

## GREAT HORSES

Now 22 years of age, NU Cash occupies a special place on Ted Robinson's California ranch. The stallion helped establish Robinson's reputation as a top performance-horse trainer and provided him hard-learned lessons on success in the horse business.



This athletic stallion built the career of trainer Ted Robinson, sired a line of legendary performers and rejuvenated the reined cow horse industry.

Article by Juli S. Thorson

# The NU Cash Legacy

Photographs by Sharon Fibelkorn

**D**estiny can be an unpredictable visitor. She has a way of showing up unannounced and can lurk in the shadows, unspotted for years, until someone finally realizes she's done something that deserves credit. Such is the case with a Quarter Horse colt born on April Fool's Day, 1984. Bred and raised by Doug and Betty Erbes of Windsor, California, the blaze-faced sorrel registered as NU Cash grew up to become a champion and put life back into a fading sport. He founded a line of winning cutters, reiners and working cow horses—while building a ranch along the way—and launched his trainer's career into the "statusphere."

But first, the colt had to be discovered, and that's where Destiny made her entrance. She led Ted Robinson into NU Cash's pasture when the horse was a pot-bellied yearling chowing down on grass and inspired the trainer to take over from there.

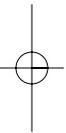
This is the story of how it all happened, and of how one horse, pointed into the right hands, can change many lives.

## A \$12,000 Move

Today, Ted Robinson enjoys renown as the all-time leading money-earner in the National Reined Cow Horse Association, and the exhibitor who has won the association's World Championship Snaffle Bit Futurity a record seven times. But in 1985, when the Oak View, California, horseman first saw NU Cash, Robinson was just another contender trying to make it to the Futurity's winner's circle while working hard to keep food on the table.

Then came his lucky break, in the person of the late horse enthusiast Ralph Gragg.

"Ralph came to me and said he wanted to buy a stud—that his tax attorney said he needed to own a stud to stay in the horse business," Robinson remembers. "So, I started



**NU Cash's son Nu Circle N Cash is now Robinson's primary breeding stallion. The horse is out of a Doc's Hickory daughter.**



According to their riders, NU Cash offspring have inherited their sire's natural athleticism, excelling in reining, cutting and working cow horse competition.

going to Texas and all over the place to look for a horse.

"I basically had a blank check to get one bought. It was a pretty scary responsibility, trying to find that perfect horse, and after several trips to Texas and Oklahoma, I still hadn't found the horse I thought was suited to that blank check."

Robinson then got a call from fellow California reined cow horse trainer Stan Fonsen, who told him about a yearling—a colt by Colonel Freckles and out of a NU Bar mare—in Santa Rosa, California. Fonsen thought the youngster might be what Robinson was looking for.

"I jumped on a plane to go look at the horse, and, to tell you the truth, I didn't think too much of him at first glance," Robinson admits. "He was just a long-bodied colt in pasture condition, eating grass. Then, I walked over, kicked a foot toward him and watched him jump 10 feet, without raising his head, before he went straight back to eating.

"I bought him right there [for \$12,000], mostly on the basis of that one move. When you see a lot of horses make a big move from a standstill, they have to raise their heads to do it, and that usually means they're not real natural shoulder-movers like we want to see

in a cow horse or a cutter. This horse didn't have to raise his head to move. He just did it by picking up his shoulders.

"Nobody had trained him to move like that, so I knew it was an inborn ability."

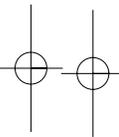
Along with the promise of athletic prowess, the trainer also appreciated NU Cash's pedigree. His sire, Colonel Freckles, was the 1976 open champion at the National Cutting Horse Association Futurity, with get that had earned \$4.4 million in competition. His dam, NU Rendition, traced to the legendary cutting sire Doc Bar on both sides of her pedigree. With genetics like this to back up his purchase decision, Robinson had every reason to believe he'd made a good buy on behalf of Gragg and Gragg's wife, Mickey.

That belief turned to despair a few months later, though, when Robinson started NU Cash under saddle. Instead of believing he'd found a natural athlete, he found worrisome evidence that the horse was a dud.

## Lessons to Learn

"Believe me, I'll never forget it!" the laugh-prone pro recalls. "I thought I'd made the biggest mistake of my life in buying this horse. I mean, he was about the most lethargic, dull thing I'd ever been on—just no life to him at all.

"Everything I tried to get him to do was just work, and I went to bed every night so disappointed in this prospect that I'd bought for Ralph and Mickey, and brought home with such high hopes. This went on until April of his 3-year-old year, and then I got one of those bits of education that can make all the difference in the world to the way you run your program." ➤



Elaborating, Robinson says that until he had NU Cash, he didn't believe in feeding grain to his horses because he felt they got adequate nutrition from the high-quality alfalfa he fed. But, finally, thinking he had nothing to lose, he acted on a suggestion and augmented NU Cash's hay with a commercial grain mix with 18 percent protein.

"It changed him completely," Robinson claims, "and many of his horse colts were the same way. They were really dull until you put them on high-protein grain, and then you got all the horse you needed. Once I got that grain into 'Cash,' everything I'd worked so hard to teach him suddenly was right there. It didn't make him hyper; it just gave him the life he needed to perform to his potential."

The change in feed made such a difference that, by that fall, NU Cash carried Robinson to the open championship of the 1987 NRCHA Futurity—his first victory in the grueling contest that requires 3-year-old horses to cut, rein and work a cow down the fence.

Robinson's first big win was soon followed by another important piece of education. Taking the new champion home to Oak View and offering him at stud, Robinson didn't have many takers. Not only were outside owners disinterested in breeding to him, Robinson recalls, but he also made poor choices in the mares he chose to be bred to NU Cash.

"We started out really, really horribly," Robinson confesses. "It was quite the eye-opener to win the futurity and then have, like, no more than three outside owners who wanted to breed to him!

"In those days, the late '80s, the cow horse world was in a lull, with few people who wanted to breed. And then I went and bred him to some dull, old mares that just weren't very good, and I didn't get much from his first crops.

"In his career as a sire, NU Cash started out with a really bad rap that was largely my own fault."

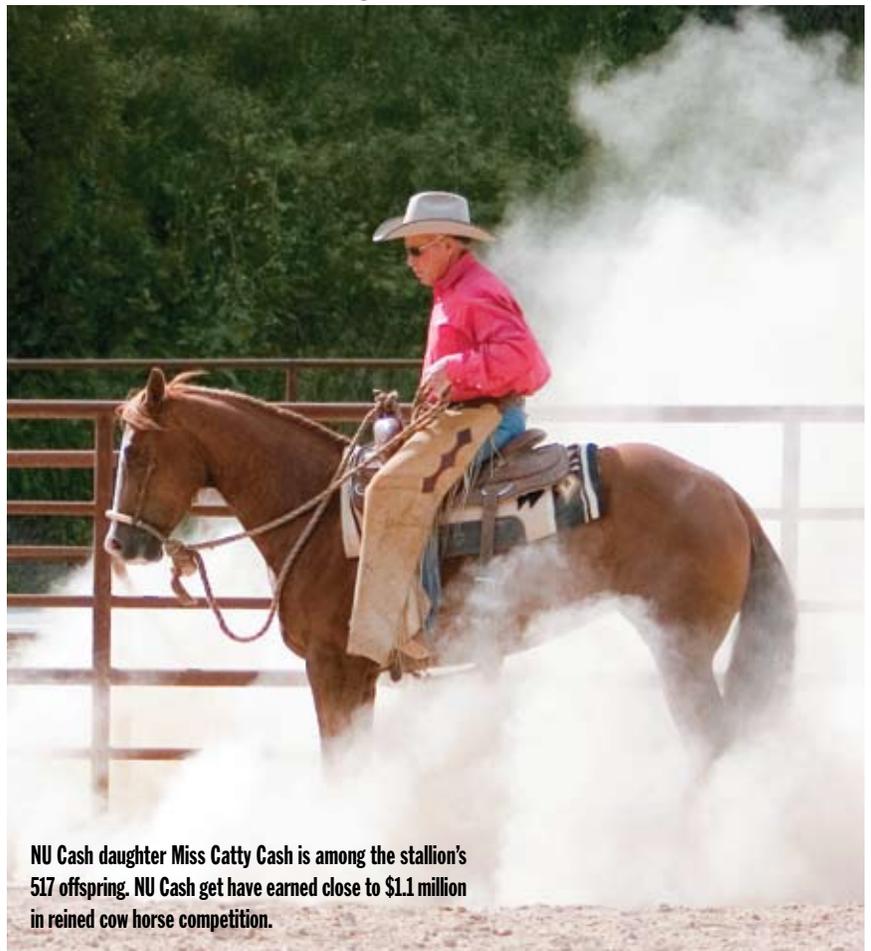
Meanwhile, because of the greater prize money to be had in cutting, Robinson redirected NU Cash's competitive career toward that sport. In three seasons in front of the herd, the horse earned more than \$38,000.

"That was another one of those learning-experience deals," Robinson says. "I wasn't very experienced at

cutting at that point, yet Cash was successful despite having to put up with me while I learned. It wasn't that different from our time in the reined cow horse pen, where I sacrificed him to learn how to win.

"I often still ask myself, 'If I had him to train and show today, how great would he be? What could he do if he had the benefit of the knowledge I've gained over the past 20 years?' If I had to sum up his show-horse career, I'd say he was my sacrificial lamb."

By the time NU Cash was 6 years old and ready to be retired from competition, the Graggs had made Robinson a partner and given him another kind of blank check, in the form of permission to call all the shots in their horse business. Taking his initial lessons in



**NU Cash daughter Miss Catty Cash is among the stallion's 517 offspring. NU Cash get have earned close to \$1.1 million in reined cow horse competition.**

breeding to heart, Robinson took out a bank loan to buy a better set of mares. This step enabled both horse and handler to graduate to a new level.

“Once I started breeding better colts, I was able to start winning on them,” he says. “That’s when the breeding picked up. After that, Cash went to breeding as many as 100 mares a year.”

## A NU Line of Winners

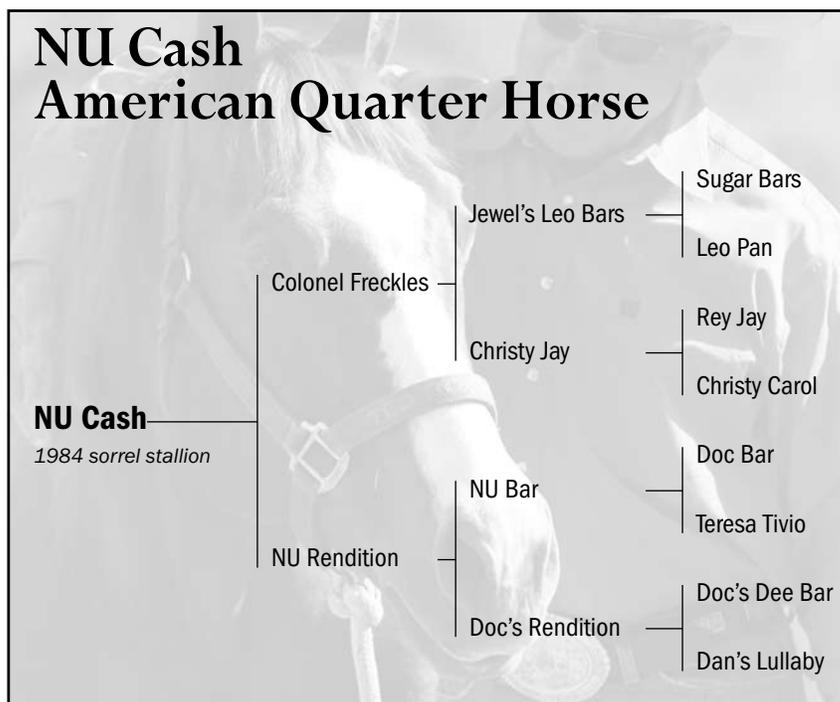
In his 16 seasons at stud before becoming sterile, NU Cash sired 517 American Quarter Horse Association foals, the youngest of which turned 4 this year. His list of winners is long and varied, and includes three open NRCHA Futurity champions, all trained and shown by Robinson. NU Cash’s get have earned close to \$1.1 million in reined cow horse competition alone and more than \$500,000 in NCHA-approved cuttings. The National Reining Horse Association credits his offspring with more than \$160,000 in earnings, and AQHA has him down for siring horses with close to \$35,000 in Incentive Fund and AQHA World Championship Show prize money.

Scott Weis, a cutter from Ojai, California, is among those who’ve earned money on performers sporting the signature NU Cash brand—a dollar-sign on the hip.

### NU Cash

## American Quarter Horse

**NU Cash**  
*1984 sorrel stallion*



	Jewel's Leo Bars	Sugar Bars
		Leo Pan
Colonel Freckles	Christy Jay	Rey Jay
		Christy Carol
	NU Bar	Doc Bar
		Teresa Tivio
NU Rendition	Doc's Rendition	Doc's Dee Bar
		Dan's Lullaby

### Career Highlights:

Open champion—1987 NRCHA World Championship Snaffle Bit Futurity; NCHA earnings: \$38,031.03

**Progeny Record:**

**Foal Crops:** 16

**Foals Registered:** 517

**AQHA Champions:** 1

**AQHA Superiors:** 17

**AQHA Points Earned:** 2,985.5

**AQHA High-Point Wins:** 4

**AQHA Earnings:** \$34,912.77

**NCHA Earnings:** \$503,519.19

**NRHA Earnings:** \$160,882.86

**NRCHA Earnings:** \$1,089,533.32

**NRCHA Futurity Winners:** 3

“I’ve had several NU Cash offspring over the years,” he says, “and found them fabulous to train because of their athletic abilities. I never had trouble training any of them. I’ve won about \$3 million as a cutter, and a lot of that total came from NU Cash horses.”

Another fan of the NU Cash line is Tennessee trainer Charlie Hutton of Fayetteville. He’s built his breeding business around Nu Chex To Cash, the 1990 palomino stallion who was AQHA’s high-point reiner and working cow horse in 1999, and whose son Wimpys Little Step won the NRHA Futurity in 2002.

This level of success with yet another generation is Robinson’s latest source of NU Cash pride. He’s now breeding NU Cash grandget of his own via a son named Nu Circle N Cash, who is out of Miss Circle Doc, by Doc’s Hickory.

In summing up the NU Cash legacy, Robinson sets aside talk of dollars and points, and zeroes in on factors that are harder to measure. ➔



**The dollar-sign brand appears on the hips of NU Cash's sons and daughters, and on the occasional fencepost at Robinson's ranch.**

“NU Cash had the support of Ralph and Mickey, and he kept both of those people alive for a lot more years than they might’ve otherwise lived,” he says. “He provided them with something in life they wanted to do. Ralph could be sick as a dog, but if NU Cash was going to a show, then by God, he was going, too.

“It was the same way when NU Cash’s colts came along. The Graggs threw everything they had into the reined cow horse world and rejuvenated it with their involvement. So, besides building up Ted Robinson and building and paying for my ranch, NU Cash built the reined cow horse sport back up after it had suffered a bad slump.

“It was all due to that one horse.”

That one horse is the same 22-year-old who now lives right outside Robinson’s bedroom window, and who’s earned the right to stay there until the end of his days.

“Technically,” says the trainer, “he’s owned by the Gragg family’s trust, but when Ralph was about to pass away, he wanted me to have him. He’s an old horse now, and his breeding days are done, but I’m happy just to keep him as a big ol’ pet.

“I’ll have him until the day he dies.”

*Juli S. Thorson is based in northern Idaho. For more information about Ted Robinson and NU Cash, visit [tedrobinsontrainingstables.com](http://tedrobinsontrainingstables.com). Send comments on this article to [edit@westernhorseman.com](mailto:edit@westernhorseman.com). *