

Lisa McMahon

Dreams can come true.

By Richard Chamberlain

LISA MCMAHON MET HER FIRST RACEHORSE IN THE MID-1970S. At the time, she was one of those horse-happy teenagers who loved, lived and breathed horses, centered her life around them and would do just about anything to be able to ride them.

"I was a senior in high school, and I had a little Quarter Horse mare that was in foal," says McMahon, who has come a long way since then and today races her homebred champion Blazin Fire. "I wasn't even sure if my mare was even registered. I boarded her at a barn not too far from where I lived, and there was a couple there who had moved from California with some *beautiful* Quarter Horses. They raced at Los Alamitos and also had a few Thoroughbreds, and were looking for someone to gallop and exercise them. So of course, loving to ride, I started doing that."

Well, *of course*. Already experienced on hunters and jumpers, McMahon jacked up her irons, learned how to throw a cross and took off – in a pasture, because there was no track. Now, three decades later, this member of the AQHA Racing Committee lives with husband Dan and their kids, 12-year-old horse-crazy daughter Jessie and 15-year-old son Bobby. Their home is in the Memphis suburb of Collierville, Tennessee, where she grew up the oldest of four girls and two brothers, and today owns the advertising agency Blazin Ads, which was founded by her mother, Barbara Blumenfeld.

But that's getting ahead of the story. McMahon's Quarter Horse mare foaled a filly the following year, and the girl had to track down her mare's sire to get a breeding report before she could get papers on the baby.

She named the filly Gimme Shelter (after the Rolling Stones' hit song. We're talking '70s teenager here.) As best as she could determine, her mare, the Bar B Leo King daughter Gee Bar B Bess, had been covered by Bud's Beggar Boy, a son of the Tonto Bars Gill stallion Tonto Boy.

"I don't know if I should say this, but I've always kind of

wondered about it," she admits. "This was back before AQHA had DNA testing, but her supposed sire was a AA racehorse of real old-time breeding, and there was no racing at all on the bottom side of the pedigree. No one thought the filly would ever do anything. But in my second year of college, I sent her to the trainer. And it turned out she could run a little bit."

Gimme Shelter won four of 18 races at Blue Ribbon and Midway Downs in Oklahoma and the Custer County Fair in Nebraska. For all of that, she earned \$723. But it was a start.

"She was AA, and back then, just having a winner that was AA – I thought that was just like having a champion," McMahon says. "It was just so unbelievable."

Gimme Shelter produced six winners from eight starters, including the stakes-winning Uppen Atom mare Atomic Valentine. Several of Gimme Shelter's daughters were producers of minor stakes horses, though nothing at the level of futurity winners at Los Alamitos or Ruidoso.

"But they were horses people had a lot of fun with, winners, stakes winners and track record holders, stuff like that," she says. "One still holds a track record in Canada."

"But while they were fun, I did a lot of pedigree research and realized I didn't have enough blood, the right blood, to get to where I wanted to be," she acknowledges. "Back in 1984, the year I raced Gimme Shelter's first daughter, Atomic Valentine, the toughest of the tough ran at Blue Ribbon Downs. Atomic Valentine won the Miss Betty Stakes, a nice little \$22,000 stakes, and when I qualified for that, I thought I was really in the big time."

Not quite, not yet. But she and some friends had a good time while at Blue Ribbon for the Miss Betty trials.

"I had some friends there, and we were having a big time," she recalls. "And that night, we heard about a little backyard auction that (Blue Ribbon founder) Bill Hedge was having.



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Bill was a good friend and a great, great guy. We decided to go over there, just on a whim. They didn't have a real catalog, just some pieces of photocopied paper stapled together. I'd been studying pedigrees for years, and we were sitting there and this wild-eyed sorrel mare comes up with a real pretty filly. I looked down to see who she was, and it was a 7-year-old mare by *Nativo* (TB), which I really liked. She was out of a maternal granddaughter of *Leo*, and her filly was by *Easy Crimson*. I *loved* the breeding on *Easy Crimson*. They weren't getting much play on them, so I stuck my hand up and got her for \$2,500.

"The next morning when we went to pick them up, they were turned out in a pen with several other mares and foals. The filly had both of her front teeth kicked out – she was a bloody mess."

The filly was *Blazin Sin*.

Living On Sin

MCMAHON'S RESEARCH, STUDYING AND LEARNING PAID OFF. *Blazin Sin* was the fourth foal out of *Miss Sin Sin*, who McMahon traded to Rex Brooks in exchange for training *Atomic Valentine* and other horses. *Blazin Sin* was turned over to Lonnie Stokes, who conditioned her to win eight of 16 races, including going undefeated through seven races as a sophomore in 1987. *Blazin Sin* that year scored in the Brad Len Stakes and Blue Ribbon 440 Derby, before going to California to run in Florentine's 1988 Vessels Maturity (G1).

Lisa McMahon was on her way.

And that was because *Blazin Sin* was in her barn. More important than the wins or the \$33,326 in earnings from the track was *Blazin Sin*'s produce, her seven winners from eight starters. In 1992, *Blazin Sin* dropped the stakes-placed *On A*

High gelding *Blazin High*, a \$260,113 earner that showed in Daring Difference's Heritage Place Futurity (G1) and A Touch Of Victory's Sam Houston Futurity (G1), was fifth in Mr Jess Perry's Texas Classic Futurity (G1) and seventh in Darlin Sixarun's Remington Park Futurity (G1). *Blazin High* the following year finished second to *Ichin The Gold* in the Heritage Place Derby (G1) and to *Pies Royal Request* in the Z. Wayne Griffin Director's Stakes (G3), appeared in several other stakes and left the track with earnings of \$260,113.

Blazin Sin followed with several more useful horses and in 1998 produced *The Blazin Man*. An earner of \$76,773, the son of *Heza Fast Man* won four stakes in Texas, where he was the high-point aged stallion in 2002.

And in 2002, along came *Blazin Fire*, produced by embryo transfer right before *Blazin Sin* was euthanized due to cancer. If there were still any doubt as to whether McMahon belonged in the major leagues, the daughter of *This Snow Is Royal* shattered them. A winner of 11 of 33 races and an earner of \$310,612 – so far – *Blazin Fire* has been sent out by Paul Jones to win six stakes, including last year's John Deere Distaff Challenge Championship (G1) and the last two renewals of the Las Damas Handicap (G2), and was a finalist in Wave Carver's Champion of Champions (G1). Though still at the track, where she was 2007's top aged mare, *Blazin Fire* through embryo transfer this year produced her first foal, a First Down Dash colt named *Blazin Son*, and recipient mares are carrying her First Down Dash and FDD Dynasty embryos for 2009 foals.

McMahon and her daughter now share riding time on her daughter's Quarter-bred hunter/jumper, which they board at a stable near their home in Collierville. She and her husband, who owns a weed-control company, keep their broodmares at Bob Moore Farms at Norman, Oklahoma, and JEH Stallion Station at Pilot Point, Texas. McMahon was appointed a year ago to the AQHA Racing Committee.

"I just always wanted to be more involved in racing," she says. "Some very good friends of mine, Sharon Brandsness (of Las Vegas, Nevada), and Melodie Knuchell (the stakes coordinator at Los Alamitos) are both on the Racing Committee and they thought that I would be a good addition to the committee. So they helped me get on it. I just want to help."

"Help" is a four-letter word that encompasses huge territory. Doing her part as an advertising expert, McMahon is on the subcommittee that steers the marketing of Quarter Horse racing.

"We need to make the perception of horse racing to be fun," she says. "I think it should be something families would enjoy coming to. At Sam Houston Park, they have concerts, which bring young people to the track and expose them to horse racing, get them accustomed to the track itself and make them comfortable there. They're the future – maybe they'll like it enough that they come back, maybe they'll tell their friends, maybe they'll start betting and maybe they'll even decide they want to have their own racehorse some day. I think we need stuff like that, rather than *just* racing, *just* casinos. We need to make racing fun again."

Tall order. But McMahon is giving it her best shot.

"Everybody who's known me my whole life knows I've always been a horse lover," McMahon says. "I went to college, but I was too horse-crazy to concentrate on my studies. It's just always been my passion, ever since I was a little girl. Now I'm just trying to give something back and maybe help other small breeders realize that their dream of a lifetime is possible." ❏