

There are many reasons why top riders team up with certain horses. But for some, the attraction is in the pedigree. So why do certain riders champion a particular bloodline and what are the benefits? Carole Mortimer investigates

FOR more than two centuries thoroughbred breeders have studied the link between pedigree and performance. This is not only to establish bloodlines that produce superior horses, but also to ascertain which lines complement each other. Since the birth of the sport horse — purpose-bred to perform specific disciplines, such as dressage or showjumping — European warmblood stud books have cropped up and followed the thoroughbred breeders' lead.

Today, as each discipline becomes more specialised, British sport horse riders are approaching bloodlines more discerningly.

For some, dedication to a certain line has paid dividends. So what can be gained from this approach?

'I now know what I'm dealing with'

ONE who adheres to this school of thought is Carl Hester, who has enjoyed many competitive successes with horses by Donnerhall, most notably with Donnersong and Dolendo.

"Initially, I couldn't say I looked for horses by Donnerhall — it was more likely that there were just so many around," admits Carl.

But that soon changed and his latest horses — including the exciting young grand prix (GP) horse Valegro, by Negro — have been chosen with much more attention paid to pedigree.

Carl came across Negro through his trainer Anne Van Olst, who rode the stallion at GP



Negro, successful in competition as well as at stud

before a pedal bone infection resulted in his premature retirement from competition.

"I was lucky to ride him. It was obvious how much talent he had; he was the Totilas of his day," says Carl.

Carl also enjoyed success on the Negro son Negretto, winning numerous five-year-old classes in 2005. The stallion's career was cut short when he was put down following a freak accident just before the British Dressage (BD) national championships in the same year.

Since buying Valegro as a two-year-old, Carl has since acquired Negro offspring Watson — sold to Jodie Lister — Valegro's full-sister, now in-foal to his grand prix ride Uthopia, and a six-year-old named Amazing, who he considers to be "the next Valegro".

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Shah Shadow, a founding stallion of the Viacq endurance line



Tricia Hurst with FEI horse Viacq Khamul



Valegro is one of Negro's most successful offspring

"When you are looking at some horses from a certain line, you feel their potential, their willingness and their ability for collection," he reasons. "I felt all of this in Valegro as a four-year-old as I did in his sire."

"Negro stamps his stock and I'll always look at a horse by him. The advantage is that I know what I am dealing with. His offspring have an engaged and active canter that makes for good collection — which is fairly standard for a horse by Negro. I can spot a Negro a mile off by the way they move."

But doesn't having horses by the same sire become rather repetitive?

"Not at all," counters Carl. "I now consider it the way forward. I have learnt over the years to stop looking at horses with flashy trots. While Negro does not have a big trot, he has power in the hindleg that he passes on to his offspring."

"Looking ahead, I have seen an interesting cross with the stallion Lord Leatherdale [sire of Lord Farquahr, champion dressage foal at the 2011 Futurity Evaluations] who has been used on Negro mares and I am sure this is an exciting combination for the future."

'Not the prettiest, but trainable'

ANOTHER popular dressage line comes from the stallion Breiting W. This highly ranked sire is by the Hanoverian Bolero, founder of the new "B" line that has produced stallions Brentano I and II and the popular Bellissimo M, sire of Toni Terry's British young horse champion Beltoni.

Richard Barrett is a fan and has two by Breiting W in his yard.

"They are not the prettiest animals, more of a hunter stamp, and not the biggest movers, but they are extremely trainable and I would definitely look at another," he says.

"If you have a good horse, then given the opportunity, you would naturally gravitate towards another by the same sire," says Richard, who also has two by another dressage great, Weltmeyer.

Enduring legacy

IN endurance, success with Rohey Evagline, by the Arab stallion Ferozeshah, prompted