Times daughter, to world's champion of champions CH Caramac, a former Number One World's Champion Sire and son of the great producer, World's Grand Champion Five-Gaited titleholder, CH Will Shriver. Bennett got a foal and Weldon got a foal. His turned out to be Nutcracker. Nutcracker's second dam was Nativity, a daughter of Native Promise who was by the above-mentioned Oman's Desdemona Denmark and his third dam was Nancy O'Lee, a top producing daughter of the legendary Supreme Sultan, also mentioned above. Nutcracker was at Callaway Hills and was a brilliant three-year-old fine harness prospect with Bob Brison when, unfortunately, he had an accident and a career-ending injury to his ankle, which needed surgery. Nutcracker was moved to Joan Lurie's Willowbank Farm at the end of his three-year-old year where she nursed him back to health, but not without a lot of sleepless nights. As she explained, "It was touch and go while recovering. He was critical for at least a month."

When asked if Nutcracker was special from day one, Hoppy Bennett replied, "Well, not day one, but by day two he was pretty exceptional. We had no idea he would breed the way he did, but he was an outstanding individual early on," said Bennett. When asked about why he made the decision to cross Christmas In New York ERB with CH Caramac, he replied, "I liked the stud and then I got lucky. You breed the best to the best and hope for the best. I got very lucky; I was at the right place at the right time."

"I'll never forget Joan Lurie came to visit me when he was a yearling and was in a stall in Tate's barn at Undulata. I took Joan down to see him and I opened the

stall door and he stood there and posed. She said to me, "This would be my dream of a lifetime to stand a horse like this."

Prophetic that day at Undulata Farm with Bennett, Lurie nursed Nutcracker back to soundness for the breeding shed and his first crop was born in 2005, his five-year-old year. He hadn't stood to the public yet, aside from a few select outside mares. From that first foal crop came world's titleholders like CH Soquili's Georgia Kracker, Undulata's Nuts And Bolts and Undulata's Health Nutt. His second crop produced Undulata's Heir Apparent, Zagnut, CH Nuttin' Doing, CH Nutcracker's Ballerina, Nuttin But A Dream, CH Undulata's Susan McGee, Undulata's Just Plain Nuts, and CH Undulata's Fashion Nut, among others. Year after year, crop after crop, his offspring were easily identifiable, both by sight and their names.

Kris Swanson became Nutcracker's first owner after Bennett and started him on the way to being the breeding horse he became.

"I bought Nutcracker from Hoppy Bennett when he was three-years-old," said Swanson. "Hoppy had wanted to show him in three-year-old fine harness but he injured himself and was never able to show."

"There were only nine weanlings in the past to display his potential so it was a leap of faith to buy him and start his breeding career. But, we believed in him so we started with one weanling winning the world's championship at the Kentucky State Fair and the rest is history. He totally exceeded our wildest expectations and his contributions to our breed is history-making. From the beginning of my ownership, we made him available to other believers in the American Saddlebred world to have opportunities to achieve their breeding and show ring dreams too! My greatest thrill owning Nutcracker was to see those folks have the thrill of victory, happiness and success that Nutcracker provided them when they took the leap of faith too."

"His first babies were so special," added Joan Lurie. "They moved differently, their necks more up in the air than the others as a group. Our first world's champion by him was from his first crop, Undulata's Nuts And Bolts. Then we had Undulata's Dream Team."

For more than a decade, Lurie, Darrell Cruse and the Willowbank team would wow Freedom Hall with the athletic and expressive youngsters sired by Nutcracker. It didn't take long before Nutcrackers were in show rings from coast to coast. They were brilliant and athletic young show stars, many with long careers, suitable for every division offered. The sentiments for Nutcracker by his connections are one thing but backing them up with numbers is another. According to the ASHBA Reference Book that contained statistics through the 2024 season, Nutcracker has had to this point, 502 Kentucky State Fair ribbon winners with a total of 2,485 ribbons. Sixty-nine horses by Nutcracker have earned the CH status and 196 have made Futurity winners. For the majority of his 15 years as Saddle Horse Report's Number One World's Champion Sire, he has won it by a long shot and has been number one in all of the division ratings: five-gaited, three-gaited/park, fine harness, pleasure (park, show, country), and in hand.

"The passing of Undulata's Nutcracker is the end of an era," said breeder/owner/exhibitor Scott Hagan. "Nutcracker was a stallion who reinvigorated our breed by instilling gameness, athleticism, charisma, quality and superior conformation in his get. So far more than the 50/50 standard, and with superior mares, he produced some of the greatest Saddlebreds in history."

"Nutcracker topped the stallion list for 15 consecutive years and will continue to do so for many years to come. Just for Hagan Saddlebreds, Nutcracker produced numerous world's champions, including my favorite, and possibly Nutcracker's most famous progeny, CH HS Daydream's Heads Up. Joan Lurie of Willowbank brilliantly managed Nutcracker and his breeding program



left CH The Crowd Went Nuts! is a four-time World's Grand Champion Three-Gaited titleholder, two of them with Steve Wheeler (pictured).

top and bottom right Nutcracker's son, CH Daydream's Heads Up is one of two horses in history to win both the World's Grand Champion Three-Gaited and World's Grand Champion Fine Harness titles. Both were with his owner, Scott Hagan.





top left Besides his harem of mares, one of Nutcracker's greatest joys in life was eating watermelon, something Nancy Leigh Fisher made sure he had plenty of.

bottom left Starting out as a country pleasure horse, CH Don O'Neill, ridden by Chris Reiser for Cindy Chesler, was one of four World's Grand Champion Three-Gaited horses sired by Nutcracker.

top right Jim Stachowski has won two world's grand championships with Nutcracker offspring. CH Lady Mandolin was his second harness titleholder and then she went on to be a three-time world's champion of champions in the three-gaited division.



World's Champion Of Champion Sired By Undulata's Nutcracker

CH Amarula Sunrise	CH Nuttin But Style	Doctor Dobro MS	Nutter Butter
CH Eata Sachon	CH Nuttin to Lose	Forever A Mystery	Pappy Van Winkle
CH Extremely Fortunut	CH Really Really Red	Freeborn Man MS	Personal Legend
CH HS Brilliant Heiress	CH Satchmo	Graduate Student	Sedgefield's Best Story Ever
CH HS I'm A Dreamer	CH Special Gentleman	Grey Ridge Wildcat	Sedgefield's Graceful
CH I'm In Heaven	CH Tefnut	Hardly Innocent	Sylvanhall's Highly Classified
CH I'm Still Dreamin	CH The Great Oz	Katharine's Prophecy	The Code Cracker
CH Katherine The Great	CH Undulata's Cherry Garcia	Military Secret	Undeniably Undulata ERB
CH Lady Mandolin	CH Undulata's Simbara	Moon Trac	Undulata's Dream Team
CH Little Black Dress	Cirrusly Divine	Nobody Knows	
CH Nutta You Business		Nutorious	

for 21 years and should be commended for orchestrating his success. The passing of Nutcracker leaves a huge void in our breed and challenges us breeders to experiment and determine which stallions can cross successfully with Nutcracker's daughters.

"Rest in peace Undulata's Nutcracker, the greatest sire in Saddlebred history!"

Again, backing up the sentiments of his human admirers, Nutcracker has sired (4) World's Grand Champion Three-Gaited horses, including Hagan's CH Daydream's Heads Up, and (4) World's Grand Champion Fine Harness horses, also including CH Daydream's Heads Up. Combined, those horses have won 12 world's grand champion titles from 2014 through 2024.

CH The Crowd Went Nuts! (Undulata's Nutcracker x Elegant Heirloom by CH Harlem Town) has worn the roses four times for owner Diane Sembler Kamins. Neil Visser, Erin Eichenbaum and Steve Wheeler (twice) made those winning rides. Nutcracker's first world's grand champion in the three-gaited division was CH Macadamia (out of the Santana's Charm daughter Sass With Class BHF) with Steve Wheeler riding for Glasscock Financial Services in 2014. Two years later Chris Reiser and CH Don O'Neil left Freedom hall as the World's Grand Champion Three-Gaited combination for Cindy Chesler. Heads Up won his title in 2020 and CH The Crowd Went Nuts! started his run in '21. For the past two years, both the Three-Gaited World's Grand Champion and reserve world's grand champion (Hallelujah Moment) were sired by Nutcracker.

His first World's Grand Champion Fine Harness titleholder was the bold, black, super athletic Nutcracker's Nirvana (Undulata's Nutcracker x

Kingwood's Harlem Harlem, by Harlem Globetrotter), driven by Jim Stachowski for Shawn Stachowski. He followed that up the next year, 2015, with the freakish moving mare, CH Lady Mandolin (Undulata's Nutcracker x Suddenly Summer (BHF) by Merchant Prince). In 2020, Neil Visser paraded Soul Desire across the green shavings making the World's Grand Champion Fine Harness victory pass for owner Diane Sembler Kamins. A year after winning the Three-Gaited World's Grand Championship with owner/breeder Scott Hagan, CH HS Daydream's Heads Up (Undulata's Nutcracker x A Daydream Believer BHF by Attache's Born Believer) was crowned the 2021 Fine Harness World's Grand Champion with Hagan becoming only the second horse in the history of the World's Championship Horse Show to accomplish this feat. A son of Nutcracker and Sweet Soul Sister (by Harlem Globetrotter) Soul Desire would wear the roses again in 2022, this time with Visser driving for Sandy Gallagher.

When Kris Swanson purchased Nutcracker, he began standing to the public and his book boomed. Lurie juggled keeping him healthy, happy and productive and in return he kept turning out world's, national and regional champions in all divisions. From five-gaited to hunter he was beginning to put a lasting stamp on the breed.

"Nobody knows why they [his offspring] are so special. God made them that way, said Lurie. "He was complicated to manage but he was totally honest, you knew every day what he thought, what he liked and what he didn't like. He was very predictable. Most like it, but Nutcracker would walk through fire for a watermelon.

He loved eating them off of his tailboard the most and then we'd have to wash it down because of the flies."

The final chapter in Nutcracker's distinguished career came under the ownership of Nancy Leigh Fisher and her family's Woodleigh Farm. "When Kris [Swanson] let me know she needed to sell Nutcracker, Nancy Leigh [Fisher] said, 'I'll buy him.' I never thought she wanted a stallion, but she was here often as she has had horses with me and she knew what he produced."

"The reason I bought Nut, I was in Hawaii on vacation when I was informed that he was for sale and would probably be moved out of Willowbank," said longtime American Saddlebred owner/exhibitor/show mom/show grandmother, Nancy Leigh Fisher. "I immediately decided that I wanted to own him so that Joan Lurie and everyone at Willowbank would take care of him for the rest of his life. "I did not feel he would survive under anyone else's hands.

"I never thought of him as the 'GOAT,' I always thought of him as this marvelous individual that would have a fit as soon as he heard our voices because he wanted us to come visit him (even just to talk to him without giving him any treats). He had his routine and he did not allow you to deviate, and if you tried, he let you know and you would pay (usually with a good bite). I don't think people realize how much work and care went into breeding him. He loved his job and was very efficient at it, but the support and care that had to happen to allow that was a lot. He couldn't be in long lines because he would get too big and hurt himself, so he had to be jogged. Later in life he developed asthma-like issues that necessitated a breathing treatment

one or two times a day. Joan figured out how to keep him happy and was willing to do that, which getting a stallion to cooperate with an over the nose nebulizer treatment was no small feat.

"We laugh about his trot as a 'mystery gait' because it wasn't a trot or a slow gait, it was a mixture of both, because that is how he could move due to the injuries he sustained as a young horse. He was so athletic to figure out how to move and get big and show off. It was a joy to watch. One time Alice was jogging him and I hadn't said hi to him before he came out, so he disregarded where Alice was telling him to go and beelined to me just to say hi. He was the smartest horse I have ever been around. His loss to me has been that of an immediate family member. I have shed so many tears over losing this amazing individual who I greatly loved. I am ever so grateful that we got to see him two weeks before he died. He was so happy and in such a good mood because it was spring, and he actually did a strong, real trot."

Nutracker's passing hit all of Fisher's family hard. He also had a deep connection to her daughter Alice. "When we first bought Nut I was so in awe of him it didn't feel that he was really ours," said Alice Unger. "I'm not sure it really ever sunk in that we owned him. It felt more like we were his guardians to make sure that he stayed in the perfect location for him. Joan Lurie was his Guardian Angel that looked out for him in so many ways.

"The thing that really got me connected to Nut as an individual is that Joan would let me jog him when we were in town. He made me laugh and giggle every time I got to do that. He was so smart and knew his routine, he knew exactly how many times around he went and unless he felt like doing more, there was no convincing him to do even one extra round. Taking him out of the stall and hooking to a cart was always a three-person job because he acted like he was ready to eat anyone foolish enough to get close to his mouth, but as soon as he was hooked up, he ambled off like an old trail horse. He then slowly revved up to his "trot," aka "mystery gait," and the far rail would get fancier every time we went around. The last pass was always his biggest. He really thought he was in the Fine Harness Stake at Louisville! Even though he had never shown or had a crowd cheer for him, he knew what that meant. My mom or MyMy would make noise and clap for him and he would get so big and happy and put on the biggest show he could. But, come around that corner, and as Joan always said, the quarter would run out for the ride and he would go slower and slower till we were in front of his stall and then he was done!

"It has worked out that every horse but one I've had since MyMy has been born (2007), has been a Nutracker, of which only one was bred by us, Slice Of Heaven. We did not set out to do that, it just worked out that way, and I have loved every single one of them. They have all been smart in their own ways; fun, mischievous and endlessly entertaining."

Unger's daughter, MyMy Singh, also has her fond memories of the greatest! "I always thought of Nutracker as being just like an A-List actor," said Singh. "For my entire life he was always in that stall three doors down at Willowbank. Opposite of mom, I've only ever shown one Nutracker horse. However, because of my mom's string of Nutracker horses I always knew them. One of the coolest experiences I've had was getting to know him and getting to see how all of his children resemble and take after him. Many times, I've compared him to a modern foundation sire, and I truly believe that he is the foundation sire of my generation.

"Even though he never was in show shape, he was still one of the grandest horses I've ever seen. Even though he produced many grand show horses, he has never produced another him. My grandmother's and my favorite game at horse shows was watching a class and seeing if we could pick out every Nutracker horse. We were almost always right. While I deeply miss him

already, I know he will live on in big, beautiful blazes and horses too smart for their own good."

"As a family we are cheering on all of his sons passing on his legacy. We adore all of the ones we know at Willowbank," added Alice Unger.

His legacy will live on through his producing sons and daughters. Lurie is thrilled with two of his sons standing under her guidance, Glamorous Nuts and Sedgefield's Legacy. Besides Glamorous Nuts, Nutracker sons Rose Arbor Destiny and Nutracker's Nirvana were in the 2024 World's Champion Sire Rating Top 20.

From the family that owned him to the lady who cared for him daily and saved his life more than once, to the breeders and trainers who greatly appreciate what he has provided for their programs, Undulata's

Nutracker will go down in history as the greatest sire of our generation and more than likely, ever. While his bloodlines were spectacular, it was his combination of God-given assets that he was able to pass on, that have put him high on a pedestal.

"He was a phenomenon," said Joan Lurie. "His offspring are so naturally athletic, most trot barefooted like a finished horse. The majority have brilliant careers as young horses and then go on for years having jobs in every division we offer. There's never been another one like him. From the bottom of his hind feet all the way to the tip of his ears, he sprang off the ground with energy and brilliance every day.

"It was an honor to be his person."



top left CH Macademia was the first of four Nutracker sons to win the Three-Gaited World's Grand Championship when he wore the roses in 2014 with Steve Wheeler presenting for Glasscock Financial Services.

top right The only time Nancy Leigh Fisher and her daughter Alice Unger showed against one other, they were on Nutracker offspring. Unger (l) was riding Soquili's Southern Blues and Fisher was on A Breath Away.

bottom Among four Fine Harness World's Grand Champions sired by Nutracker, Soul Desire was a two-time winner with Neil Visser. Out of Sweet Soul Sister, he won for owner Diane Sembler Kamins in 2020 and Sandy Gallagher in 2022.

