One of the most significant changes in the performance horse industry in recent years has been the breeding of horses for specific performance events. In reining, today's top horses present an almost totally different picture than that of most of the winners from the past. Today's champions are more flowing in movement, more collected in their frame, more level in their carriage, and much deeper in their stops than those in reenings early times. Training techniques have advanced, and today's trainers give each prospect many months more preparation before their first show. Still, the biggest change is in the actual horse.

Reining actually had two beginnings - one in the West and one in the East. The stock horse classes popular in the West evolved into California reined cowhorse and finally the NRCHA. In the East and Midwest, the stock horse class evolved into reining competitions which led to the birth of the NRHA. Today's reiners have gained tremendous international acceptance, and are truly a blend of the best from both the East and West.

The original idea of the stock horse contest was simple. It was a contest among cowboys meant as a test of a ranch horse. Instead of simply arguing about whose horse was fastest, quickest, handiest and best broke this class was meant as a test of the cowhorse. Although judges were allowed to "require additional work from an contestant" and to modify the pattern according to arena conditions the basic tests were the same - figure 8, rundowns, and stops, pivots and rope work.

The stock horse class has been around for a long time. In the book, Don Dodge The Way It Was, Dodge tells about seeing his first stock horse class in 1940. That first image of the bridle horse was a turning point in Dodge's legendary career. The pride of the California reinsman in his horse, his equipment, and the finesse demanded by the competition was a lasting influence on Dodge and countless others.

It is probably safe to assume that stock horse contests began long before California became a state, and that their beginning were part of the vaquero tradition. The long, patient development of the stock horse through years of riding in the hackamore, the two rein, and finally the half-breed and spade bit is an integral part of the reining history.

Various kinds of reining contests must have been held wherever cattle were worked and cowboys gathered. Early AQHA records show that reining contests were held before the American Quarter Horse Association was founded in 1940. In Texas, these classes were called reining and were among the first classes offered at fairs and shows for Quarter Horses.

My own first experience with stock horses was at an AHSA horse show in Southwest Virginia in the late 50's. I remember the gaited classes and open jumping vividly, but most of all I remember the stock horse class. Certainly, the quality of this class was light - years behind a class like Don Dodge has witnessed in California in 1940, but to this country boy it was revelation!

That stock horse class at Christiansburg, Virginia was held in a ring built to show gaited horses. The main arena was covered in grass, and only the area along the rail had a dirt surface. Eight or ten horses were entered in the class. Each horse ran its figure 8 on the
grass, and then made their rundowns and stops along the fence. After the last stop and backup, the horse executed its pivots and then went back to the grass for the "rope test."

I still remember three of the stock horses. A mostly Thoroughbred leopard Appaloosa mare won the class, with the first smooth flying lead changes I had ever seen. Second went to a well-made Quarter Horse gelding. This buckskin horse, ridden in a hackamore, was the first horse I had ever seen ridden without a bit - and he could really stop and trot backwards. The next week I found a piece of scrap electrical cable and made a crude bosal! The last of the three horses I remember was a flashy bay and white tobiano, ridden in a California bit with rein chains. I also remember that he ran off, in spite of the fancy headgear, and the rein chains broke! Even then, I had begun to realize that a bigger bit isn't always the answer.

With that first exposure to stock horses, I began searching for anything I could read about their training. I discovered Ed Connell's book, The Hackamore Reinsman, which I still respect highly today. Next, I found Monte Foreman's little pamphlets, including "Those Canterous Leads." His photos, with horses wearing leg wraps for visual clarity, gave a new image of how horses function underneath.

The first real reining that I watched was at the 1965 Ohio State Fair. I was lucky to be in those stands on that particular day, State fairs are as much a part of the Midwest as cornfields, and reining had already become a part of the farmer's entertainment. A championship reining class was offered to the first and second place winners in each of the Quarter Horse classes - junior bit, senior bit and hackamore. Also, the winners of the open class (open to other breeds) were invited to enter the championship.

The riders in that championship class that I remember were Clayton Woosley, John Stutzman, Jim Willoughby, Paul Horn, Bill Horn and Dale Wilkinson. It was in modern terms, "Finals Night." Each rider was hanging it out, asking their horse for a peak performance. Dale Wilkinson placed first on his senior horse, Continental King, a black son of King P-234. Dale also received second in that contest on his junior horse, Tabano Nancy, a crop-eared bay filly by Tabano King.

I remember a lot about those runs. The fast circles on a loose rein were new to me. The rollbacks would be appreciated today. The spins - especially those of Dale's and Bill Horn's horses were from outer space! I had never seen anything like them and I have been working on duplication them from that day until today.

Although I didn't know it at the time, I was witnessing the first labor pains that led to the birth of the NRHA. That group of trainers needed more challenging patterns to test the horses they were training. The old combination of a figure 8, a pair of rundowns and stops, and a set of pivots was no longer enough to determine the winner. Thus, modern reining was born.

It was only a year later, in 1966, that the first National Reining Horse Association Futurity was held in Columbus, Ohio in conjunction with the All American Quarter Horse Congress. The rest is history, and still being written.

From an organizational standpoint, the reined cowhorse of the West predates the NRHCA by many years. Formed in 1949, The California Reined Cowhorse Association was dedicated to preserving the vaquero tradition. In the 50's and 60's, cowhorse competition became popular at the many fairs and horse shows in the West. The idea of a "snaffle bit futurity" to
promote the proper development of the young cowhorse was born, and the first such futurity was held in Sacramento in 1970. In 2001, the 32nd National Reined Cowhorse Association Snaffle Bit Futurity was held in Reno, Nevada.

Even when tradition continues, styles do change. Today’s reining horse is more influenced by the cowhorse than ever before. In their "dry" or reined work, the cowhorse of today has been profoundly influenced by modern reining. Rules and judging standards have not only improved, but become more standard from East to West. Let’s look more closely at some of these changes.

The traditional bridle horse was patiently trained to accept a high degree of collection. In their progression to accept the spade bit, they became very light in their mouths and supple at the poll. Beyond suppleness in front, they achieved collection through driving off their hocks, rounding their back, and maintaining impulsion at any length of stride. As such, maneuvers of reining took a definite style. Lead changes are relatively easy for a horse trained in this manner, and precise, smooth changes were demanded by stock horse judges. Quoting Don Dodge, "If your horse popped his tail twice in the bridle class, you might as well go home because the judge had no tolerance for that. If he dropped the hind lead going around the figure eight, your run was over."

In contrast, flying lead changes were probably the biggest weakness of both horse and rider in the early days of the NRHA. Fast, loose reined circles were in demand, but most lead changes were of the "bump and hope" variety. It was largely because of the West Coast influence that precise, collected changes became standard in a winning reining run.

Spins were something else. Most bridle horses of the past executed pivots and turns in an elevated frame, usually with a galloping footfall. This animated turnaround was more similar to the dressage pirouette than the spin as we know it today. More than anyone else, Dale Wilkinson developed the modern spin. The Ohio trainer was and is a true innovator, a person who could amuse himself by experimentation. Searching for ways to improve form to function, Wilkinson learned to develop "guide" by first developing forward motion, and then redirecting the horse's motion in straight lines. By applying exactly the same principles he developed a straight, flat spin that was new to the horse world. Even in the 60's Dale's horses spun with the style, speed and finesse that would earn "plus ones" today. They turned straight in their necks and rib cages off the outside rein, and could accelerate on slack.

As reining grew in the East, a new stopping style emerged. Many early reinings in the Midwest were held on racetracks, where a section of track in front of the grandstands was fenced off as a temporary arena. The hard surface of those harness tracks allowed a horse to slide a long way, and the longest stoppers usually won. Many of the early reining events were run on ground patterned after the racetracks with a hard base covered by a couple of inches of sand. Trainers built "slide tracks" at home and boasted of their "fifty foot sliders." The Ohio State Fairgrounds still had a racetrack where the reiners all warmed up.

Most of the longest stoppers would be called "standup stoppers" today. These horses learned to stop on their hocks with little flexion in the loin. They learned to trot in front for balance in those long slides. With a little suppling at the poll, they began to "tread" in front, producing a crowd pleasing and balanced picture.
The trouble with the "skaters" showed up when the ground was deeper. As reining moved westward again, arena conditions changed. Nowhere was this more apparent than at the AQHA World Show in Oklahoma City where the ground had to be deeper to accommodate a variety of events each day. A horse had to "push dirt" to hold the ground under these conditions, and the West Coast horses and riders held a big advantage. These horses, stronger in the loin and hocks, didn't slide very far but could stay in the their stops. More horsemen, from East to West, began to appreciate the athleticism of the deep stoppers and to reward this new measure of degree of difficulty.

Breaking in the loin and getting deep in the ground has a long been a requirement of the best reined cowhorses. One stallion who passed this trait on to a remarkable number of his offspring was King Fritz. Foaled in 1956, he proved himself as a performer and even more as a sire. In the 60's and 70's, King Fritz was the dominant sire of cow horses, establishing a dynasty of winners. Most had "Chex" in their names, and this became a name to be reckoned with. No only were the Chex horses deep stoppers with lots of cow, but their longevity was remarkable. Because of their soundness and longevity, many were passed from owner to new owner and kept winning. His daughter proved to be outstanding producers of reiner, cutters and cowhorses. Several of his colts were successful, but only the full brothers Bueno Chex, and Fritz Command compared to their sire.

During the same time that King Fritz was domination the cowhorse events, another California stallion was revolutionizing the cutting horse industry. Doc Bar brought a new look to the cutting pen, and soon his influence was felt in almost every performance event. That influence also spread geographically to all parts of the US and foreign nations as well.

In the East, one of the best proven sires was Joe Cody. When mated to Doc Bar Linda, by Doc Bar, he sired Topsail Cody. Topsail Cody was not only the champion of his NRHA Futurity, but retired undefeated with an AQHA World Championship to boot. Bob Loomis, his trainer and owner for most of his career, astutely assembled a breeding program to compliment Topsail. Many of his favorite show mares became broodmares in his program. Daughter of Okie Leo, Hollywood Jac 86, King Fritz and Bueno Chex led the way, and helped make Topsail a $1 million dollar sire. With Topsail Whiz now the senior sire at Loomis Ranch this breeding program is reaching new heights each year. Note that each of these family nicks for Loomis are from proven, deep stoppers. The biggest star from the Loomis program in 2000 was the invincible Conquistador Whiz, out of Sugarita Chex by Bueno Chex.

Doc Bar was an unusual breeding horse in that both his sons and daughters were of great genetic impact. Many of the best were from daughters of the great Poco Tivio. Don Dodge had purchased Poco Tivio, bred by the Waggoner Ranch, in Texas in 1952. Dodge showed him successfully in cutting and in bridle classes in California. However, it was his next owner Charley Araujo who guided his breeding career. None of the Tivio sons came close to their sire's success in the breeding shed, but his daughters were something else! Crossed on Doc Bar they produced horses like Fizzabar, Cal Bar, Boon Bar, Nu Bar, Docs Oak, Docs Solano, Docs Haida, Docs Remedy, Docs Tom Tucker, Docs Lynx, Docs Prescription, Docs Hotrodder and many more. From Tivio's full sister, the incomparable Poco Lena, Doc Bar sired her only two foals. Those two colts, Doc O Lena and Dry Doc, both won the NCHA Futurity and went on to become leading sires.

Crossovers from cutting to reining and cowhorse events have become so frequent, and so successful, that the pedigrees often don't give a clue to which event a horse might have won. Part of this is due to the inherent similarities demanded in top performers in any of these events - a trainable mind, soundness, quick footedness, and eye appeal.
A major change in cutting styles began in the 60's, and has also changed the physical demands on the winning cutter. Horses that moved across the pen parallel to the cow, then stopped and turned became the big winners. Earlier cutters had often moved in a two-track, making their turns easier, but were less able to keep up with a hard running cow. The horses that were able to handle the new style, but "big stopper" became part of the cutter's language. Obviously, these big stoppers had to break in their loins, staying low in front while dropping deep on their hocks.

The 1976 NCHA Futurity at Fort Worth proved to be a testing ground for this new class of cutting horse. It was a great finals, and two colts who were to become all-time leading sires lead the way. Colonel Freckles was the champion, and his stablemate Freckles Playboy followed close behind. Both were bred by Marion Flynt, and both were sired by Freckles (aka Jewels Leo Bar) out of Rey Jay mares. Both became great sires.

The champion of the 1977 NCHA Futurity also made a lasting impact on all phases of performance horse breeding. Peppy San Badger (Little Peppy) won the event in a manner that sent shock waves thru the industry. Norman Bruce was one of the judges at that classic Futurity. He told me that he had never seen a horse "stop so hard and still keep low in front." Norman immediately booked his all-time favorite mare, Docs Haida, to Little Peppy. The resulting foal was Haidas Little Pep who went on to greatness as both a champion cutter and leading sire ($3.4 million).

Little Peppy's unique style of stopping and turning was not accident, but rather a true example of "form to function." In conformation he was unusually strong in his loin, his stifles and his hocks. These physical traits enabled him to break in the loin as he stopped and turned. He made the difficult look easy.

Fortunately for the industry, Little Peppy passed these traits on to his foals with a high degree of consistency. When crossed on Doc Bar and Doc O Lena mares a genetic "nick" resulted much like the nick of the Doc Bar and Poco Tivio mares. This "magic cross" has given the performance industry many great performers and producers including Dual Pep, Greys Starlight, Haidas Little Pep, Little Badger Dulce, Peptoboonsmal, Gallo Del Cielo, Tejons Peppy Doc, and Tangys Classy Peppy. Such horses are now influencing cutting, reining and reined cowhorse breeding in a major way.

Another NCHA Futurity Champion whose genetic influence is incredible strong today was the 1982 champion Smart Little Lena. The industries respect for this Triple Crown winner has never waned. With lifetime earnings in excess of $23 million, he is second only to Little Peppy as a lifetime cutting sire. Also siring champions in major reined cowhorse and reining events, Smart Little Lena's influence is felt across the board.

Of the Smart Little Lena son's, Smart Chic O Lena has clearly been the most dominant. As a performer Smart Chic O Lena won AQHA World Championships in both cutting and reining. As a sire, his offspring have passed the million dollar mark in both reining and cutting and have also been very influential in the reined cowhorse events. On the distaff side, Smart Little Lena mares have produced scores of major winners, especially in cutting.

One of Doc Bar's last sons, Genuine Doc, continues to influence all phases of performance breeding. Of the proven Gay Bar King mare, Gay Bars Gen, this colt became a highly competitive cutting horse. I still remember Carol Rose riding Genuine Doc to win the Non-Pro Futurity at Augusta as if it were last week instead of 20 years ago.
Although he sired many excellent performers - cutters, reiners, cowhorses and ropers - Genuine Doc's greatest contribution to the breed comes from one incredible son, Shining Spark. From the great producing mare, Diamonds Sparkle, this palomino stallion has proven to be a true breeding horse. In 2001, Shining Spark became reining's youngest million dollar sire. His influence in reined cowhorse events has been equally strong.

A common thread in the pedigrees of the leading performance families of today is their high concentration of foundation blood. King P-234 appears in the pedigree of virtually every leading sire. The incredible influence of Hollywood Jac 86 is evidence of the proven foundation genetics of the past on the winners of today.

I remember actually seeing a number of Richie Greenberg's runs on Hollywood Jac 86 himself. What I recall most was the stallion's big stops and his longevity. This was an honest horse who seemed to like his work. Richie said that Jack first taught him how to ride, and then to win. Hollywood Jac 86 was sired by Easter King, a son of King who was line-bred to Zantanon. In color, Jac was actually a "dunamino" like his maternal grandsire, the great Hollywood Gold. Both were smutty palominos with a dorsal stripe.

On Equistat's Five Year Leading Sire List, Hollywood Jac still holds 13th place - even though he was foaled in 1967. He was also one of reinings first "million dollar sires". Amazingly, ten of his sons and grandsons are also in the Top Fifty of the Five Years Sire List. His most famous son Hollywood Dun It leads the list, and has become reinings first three million dollar sire.

My final example of the "crossover effect" within performance disciplines is perhaps the most dramatic. Reminic competed with great success as a cutter, then became a dominant cowhorse sire, and finally moved East to become a leading reining sire. Reminic's pedigree is truly "the best of the West". His sire, Docs Remedy came from the magic Doc Bar x Teresa Tivio cross. His dam was Greg Ward's legendary Fillinic who excelled as a hackamore horse, and bridle horse and as an incredible producer. Reminic's offspring include NRCHA Futurity Champion Reminic's Pep, NRHA Futurity Champion Von Reminic and many more.

In summary, the stock horse tradition is live and well. Influenced by the best horseman and the best horses from each discipline, today's performers are true to their heritage. From informal cowboy contests at roundups and rodeos - to the reality of international competition and high hopes from the Olympics - the stock horse has made quite a journey.