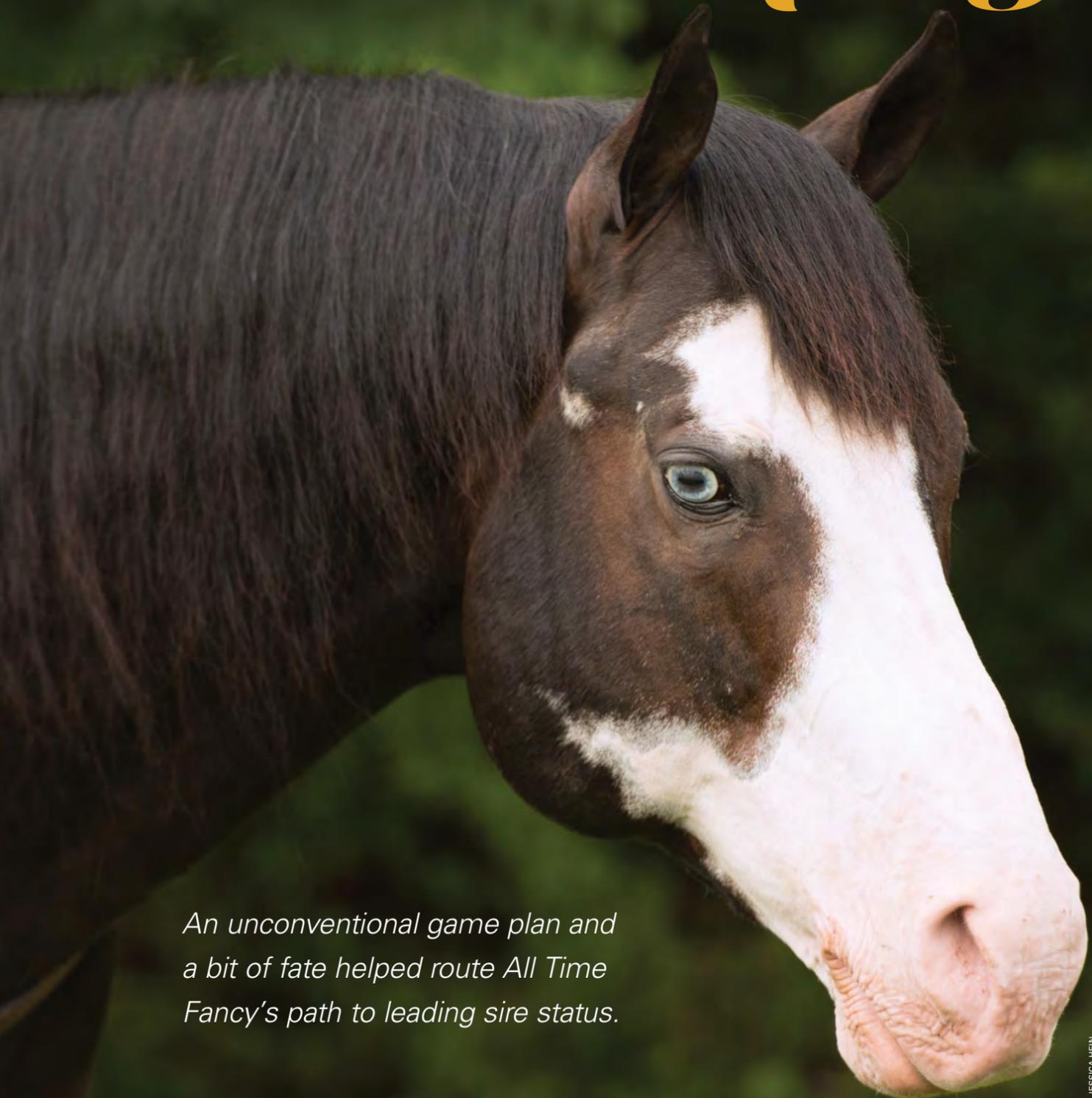


# A Splash of Serendipity

By JESSICA HEIN



*An unconventional game plan and a bit of fate helped route All Time Fancy's path to leading sire status.*

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In a world where legacy is judged not only by one's own accolades but also by long-lasting influence, All Time Fancy's story was almost over before it began. Once headed toward life as a Youth mount, the leggy bay yearling found his path rerouted to an even greater destiny, thanks to a starry-eyed Missouri horsewoman and a fourth-generation Oklahoma farmer/rancher. Together, the trio forged a Cinderella story bigger and better than they could have ever imagined, cultivating an extended family of fellow horse lovers that's left a lasting impact on the Paint Horse community.

## *Fancy, Fancy*

As a young trainer making a name for herself in the Paint world, Peggy Knaus was always on the hunt for quality prospects. Watching yearling longe-liners at the 1999 World Wide Paint Horse Congress, it wasn't the class winner that caught Peggy's eye—instead, it was a dark bay, almost black, colt with four white stockings, an apron face and a blue eye that seemed to look right into her soul. Though his talent was raw, Peggy could see potential in All Time Fancy.

"I think he broke three times and ended up fifth," Peggy said about the colt by CF Wicked Willie and out of the Mr Fancy Bonanza mare Forced To Be Fancy, bred by Rosemarie Shedd of Rockton, Illinois. "He easily could have been the winner that day if he'd kept on going, but 'Nike' was always a bit lazy. When he loped off, I thought, 'That one has to come home with me.'"

Planning to train Nike as an all-around Youth mount, Peggy recruited a client to partner with her on the colt's purchase. The yearling was so low-key, Peggy didn't realize Nike was still intact until he came home to Kansas City. And though she wasn't in the market to stand a stallion, serendipity has a funny way of crossing the right paths at the right time.

"I thought I had bought a gelding," Peggy laughed. "He was really quiet and sweet, which is probably why it



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J BEARD, COURTESY PEGGY KNAUS

*Above: Peggy Knaus knew almost immediately that All Time Fancy was destined for greatness. They've been almost inseparable for 17 years.*

*Left: "Nike" was a natural in the show pen, earning a total of 277 points in four years.*

never occurred to me that he was still a stallion, but it was never an issue. The first time I rode him, he was 2 and he loped off from a walk; I could have shown him that day. I got off and said, 'This horse will never be cut.' He was just that natural and easy. He just wanted to do whatever I thought was important, and he was always happy to do it."

From that first ride, Peggy knew Nike would forever be under her guidance, and with his eye-catching chrome, naturally slow and cadenced lope, and want-to-please attitude, she started dreaming of a Western-event career for the youngster. Already tall as a yearling—Nike stood about 15.2 hands when he was purchased in

November, Peggy recalls—the colt hit a growth spurt the following spring that sent him sprouting taller than Peggy ever expected. Fate, it seemed, wanted to see Nike in the hunt-seat.

"By the next April, he was 16.2, and it was apparent he was not done growing—I knew then he was going to be an English horse," Peggy said. "He's 17.1 now."

Shown lightly as a 2-year-old—he was sixth at the APHA World Show with Peggy in 2-Year-Old Hunter Under Saddle—Nike's breakout came as a 3-year-old, capturing a 2001 World Show Top Five in Junior Hunter Under Saddle and placing third in the 3-Year-Old Hunter Under Saddle Challenge with Jerry Erickson, in addition to earning 137 points that year.

"He loved showing," Peggy said. "He was a ham. He didn't like to warm up a lot because he was lazy, but Nike loved to show."

Nike logged another 131 points as a 4-year-old, capturing a pair of thirds at the World Show in Junior Hunter Under Saddle with Peggy and Junior Pleasure Driving with Mike Short. Peggy remembers the surreal feeling when the World Show crowd came to its feet when she asked Nike for his extended trot.

“He had incredible extension when we would lift him up and let him out; he was already uphill—higher at the withers than the hip—by then, so he was very strong and very good at it. When they asked for the extended trot in the semi-finals, the crowd just went crazy. The next night in the finals, the call judge asked for the extended trot in the second direction, and the crowd literally did the wave and cheered as we went by. When we were called out—we ended up third—the crowd gave him a standing ovation. Even after we left the arena and were in the tunnel, they were still cheering.”

Though Nike towered over 17 hands at age 4, the quintessential hunter even managed to garner a few Western pleasure points, surprising more than a few folks at the 2002

Western Paint World in Bakersfield, California.

“He really covers ground at the jog, so I was jogging off the rail in a big class of 25. When they asked for the lope, I had horses passing me on the rail; he loped so slow naturally. That’s how he ended up with the points,” Peggy said.

A Cinderella story isn’t replete without some tragedy, however, and it came en route home from that California show. A misjudged roll at a layover facility resulted in a hock injury that required surgery. Thanks to his dedicated team and a vigorous treatment plan, however, Nike returned to the World Show in 2003 for one final performance, in which he earned the elusive buckle—a reserve world championship—in Junior Hunter Under Saddle with Brian Isbell in the irons.

With that bucket-list item checked off, Peggy says it was an easy decision to ask her young stallion to shoulder more breeding duties. Yet again, it seemed fate intervened with a glass slipper that was just the right fit for the next chapter in Nike’s tome.

## Sire Power

With limited space and few broodmares of her own, Peggy mostly bred Nike to outside mares during his early career. In a stroke of good fortune, she reconnected with friend and former client Brad Perkins of Thomas, Oklahoma. Back in the mid-1990s, Brad’s stallion Fame And Honor was in training with Barron Knaus, Peggy’s former husband; Brad enlisted Peggy to show some of his Fame And Honor colts, too. Ten years later, Brad was focusing more on breeding horses than showing, and after the loss of a lethal white foal, he was looking for an OLWS-negative stallion for his solid Paint-bred mare. Hearing Nike fit the bill, Brad reached out to his old friend.

“I had never really paid much attention to hunt-seat horses—to me, hunt-seat horses back then were Western horses that went faster,” Brad said.

“But this horse, he was gorgeous, big and was throwing color, and the foals were very marketable. I bred my mare to Nike, and man, was that a nice cross!

“The second baby we got by Nike was a solid bay who was just gorgeous.

As a baby, she would lope around her mama in the pasture; I called Peggy and said, ‘My knees just go weak watching this baby,’ ” Brad continued; that filly, Timing Is Everything, later won the Solid Paint-Bred Hunter Under Saddle Sweepstakes at the 2008 Fall World Show and is now in Brad’s broodmare band. “Every baby was like that. They were so different and more unique than anything else. I just got hooked, and it evolved from there.”

With almost 3,000 acres of rolling Oklahoma prairie grass and a herd of broodmares, Brad started breeding more and more to Nike. It wasn’t long before Brad and Peggy decided to capitalize on their individual skills to create a win-win partnership.

“Peggy is a trainer with limited space and broodmares; I have plenty of space and lots of broodmares. I like raising the mares and colts, and I like being closer to home,” Brad said; he and wife Carmen are raising their grandchildren, 4-year-old Layla and 2-year-old Hunter. “Peggy does the marketing and training, and she still likes to go down the road to show. We breed 20 to 25 mares a year to Nike. It’s a bit unique, but it’s worked out to be a good partnership for us.”

Without specific goals outlined for Nike’s breeding career, Brad and Peggy say they simply wanted to produce quality foals that would give others a chance to share a special relationship with a horse, much like the one Peggy shares with Nike.

“It was never in my mind that I wanted to make this horse a leading sire or anything; honestly, it was all about the babies,” Peggy said. “I wanted to give people the opportunity to have a horse that special. His foals are different; they are kind-hearted, and I think that’s something any animal person would enjoy.”

To date, Nike has more than 750 foals on the ground, and there’s no shortage of championship potential: they’ve earned 74 world championships, 61 reserve world championships and more than 50,000 APHA points.

No matter what he’s bred to—be it a short and stocky pleasure-type mare or a leggy Thoroughbred—Nike seems



Eighteen years old and long retired from the show pen, Nike remains a joy to ride. Before breeding, Nike often warms up by loping bareback with Peggy’s daughter, Summer.

Timing Is Everything, one of Brad Perkins’ first All Time Fancy foals, helped get the Oklahoma rancher hooked on the cross. He breeds about 20 mares a year to Nike, watching the foals grow up alongside his grandchildren.



to pass on his height, mind and gaits, a winning combination when it comes to marketability.

“I just believe that no matter what I bred to him, the baby will be an improvement,” Peggy said. “One of the best mares I bred to him is 14.1, a tiny little Zippo-bred mare, and she’s had four or five world champions so far. The all-around horses, the Zippos Sensation–All Time Fancy crosses, are proving to be easy, too. Brad has a lot of different mares to choose from, so you can really see what you’re getting each year.”

Though many of Nike’s foals find their callings in hunt-seat classes, others—like the 2004 chestnut overo gelding Its All Bhandthe Zipr—excel in all-around events, netting world championships in horsemanship, Western riding and more.

“People originally bought All Time Fancy’s foals for hunt-seat, and then they started putting them in the other classes,” Brad said. “We haven’t done anything specifically to promote that versatility; it’s just happened.”

An APHA leading sire, Nike finished 2015 as the No. 1 leading sire in four categories: Halter Class Winners, Point-Earning Halter Horses, Performance Winners and Performance Point-Earners.

“The breeders who came and bred mares or bought babies are the reason Nike is what he is. They have made him famous,” Peggy said. “It’s the people who have taken those babies and shown them who have put Nike on those lists—that’s owed to them.”

## Live & Learn

Based on their collective knowledge and a unique setup that lets them evaluate the effectiveness of certain crosses from conception through performance debuts, Brad and Peggy identify a few guiding principles that help shape their program.

### Constantly evaluate your stock.

Brad’s sweet spot, in terms of time and efficiency, is about 25 broodmares, but he’s always on the lookout to



improve his herd. When a better mare comes along, he's quick to cull another to keep his program on the uptick.

"I try to always improve. If I get a good one, I try to rotate one out; or if I have one that's not a good cross, we don't do it anymore," he said. "A lot of people think, 'This mare was good, so we're going to stay with her forever.' But if it's not working, move on—there are others out there."

Brad's also a fan of using solid Paint-bred mares in his broodmare band—oftentimes less expensive than their Regular Registry counterparts, Brad's found his solid mares just as likely to produce colored foals when bred wisely.

"I've used solid Paint-bred mares forever. I believe they are invaluable to the Paint Horse breed," he said.

### Choose stallion prospects with care.

Before shipped semen was commonplace, more horses were left as stallions, Brad says, but modern techniques have changed the game.

"In the '80s, you had a different perspective because of live cover. If a horse came out with loud color and a pretty head, you usually left him a stallion," Brad said. "Now, you don't need as many stallions. A stallion prospect will not

usually be priced any higher than a gelding, and a gelding will often bring just as much, if not more, than a stallion."

With that in mind, Brad's picky about what makes the cut. In addition to conformation, quality and movement, he looks for color markers: four white feet, white facial markings and belly spots ... and a blue eye doesn't hurt, either. Strong lineage is important, too—though it's no guarantee, it lends extra credence to a young stallion's potential.

"You've got to have correct conformation, attractive color and it helps to be from a great family. You can't make a stud out of just anything," he said. "He's got to make you say, 'Wow.' It's the same with broodmares."

Most important, however, is a stallion's ability to "out-sire" himself.

"You can't make a stallion a sire—they either come to do that or they don't," Peggy said. "I probably wouldn't give a stallion more than two or three seasons to prove himself."

### Remember the end goal.

Breeders help make a stallion, so it's critical to make everyone—whether they have one mare or 25—feel valued, Peggy says.

"If I was going to give any advice to stallion owners, it's to be

accommodating to your breeders. The goal is for them to have a baby—keep that in mind when they call you in a panic. People will come back because they know it matters to you to help them get their mares in foal," she said.

Thanks to social media, Nike has fans across the world, and it's easier than ever to stay in touch with foal owners and cheer on their successes. For Brad, watching the "Nikes" at the APHA World Show is akin to a proud grandparent watching a grandchild's recital or game.

"The neatest thing for me is to sit at the stands in the World Show," Brad said. "I own the mama, and I breed to the daddy; if I've got the factory, I don't need to own all of them. Someone else can have success with them, and I get to say, 'That one came from our place.'"

### Don't lose hope when things get tough.

Rough patches come along for everyone—for Peggy, one of the biggest was a 2013 fire that reduced her barn and everything inside to ashes. When times were the darkest, the Paint community rallied around Peggy to help her family find their feet.

Though they lost eight horses in the fire, the tragedy's silver lining was

that Nike was outside when the barn ignited. Counting her blessings, Peggy was floored by contributions—close to \$30,000 in cash donations, not to mention gifts of tack, equipment and feed—that poured in from APHA members across the nation who were ready to help the horsewoman who had previously touched their lives in some small way.

"I had no idea people were that generous or that caring," Peggy said. "It was an eye-opener to say the least, to see how much people cared. It just shows being nice goes so far with people."

### A Wild Ride

Now 18, Nike still stands to a full book—and though Brad and Peggy hope that continues for years to come, it hasn't stopped them from looking toward the future. Peggy's recently partnered with Mississippi breeder Mike Holloway to form Knaus-Holloway Ventures, and she's standing Mike's stallion, Mckenzie's Gallant Jet, along with Nike at her farm in Peculiar, Missouri. Brad and Peggy plan to keep producing the best foals they can by Nike; they're particularly excited about All Ways The One, a 3-year-old bay overo stallion prospect out of NLF The Catwalkindiva.

Looking back, that leggy bay overo colt has taken Peggy, Brad and a host of others on a wild ride—with results they never could have dreamed.

*Facing Page: With almost 350 performing foals to date, All Time Fancy's get have earned more than 50,000 APHA points in a variety of events. Fancy Ride To Malibu (far left) is being shown in hunt-seat classes, and this 2016 foal out of Sensational Chenille (center) might find his destiny in all-around events.*

*Left: Solid Paint-bred mares are a big part of Brad's breeding program; when bred wisely, they're certainly capable of producing color, like this loud 2016 foal by Nike and out of Hot Baby Blue Eyes.*

"It's humbling," Peggy said. "It could have been anyone—anyone could have bought that horse. The opportunity was there; I was just really fortunate, and it's been a privilege. It could have been any breeder in the industry, but it was me.

"I've always felt that a horse like All Time Fancy can't be owned—he is just part of the family. We've been privileged to be on this ride together." 50

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*Brad and Peggy are excited about the debut of All Ways The One, a 2013 bay overo stallion by Nike and out of NLF The Catwalkindiva.*

