

# Midwest Thoroughbred™

*The New Voice of Horsemen in Racing's Heartland*

## **One Man's Trash...**

By: Gail Vacca, President, Illinois Equine Humane Center

The morning of June 6, 2009 began just as every other morning here at the [Illinois Equine Humane Center](#), with the exception of beginning barn-chores a few hours earlier than normal so that the horses could all be fed and turned out for the day by 6:00 am in time to hit the road for the day from home base in Illinois to the Shipshewana Livestock Auction in Shipshewana, Indiana.

It had been years since my last visit to Shipshewana, and truth be told, I'd hoped to never have to visit that place again. Shipshy (as it is known to locals) is one of the largest low-end horse auctions in the Midwest, and it is also one of the most notorious - renowned for its cruel treatment of horses and other livestock. Shipshy is also well known for being a place where most of the horses are sold to kill-buyers and are thus thrust into the slaughter pipeline where their journey of suffering and misery ultimately ends at a slaughter plant in Mexico or Canada. Shipshy is not a place that any caring or compassionate horsemen would care to visit. The memories of terrified horses being beaten by auction employees as they enter the sales ring, the sick and lame horses stuffed into kill-pens with dozens of other panicked horses, the "spent" dairy cows unable to stand due to emaciation with udders so distended they drag the ground, the poor little goats beaten and kicked about the head just for "kicks and giggles," needless to say, I was not at all looking forward to this journey or what the day would bring.

My traveling companions and I hit the road a bit on the late side and thus our hope to arrive at Shipshy before the kill-pen horses sold at 9:00 am did not work out quite as planned. Upon arrival the dread I'd been feeling since planning the trip turned immediately into a sickening lump in my throat when we first came upon the outdoor holding area where the Amish buggy horses were parked for the day while their owners bartered and sold the livestock they'd brought to market. It was just a bit past 9:00 am and already it was nearly 90 degrees. The sun was relentless and the flies were already out in full-force just to compound the misery of the poor Amish cart horses who were tied still dressed in full harness. Hitched to their wagons and buggies and lined up along the concrete slabs of this equine makeshift parking-lot, the horses had no water, no shade to protect them from the sun, no bedding or matting to absorb the shock of their constant foot-stomping in a vain attempt to rid themselves of the thousands of flies feasting upon them, no ability to turn their heads to swat the flies, the deadened look in their eyes only personified the misery that these poor horses were left to endure...welcome to Shipshy.

By the time we made it into the barn area, we realized that the "loose" horses had already been sold and would soon be loaded for slaughter. The point of my trip that day was to specifically look for Thoroughbreds that had previously raced at Illinois racetracks which had recently enacted a zero-tolerance policy on horses being sold at low-end slaughter auctions. Hoping to find evidence of such infractions of this rule, I immediately set out to look through the kill-pens to see if any Thoroughbreds were among the crowds of horses.

In the back of a kill-pen jam-packed with fighting and kicking horses I saw what I believe was the only Thoroughbred in the pen. The horse was an attractive dark-bay and appeared to be quite lame as it tried to maneuver away from the herd in a vain effort to protect itself. Camped out in the classic stance of a foundered horse, this poor horse could barely walk let alone defend itself. I set out to find the kill-buyer who now owned the horse to ask if it was a Thoroughbred knowing already in my heart that the horse surely was.

The kill-buyer denied and denied the horse was a Thoroughbred and even offered to prove it to me by jumping into the pen to flip the horse's lip to see if it had a tattoo. He came back and said..."nope, no tattoo." Knowing full well he was lying (likely in an effort to cover for someone who'd might be in violation of racetrack "zero-tolerance" policy) I decided the only way to know for sure would be to get to the horse ourselves and look for a tattoo.

Some time later we were able to coax the horse, who by now we'd determined to be a mare, close enough to the edge of the pen to flip her lip. Sure enough the tattoo was there, plain as day, albeit a very difficult one to read as the ink was mottled among the pink and black pigmentation of the mare's upper lip. I called the tattoo number in to friends at the Jockey Club, but we were unsuccessful in our attempts to identify the mare.

As lame as this mare was and knowing that she'd suffer enormously on the long journey to slaughter, I offered to buy the mare if for no other reason than to humanely euthanize her and spare her any further suffering. I figured we would get her home, make her comfortable, and have the vet out to end her suffering. The kill-buyer wanted \$300 and so the deal was done.



(Lulu upon arrival to our quarantine facility following purchase at Shipshewana)

In the days that followed I would spend hours upon hours attempting to identify the mare through the Jockey Club's online tattoo research page. Try as I might, I never was able to identify her and still in need of a name, I decided to call her "Lulu". In the meantime, our farrier and vet were out to help diagnose the lameness and to see if anything could be done to provide her with some relief. Radiographs of Lulu's feet revealed a hodgepodge of issues that were at the root of her extreme lameness. She has a little bit of navicular disease (although not drastic), a little bit of founder, and a little bit of just plain bad feet. We decided to give her a chance and try some corrective shoeing measures and pain-killers and that we'd wait to see how she fared before re-visiting the option of euthanasia.

In the weeks that followed, my suspicion that Lulu might be in foal began to grow along with the size of Lulu's ever expanding belly. Once again we had the vet out and sure enough, it was confirmed...Lulu was indeed IN FOAL! To say that everyone at the ILEHC was excited would be a gross understatement. We were all so grateful that we were there that day at Shipshy not only because we were able to save Lulu, but that we also were able to save her unborn foal. Talk about an incredible stroke of luck for both mama and baby!

Months went by as we carefully managed Lulu's lameness issues and awaited with great anticipation the arrival of her foal. Finally, on April 15th, 2010 Lulu gave birth to a striking dark bay colt who we aptly named "Taxi" given the fact that he was born on Tax Day. Sporting incredibly long legs and neck, and given his stunning athleticism and presence, it was clear that our boy was all Thoroughbred. And thus began the renewed quest to figure out mom's true identity, hoping that this knowledge would lead us to learn the parentage of our boy Taxi and the facts surrounding their disposal at Shipshy.



(Lulu and Taxi - April 2010)

Try as we may, repeated attempts to identify Lulu via her tattoo continued to fail. In a last ditch effort to find someone who knew who the mare was, I decided to see if the person that consigned Lulu to Shipshewana that day happened to have a Facebook page. As luck would have it, this person did indeed have a Facebook page and so I sent him a message asking him for information about the mare and the parentage of the foal that she delivered on April 15th. Incredibly enough only two days later I received a call from a trainer based in Indiana who was the actual owner of Lulu at the time she was consigned to Shipshy.

Turns out that Lulu had been a broodmare for the former owner and believing that Lulu had lost the foal conceived earlier that year, he then contacted his friend (the Facebook guy) to come get the mare and "get rid" of her. Thus, Lulu ended up at Shipshy...another beautiful broodmare, abandoned by her owner for no other reason than what he believed to be her failure to produce him a foal.

The former owner then revealed the information about Lulu's identity that we'd been trying to uncover for months. As it turns out, our Lulu is a very well-bred mare whose Jockey Club registered name is [Silver Option](#).

Silver Option is by the well regarded and successful stallion Silverhawk out of Hot Option (Explodent). Lulu was bred in Kentucky by Jerome T. Amerman and made her 2 career starts for owner John Amerman. Following her race career Lulu was sold a couple of times before ultimately being sent to Shipshewana. Needless to say it was quite a shock to learn that a mare who came had once lived the life of luxury with such well-respected horsemen like the Amerman's would wind up at a place like Shipshy. I suppose

that one could say that Lulu certainly has had a bit of a riches-to-rags and back-again, life thus far.

Silver Option is currently 14 years old and has had 5 foals in addition to Taxi. Lulu was bred in 2009 to then freshman sire [Magna Graduate](#) who stands at the legendary [Darby Dan Farm](#) in Lexington, Kentucky. Needless to say, we were all speechless upon learning of baby Taxi's incredible parentage. Magna Graduate was an exceptionally talented racehorse having earned 2.5M on the track, including multiple stakes wins and placing's, among them a 2nd place finish in the 6M Dubai World Cup. Magna Graduate's first crop are foals of 2010.

Upon learning of Taxi's parentage , I called Darby Dan to tell them that Silver Option did in fact deliver a very healthy and gorgeous 2010 colt by Magna Graduate. They were completely stunned by this news, having believed that the mare had lost the pregnancy early on in 2009. During my conversation with a staff member at Darby Dan, I relayed to them the incredible story of how the ILEHC had rescued Silver Option from the kill-pens at Shipshewana. Needless to say, the folks at Darby Dan were astonished to learn what had transpired.

As a non-profit equine rescue organization, the ILEHC was clearly in no position to justify spending \$5,000 for the stallion service fee owed to Darby Dan. In an incredibly generous gesture, the owners of Magna Graduate waived much of the stud-fee so that we could file the paperwork with the Jockey Club to get our boy Taxi officially registered.

Taxi's official name was voted on by several of his ILEHC fans, supporters, and admirers. After an exhausting process the name we chose for Taxi and which is now his official Jockey Club name is "[Magna Fortuna](#)." Which translated from Latin means "great luck or great fortune." Great luck indeed...for this colt was only hours away from being slaughtered along with his poor mom.



(Magna Fortuna at 5 months. Strutting his stuff -September 2010)

Magna Fortuna is currently a yearling and is enjoying a carefree life at [Indian Hills Thoroughbred Farm](#) in Edwardsville, IL where he is boarded with several other yearlings to keep him company. He spends his days romping the pastures with his herd-mates and galloping like the wind while the small herd tests their speed and stamina by competing in impromptu match races! Ahhh... what a life our little Taxi is enjoying.



(Magna Fortuna "1st birthday party" Indian Hills Thoroughbred Farm - April 2011)

Silver Option remains in our care here at the ILEHC. I am very pleased to report that with many months of continued good farrier care, Lulu is now mostly pain-free and she too can be found running, bucking, and playing with her little herd of gal-pals.

The future for Magna Fortuna is that he shall be given the opportunity to race as he was born and bred to do. Several members of the ILEHC have formed a racing partnership in order to share in the excitement and joy of watching Taxi grow and develop from a once cast away foal into a strong and happy racehorse. Our racing partnership is aptly named "Rescue Me Racing, LLC." Shares of Taxi are being offered for sale to like-minded compassionate people who would like to join us on this incredible journey. Funds obtained from the sale of shares are donated to the ILEHC in order that it may continue its mission to help Thoroughbreds in need.

Rescue Me Racing has set up a [website](#) to follow the life and exploits of Magna Fortuna. Information about the racing partnership can be found on the website. A limited number of shares remain available and can be purchased by contacting Rescue Me Racing at 815-761-4937.

In closing, it is our fondest hope that everyone reading this story will stop and think twice before dumping their retiring racehorses and no longer productive broodmares to a horrible place like Shipshewana. Our horses are deserving of so much more than this, and as responsible horsemen we can and must do better than that. Lulu and Taxi were blessed with great luck (magna fortuna!) the day they were saved, and we are certainly blessed to have them in our care as they stand as a living proof representation that one man's trash is definitely another man's treasure.