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## WORD PORTRAIT

Jane Simmons

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### Pieter Hugo:

#### South Africa's "Accidental" Horseman

by Jane E. B. Simmons

Born on his family's farm in the small town of Victoria-West, South Africa, Pieter Hugo "lived with surrounding fields filled with numerous beautiful Saddlebred foals, the valuable offspring of the imported Saddlebred stud Sparkling Cardinal."

This "stud came to my country in 1955 from Castleton Farm in Lexington. He was by King Genius by Sparkling Waters and out of Kentucky Cardinal Belle."

Such an "auspicious beginning made it impossible for me not to fall in love with this incredible breed from an early age," Pieter told me.

"The Karoo area is an arid region in South Africa and renowned for many Saddlebred Horse breeding operations during the 1960 – 1980 era. During my early years in school, I rode, bred and showed horses."

He attended the boarding school at Victoria-West five days a week during his school years. At school, he participated in his favorite sports that "included tennis, rugby, cricket, and swimming. On my weekends, I filled my every moment with my true passion, the horses at home."

The Hugo farm — named Steenrots — "is situated 70km from Victoria West in the Bo Karoo. It has been a sheep and game farm for more than 80 years, and been in my family since the 1910's." Pieter is "the fifth generation grandson" of the original farm's owner. The farm is about a six-hour drive from Cape Town and about a nine-hour drive from Johannesburg.

Pieter said his father "used to send all the good horses to outside trainers to be shown and sold, while he left me to make do with the



Photo by Fotojan

second selection and sometimes wild ones. Even at my young age, however, I had already decided that I wanted to live in Kentucky and become a horse trainer."

Now in 2009, he has not moved to Kentucky ... yet. Instead, apart from all of his other activities, Pieter "owns his own training barn with indoor facilities, and has 15 horses in training in the

beautiful seaside town of Hout Bay, in Cape Town."

Even though he is "an amateur owner and trainer," he "prefers to show in open classes to test my horses' abilities, as well as my own, against the best my country has to offer. My goal is to show one day on the American show circuit with some of my self-bred and self-trained horses."

In his native South Africa, Pieter is a serious competitor and "has won numerous South African Championship and regional championship titles" over the years.

Pieter also has his own breeding program and has two studs in this program.

"Tomcat is a line bred Tango stud," Pieter said of his one breeding



Tomcat is owned by Studgate Saddlebreds in Hout Bay, South Africa.

Photo by Fotojan



Studgate Saddlebreds barn in Hout Bay, South Africa.

Photo by Melissa Williams



Pieter Hugo riding Wee Pee's Lover at Bloemfontein show in April 2006.

Photo by Fotojan

stallion. "A video clip of Tomcat can be seen at [www.ShowHorse/barnsonline.co.za](http://www.ShowHorse/barnsonline.co.za). My first Tomcat offspring arrived this spring. I am excited about showing them in-hand in April at the South African Championships."

The second stud in Pieter's Studgate Saddlebreds barn is Wee Pee's Lover who is by Tango's Wee Pee out of the young Lover mare, Lover's April Fool.

Pieter shared his breeding philosophy: "I focus on developing a South African version of the American Saddlebred that boasts the South African traits of stamina and vigor while also making sure my horses have the right type to be able to compete on the American show circuit."

He pointed out: "I breed these stallions only to mares that can boast either World or South African Champions in their topline pedigrees — such as Longstreet, Yorktown, or Valley's Wild Wind — or on the bottom side of their pedigrees, such winners as Indiana Ace, Alvin's Choice, Tom Rhythm, Spring Fever, and Young Lover."

On his way from grade school to being a horse trainer and owner, Pieter "served the two-year compulsory military service" required by his country at that time.

Immediately following his military stint, Pieter, at age 20, "immediately entered the famous South African University of Stellenbosch at the strong urging of my parents. Once there, I fell in love with the town, the University, the sporting facilities, and the energetic social life of a town that boasted more than 20,000 students."

Pieter, immersed himself in everything the town and the institution had to offer, and "emerged seven years later with five different degrees, including an MBA from the University of Stellenbosch Business School. With studying behind, I then started working."

He got a job "in a healthcare company as financial director, and after a stint with a listed management consulting company, I, a few years later in 1999, started my own management consulting company — called Nikela Consulting — which specialized in the private healthcare sector in South Africa." Recently, Pieter completed his PhD doctorate, with the topic "The Role of Managed Healthcare in South Africa — a Systemic View."

While managing his consulting company, "my dad passed away and I then also took over the management of my family's game, sheep and

cattle farm in the Karoo. There, I breed Dorper sheep, Dexter cattle and a variety of game animals that include Zebra, Gemsbok (Oryx) Blesbuck, Bontebuck, Black Wildebeest (Gnu), and Springbok. The farm offers hunting expeditions and has its own airstrip to ease traveling time."

In South Africa, there "are about 500 registered Saddle Horse breeders," Pieter told me during our email interviews in December.

"My country has the biggest outdoor Saddlebred show in the world, the South African National Championships, with more than 1200 horses; it is held in April each year in Bloemfontein. Regional Shows around the country host between 200 and 450 horses. One of the most spectacular is the Parys Indoor Christmas Festival show in early December each year."

In 2004, Pieter, "always on the look out for a new challenge, launched *The South African Show Horse* magazine. Now, in its fifth year as of December 2008, the magazine launched its Internet version, [www.showhorse.co.za/live](http://www.showhorse.co.za/live), and I am delighted with the response," Pieter said.

"Many overseas readers are keen to read *The South African Show Horse* magazine, but the shipping costs for the sometimes 400-page all-color magazine has become prohibitive. The Internet version, I believe, should solve this problem." Online readers can "for about \$10 download the magazine and pay by either Visa or Mastercard for access to the South African Saddle horse market.

Pieter's title is Managing Director and Editor of the SA Show Horse publication. He is responsible for bringing the Saddlebred Horse industry to the fore by introducing the sport to the wider community via the magazine, national television, as well as other marketing media.

Pieter said: "I soon realized that the printed media is not enough to promote the Saddlebred in South Africa and I started the company Silvermane Media ([www.silvermane.co.za](http://www.silvermane.co.za)). During the past year, it has provided South African and sub-Saharan Africa — as well as parts of the Middle East — through the pay station M-Net Supersport, with more than 60 hours of television time covering 12 different Saddlebred shows around South Africa," Pieter explained.

"We also produced a documentary on the 2008 World Championship show in Louisville, Kentucky. It is on-air this month (January 2009)," Silvermane Media's Managing Director Hugo continued.

Negotiations to broadcast this production "as well as other Saddlebred Horse shows in the horse crazy Middle East country of Dubai, are well down the road to being finalized," Pieter revealed.

How neat, I said to Pieter, to view the Louisville World Grand Championships half way around the world in the country of Dubai.

Pieter's long time dream "is to be in a position to facilitate a real world championship horse show in Dubai, where the best of both South Africa and America can compete." The "only prohibiting factor at this stage, as is the case with the television side of my business, is that of costs. But by creating a value by branding the show circuits, it's a dream that may well come true."

His efforts and abilities as a horseman did not go unnoticed in South Africa and he "was awarded the Horseman of the Year award in 2006 by the Professional Trainers Association of South Africa.

Blue-eyed, 6'3" bachelor Pieter Hugo describes himself as "a passionate Saddlebred Horse enthusiast" who "enjoys tremendously all my involvement in the various capacities within the industry."

He attributes his success to his ability to "rise above criticism, and focus on the bigger picture of promoting our wonderful sport and the best horse in the world." He observed that "critics are the dogs that bark as the caravan moves forward."

You may contact Pieter Hugo via his email: [pieter@showhorse.co.za](mailto:pieter@showhorse.co.za) or learn more about the *South African Show Horse* magazine at [www.showhorse.co.za](http://www.showhorse.co.za) or about his champion saddle horses at [www.ShowHorse/barnsonline.co.za](http://www.ShowHorse/barnsonline.co.za) or the hunting opportunities on [www.steenrots.co.za](http://www.steenrots.co.za).

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