



Les Vogt *and* Chex A Nic



The spirited colt outperformed every expectation and set an AQHA record that still stands.

By Honi Roberts

LES VOGT WENT TO SEE THE 2-YEAR-OLD COLT ONCE, TWICE, then a third time. And each time, the trainer called his clients afterward to say, “Don’t buy him.”

But as clients sometimes do, Lisa Blumenthal and Pat Pinkard bought the horse anyway. They saw Possibility, with a capital “P.” However, when they excitedly brought their new gelding to Les’ barn, he also saw a capital “P” for Project.

“In the round pen, his tail stood straight up like a post,” Les says, “and his head was so high, his ears nearly touched his tail. He pranced, with a lot of knee and hock action. If I’d been looking for an Arab, he’d be perfect!”

On that day in 1984, Les could never have imagined the success that he, Lisa and Pat would have with the colt in the years ahead. Chex A Nic became one of the most successful and beloved reined cow horses of all time, and an inductee into the National Reined Cow Horse Association Hall of Fame.

In 1992, Chex A Nic and Les became the first horse and rider to win AQHA world championships in senior reining and senior working cow horse in the same year – a record that still stands, nearly 20 years later.

Despite early misgivings, Les will tell you today, Chex A Nic was the right horse at exactly the right time.

In 1970, the trainer had taken a deep breath and purchased one of the day’s most celebrated horses, AQHA Champion King Fritz, and 10 top broodmares. At first, it was everything Les had hoped. He won his second NRCHA Snaffle Bit Futurity aboard Chex Wrangler Chex in 1973.

But in 1975, the stallion became dizzy during breeding, and a legion of veterinarians determined the cause: irreparable spinal damage from an injury suffered as a colt. King Fritz was euthanized. Then, another layer of tragedy: a virulent form of rhinopneumonitis ripped through Les’ broodmare band, causing 20 of his 22 mares to abort their King Fritz foals.

“After that, I struggled,” Les says. “I’d had success, and truthfully, I thought I was making the ‘Chex’ horses famous, that is, until I found out the hard way that they were making me famous. I was forced to develop a program.”

Meanwhile, a young Californian named Lisa Blumenthal dreamed of owning a champion cow horse. Lisa showed stock horses, and while in grad school met Pat Pinkard, who rode hunters. The two friends decided to form a partnership and chase the dream.

When they found the charismatic bay colt, Lisa remembered watching Les show the colt’s dam, Bueno Chex Bonita, a King Fritz granddaughter.

“Les was one of my idols,” Lisa says, “Nobody goes down a fence like Les does.”

She asked him to evaluate Chex A Nic.

“I really liked the colt’s mother,” Les recalls. “She was a big stopper. But when I saw the colt in the round pen, he was

skittish and never got off his front end. Later, when Lisa called to say they’d bought a horse, I thought, ‘Oh, no.’

“At my place, I’d open his stall door, and Chex A Nic would stand with his legs spread apart, snorting like a tiger and showing the whites of his eyes. Even as a 3-year-old, I saw no signs (that) he’d be a superstar. I started riding him, not so much because I thought he’d be great, but because I knew he’d be the perfect horse to develop myself with. He was so complex that I needed to fine-tune my skills to help him be successful. When I taught him to change leads, he breathed fire. Heck, he didn’t walk a step for months – he pranced! When he finally walked five steps in a row, I celebrated.”

But Lisa and Pat had faith in Les and in their colt.

“Chex A Nic was so talented and had such grace,” Lisa says. “We always believed he would work through it and come into his own.”

Chex A Nic came by his high spirits quite naturally, through his daddy, Reminic, an all-time leading reining and cutting sire, who was out of Greg Ward’s legendary reined cow horse, Fillinic.

“Chex A Nic was just like Fillinic,” Les says. “Watching Greg get onboard Fillinic was like watching the Pony Express: it was near a foot race. He always said he used the least pressure possible on her because he wanted her to think right, then she’d work right. Greg knew horses!

“When we started reining with Chex A Nic, he stopped like Fillinic. She’d spread her hind legs when she stopped, and I shod her grandson every way in the world to make him stop spreading. I even made boots to wear up his legs with cups over his hocks, to protect them. He’d spread wide and get so low, he’d have skid marks on his buttocks!”

Chex A Nic’s barn name, “Greg,” was a tip-of-the-hat to Fillinic’s owner.

As a 3-year-old, Chex A Nic entered the Three Rivers Snaffle Bit Futurity in Prineville, Oregon, even though, as Les





recalled, “the colt couldn’t change leads without a stampede.” But there, something clicked.

Les and Chex A Nic won the preliminary rounds in all three events, en route to the reserve championship. They followed that with top-five finishes at the Idaho, Montana and Cow Palace futurities, and the reining championship at the Southern Oregon Snaffle Bit Futurity.

“Suddenly, he was a show horse, a glamour boy,” Les says with a smile. “I realized that there was greatness in him, and I needed to develop it with care.”

Both horse and trainer were about to hit their stride.

In 1986, Chex A Nic and Les were champion or reserve every time out.

“We were excited to go to Reno for the NRCHA world championships,” Lisa says, with a chuckle. “I felt so confident about winning, I had a friend drive his truck to Reno, so he could bring home the trailer we’d win!”

“Chex A Nic was darn good in the reined work,” Les recalls. “And when one cow pushed us clear down the arena, he just stayed with him, and we marked a 77 to win it!”

Lisa and Pat got their new trailer, and Chex A Nic was the 1986 NRCHA world hackamore maturity champion, year-end NRCHA hackamore champion and the highest money earner in any NRCHA division in 1986.

With limited showing the next year, he was the NRCHA reserve world champion hackamore horse. In 1990, Chex A Nic was the NRCHA Snaffle Bit Futurity bridle champion and world champion all-around cow horse, and in 1991, he got the prestigious NRCHA supreme reined cow horse award. For three consecutive years, Chex A Nic was the Cow Palace champion bridle horse, once by a record 14-point margin.

“I never once needed to put the pedal down and ask for everything he had,” Les says. “He had such depth, there was always far more horsepower than I could use. He never once cheated, and he stayed sound. His courage was unsurpassed. It was an exciting time.”

In 1992, Lisa and Pat set their sights on the AQHA World Championship Show. Les, who enjoyed qualifying Chex A

Nic says, “By then, I knew I had a smoking gun and could win pretty near every time we went out.”

Today, it’s fun to listen to the 1992 World Show commentators, as they watch Les and Chex A Nic perform with an ability and charisma that would be impressive today (Go to Journal Plus at www.aqha.com to watch the video.).

Scoring a 219.5 from three judges in reining and a 450.5 in working cow horse, they went home with world championships in both senior reining and senior working cow horse, a feat that has never been duplicated.

“We showed him lightly for the next few years,” Lisa says. “He was a happy horse, and his well-being always came first. He loved his job.”

By the time he retired in 1994 at age 14, Chex A Nic had won every major NRCHA and NRHA event on the West Coast, and earned more than \$40,000, two trailers, 15 saddles and 23 belt buckles.

“But it was never about the ‘things’ with him,” Lisa adds. “He was so phenomenal, so electric – it was about him, with his sweet face and those big, deep eyes. He was family.”

Les recalls, “We showed at the Cow Palace, won, and then Saturday had his retirement ceremony. It was pretty emotional. I took his bridle off, and we did some spins and sliding stops;



they pulled his shoes; and you know, I think Chex A Nic savored the moment.”

For the next 10 years, Chex A Nic lived the life of a pasture ornament in the California sun: fat, happy and well-loved. When a tumor suddenly appeared on his neck in 2004 and was diagnosed as fast-spreading lymphoid sarcoma, hearts broke.

“I will always remember how it felt to ride Chex A Nic,” Les says. “So quick, fast, elegant. Because I’ve had a long career, sometimes I’m asked what my lucky break was. I reply that I had the opportunity to let Chex A Nic develop me. Today, I make my living with what Chex A Nic taught me.”

Lisa adds, “I often think of Chex A Nic. His integrity, courage, dignity – and the joy he gave to us.”

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Go to **Journal Plus** (www.aqha.com), the **Journal's** digital supplement to view a video of Chex A Nic and Les Vogt's great ride at the 1992 AQHA World Championship Show.