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### THE EUROPEAN VIEW ~ By Klaus Koch

# THE DANISH COWBOY

*Meet the Danish businessman who has owned not one but two Hambletonian starters and last year's Kentucky Futurity winner.*



Klaus Koch

Photo by Monica Thors

Chances are you've likely seen him by now, perhaps in the sales arenas, in the backstretches of stable areas or in winner's circles at tracks around the world. Twice his horses have made the Hambletonian and he reached his peak as a Standardbred owner when he won last year's Kentucky Futurity.

He is Danish, his fellow countrymen call him "the Cowboy" due to his trade, and his name is Knud Erik Ravn.

Horse racing profits greatly from many successful businessmen turning their interest and their monetary contribution to the industry. Knud Erik Ravn is such a man.

Born in the fourth largest city of Denmark, Aalborg, on September 26, 1947 (on the King of Denmark Christian the 10th's birthday!) he has lived his whole life there, but the world has become the stage for his extraordinary career as a businessman and Standardbred owner.

Knud Erik Ravn's first contact with harness racing was when the racetrack in

Aalborg opened in June of 1954. One of his childhood friends was Pauli Andersen, who became a successful trainer later on.

Together they bought their first square gaiter by the name of Jerowinger in the mid-60s. Knud (pronounced Qunoothe) took an amateur's licence and won three of 25 life time starts. One of these occurred in a circular-start-race starting from 120 metres (approximately 130 yards) handicap.

His father, however, wanted he and his three siblings (two brothers and a sister) to get an education, and he wanted the boys to follow his career at the shipyard, the biggest industry in Aalborg offering occupation for almost the entire city and one of the biggest in the country.

But Knud wanted something else, and became an apprentice in an English-style tailor's shop. He learned his trade and was assigned by his master to organize a smaller chain of tailor shops.

At 26, in 1974, he went out on his

own and together with a friend he started a chain of fashion shops called Riverside, a name he still partly uses as stable name: Rivers Inc. His companion however wanted to attend to the entertainment industry and founded Denmark's most well known chain of discothèques, Tordenskjold.

Knud moved on alone with great success, and in 1980 he founded the jeans chain Cowboyland. The name is quite obvious to a Dane where denim is referred to as "cowboy-wear" and that is why Ravn is called "the Cowboy" in his home country.

Knud Erik Ravn had a lot of business in North America as he imported his products to New Jersey, San Francisco and LA, but he never found the time to go to the races, until the early 70s.

He had a house in a little township called Biersted. The inhabitants were all agricultural people, and harness racing enthusiasts. Every farmer had dairies, pigs

NOW IN ONTARIO

# North America's Leading Two Year Old Sire

(Average Earnings Per Starter)

Photo by New Image Media



## TAURUS DREAM

2,1:59.2, 3,1:55.1 (\$552,391)

Sir Taurus – Uniformite J P – On The Take

From just three crops sire of Goldsmith Maid winner **CRYS DREAM** 2,1:54.3s-'10 (\$596,065), **VAL TAURUS** 3,1:53.2s (\$384,922), **FLORAS DREAM** 1:54.1s (\$311,628), **INTENSE AMERICA** 2,1:54.4-'10, **WINNING FOOL** 3,1:59h (\$110,713).

Fee - \$8,000

## INFINITIF

Q1:53.1 (\$731,703)

Pine Chip – Island Dream – Cocktail Jet

This gifted son of Pine Chip hails from a French bred daughter of one of France's leading sires of all-time Cocktail Jet who captured both the Prix d'Amérique and Elitlopp.

**INFINITIF** won seven of eight starts in Italy as a three-year-old including the \$900,000 Italian Derby. He captured his sixth lifetime start in 1:56.2f and showed a half-mile time at The Red Mile of :54.3 in taking his 1:53.1 record.

His first crop of Kentucky-eligible two-year-olds will race this year.

Fee - \$4,000



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Photo by Nigel Soult

Last year's outstanding sophomore trotting colt Wishing Stone became Knud Erik Ravn's second Hambletonian starter, his first being the \$1.7 million winner *Legendary Lover K*, one of two North American bred trotters he purchased in 1998, his first foray into that market.

and Standardbreds. They bred and they raced trotters, and Biersted got the nickname "Lexington of Denmark."

One of the farmers was Gunnar Christiansen, who was the biggest horse trader of the town with connections in other countries. He was the man behind *Habib*, the Biersted-bred horse who won the Roosevelt International 1986 for Norwegian colours.

In 1998 Gunnar brought Knud to the sales in Lexington, and Knud ended up purchasing two yearlings: the filly *Bold Dreamer* and the colt *Legendary Lover K*, who Knud bought for \$3,200 despite Christiansen's scepticism.

He actually urged Ravn to bid on a third yearling and they were the underbidder at \$77,000. Trainer Per Eriksson bought the horse for \$79,000 for Swedish interests. His name? *Credit Winner!*

However, Knud's two purchases turned out to be very good investments as well. *Bold Dreamer*, who earned \$531,000 during her racing career, was sold the next fall in Lexington after a series of top performances.

Now owned by Bill Weaver's Valley High Stables, the mare is the dam of the two outstanding performers *Pampered Princess* and *Was It A Dream*.

*Legendary Lover K* (*Armbro Gold*) was a late developer but he was well prepared for his three-year-old campaign. The trainer

who was assigned to manage the colt (and earlier *Bold Dreamer* as well) was Florida-based Dewayne Minor, who became the first Afro American to race in the Hambletonian as he guided *Legendary Lover K*, who had finished second in *The Beacon Course* (now *Stanley Dancer Memorial*) two weeks prior to the Hambletonian.

Unfortunately the colt had a small infection causing him some loss of form for the Hambletonian but he managed to get to the final after finishing second in his elimination. In the final, won by *Yankee Paco*, he finished sixth by two lengths.

A 50 per cent share of *Legendary Lover K* was sold to the Italian stud farm Toniatti, but he kept on racing in Europe for a number of years, trained by Danes Erik Bondo (in Italy) and Steen Juul (in Denmark).

He won the prestigious *Gran Premio Lotterio* in Naples and the *Copenhagen Cup* and became European Champion that year. He has since gone on to become one of Europe's top sires.

Since those fall sales back in 1998, Knud Erik Ravn has purchased a number of yearlings every year, assisted by Christiansen, whose daughter, *Annemette*, was married to Dewayne Minor.

Top trotters like *Jiujitzu Hanover*, *Naughty Nunu* and *Winning Chip* have been purchased by Ravn at the sales, but none of



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J. Wimbush photos





Photo by Nigel Sout

Driver George Brennan, trainer Dewayne Minor and owner, the 'the Cowboy' Knud Erik Ravn, pose after Wishing Stone's two heat victory in the 2010 Kentucky Futurity at The Red Mile. That race may be viewed by [clicking here](#).

all those are even close to the colt he bought in 2008, Wishing Stone.

"I have never had a horse like this one," Ravn says. "He was always happy, he loves to race, and he gives us so much joy."

Finishing third in the Hambletonian and winning the Kentucky Futurity and the Matron Stakes, Wishing Stone has certainly given his owner a lot excitement. After the three-year-old campaign, Ravn sold half of his prize trotter to Jerry Silva, the TLP Stable and Deo Volente Farms.

Wishing Stone is now in training in France with top trainer Fabrice Souloy who speaks highly of the now four-year-old. All the owners have agreed to keep on racing the horse in spite of lucrative offers to stand him as a sire.

"I want to race my horses, and so do Mr. Silva and the other new part owners, and that is why Wishing Stone is in training in France and not at a stud farm in the US," Ravn explains.

"I still have nine two-year-olds and three three-year-olds with Dewayne, and Mr. Souloy in Paris has my five-year-old Danish Oaks winner Odyssee Eastwind in training as well."

The breeding products of Knud Erik Ravn all carry the name Cowboyland as company names are tax deductible in Denmark.

"I have 10 broodmares," Ravn continues. "Two are in Kentucky, three in France and five in Italy. I hope to visit many more winner's circles throughout the world."

That is all for this time. Please do not hesitate to comment on my articles. My e-mail address is [ontrack@telia.com](mailto:ontrack@telia.com) and as usual I would be more than happy to receive reaction from North American harness racing fans. 🐎

Till next time,  
Klaus Koch

*Klaus Koch is one of Scandinavia's leading racing administrators and is perhaps best known for his former role as director of racing at Solvalla Racetrack.*

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