



# Operation Offspring

*Anders and Anna Lindfors are behind Offspring Management AB, one of Europe's foremost breeding distribution farms aligned with a number of North American breeders.*

By Harold Howe • Photos by Jim Gillies

*It's* a magnificent Saturday afternoon at The Red Mile during Grand Circuit week. The day presents harness racing in the most perfect of settings and is appreciated by all. The splendour of the day is not lost on Anna and Anders Lindfors.

The Swedish couple are in their favourite spot to watch the action. Standing alone near the track entrance from the paddock they revel in the atmosphere.

"This is where we like to be during the racing here," says Anders referring to

the location.

"Great horses and great racing, what's there not to like?"

The handsome couple are familiar figures at the major United States harness racing venues with good reason. They are the principals behind Offspring Management AB, one of the leading breeding operations overseas.

Based at Malmo in southern Sweden, the company is quite unique in the sense that it is not the traditional breeding facility. While the company does stand Armbro Goal it is better

known as the distribution hub for frozen semen from an ever growing number of North American trotting sires.

Among the stallions it represents in Europe are Angus Hall, Berndt Hanover, Duke Of York, Kadabra, Mr Lavec and Yankee Paco.

The company came into existence in 1995 as a byproduct of KGB Management, a company started 30 years ago by the late Kurt Gusten Bertmark. One of the pioneers of trotting in Sweden, Bertmark was influential in the migration of leading Swedish

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horsemen to the United States in the 1970s.

An accountant by trade, Anders came to work for Bertmark in his book publishing house. At the time horses were the furthest thing from his mind.

"Mr. Bertmark was a great sportsman and very involved with racing. I first went to work for him when I was about 22 years old. He had a private stable of some 20 head and always said that 19 were lame and one was racing well, much like people still talk today.

"He was chairman of the board of the track in Malmo and was a true fan of racing. One day he came to me and asked me to look after the bookkeeping of his horses and that included some stallions he stood. I had absolutely no knowledge of horses at all but once I got started into it I found it fascinating."

Anders soon discovered a new passion and found himself spending weekends at local training centres working in the barn and basically educating himself on the business.

It was not long before his full time occupation was with Bertmark's horse holdings and he could not have been happier.

Bertmark died in 1987 and his son Tomas, who had already followed in his father's footsteps, took over. As the Swedish influence on North American trotting grew so did the involvement with the younger Bertmark.

In 1988 Bertmark and his partners bought Armbro Goal for \$2.5 million just prior to the horse's victory in the Hambletonian. It proved to be an insightful purchase.

Then in 1997 Bertmark surfaced again with Harrys Bar, winner of the Peter Haughton Memorial, and of course there were others not so notable.

"Tomas, like his father, was very enthusiastic about harness racing. He liked innovations and it was his idea to create the KGB website in 1995 which was basically the first racing news website. It ran for several years but closed down when it could not support itself financially," Anders explains.

Eventually Bertmark, who now makes his home in France, elected to follow other pursuits and together with



USTA Photo

**Armbro Goal is the most notable sire that Offspring actually stands. In 1988 the horse won the Hambletonian and remains a leading sire in Europe.**

Lindfors created Offspring Management AB which sprang from KGB Management. The two share ownership in the company but Anders and his wife Anna run the day-to-day operation.

The company has steadily grown and is now recognized as one of the industry leaders.

Each year Lindfors makes at least three trips to North America. He is convinced that it is out of necessity for the business. In the breeding industry the world over, the "out of sight, out of mind" principle applies.

"Aside from maintaining contacts I am personally interested in what is happening in North America. It is important to actually see the horses we may be receiving semen from in order to talk intelligently to our customers."

A youthful 50, Lindfors particularly enjoys his visit to The Red Mile, a journey he could never make without Anna.

"She is also an accountant and is a valuable part of the team at Offspring. Anna is responsible for all the record keeping including the financial end. We're a team except when it comes to Harrisburg. She prefers to be working at home then. Harrisburg does not have much attraction for females."

To understand the book of business Offspring enjoys, one must first have a general overview of the Standardbred industry in all of Europe because that is their market.

France is the powerhouse with a broodmare population of some 15,000 followed by Italy with 5,000, Sweden 4,500, Norway 1,500, Denmark 1,000, Finland 1,000, Germany 700 and Holland 500.

"France continues to be strong, Italy is in good shape breeding-wise, Germany's racing industry is nearly bankrupt, Holland has always been small and there's no reason to think that will change. Denmark is weak but because of high oil prices Norway is doing better, Finland is steady but may be weakening and Sweden is seeing its breeding industry shrinking," he explains.

According to 2005 figures released by the Swedish Trotting Association, a total of 4,500 mares were bred in that country which is the lowest figure in 30 years. The disturbing trend marks an 11 per cent decline from 2004 which was down 10 per cent from 2003.

"It's a case of the industry adjusting to demand. We're also seeing a growing demand for frozen semen from North America because of the superior bloodlines. It now represents 12.5 per cent of all breeding in Europe," he points out.

It should be noted that some European countries operate with limitations on stallion books. Sweden, Italy and Norway only allow 150 mares to be served by each sire while Finland, Germany, Denmark and Holland have no such limits. Of course, France has a

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closed stud book.

Not unlike the Canadian situation, backyard breeders are feeling squeezed as larger operations are emerging. Multiple ownership and partnerships are far more commonplace on the racing side. Complaints of purses being too low are the norm.

A major change is in store for the Swedish industry beginning this season. The breed registry will begin allowing more foals from sires approved by the Swedish Breeding Commission regardless of where in the world the stallion is standing. A total of 150 mares will be allowed to those foreign sires unlike the present number of 25 and these foals will be eligible to race in all Swedish races.

“The industry was forced to do this or risk the ire of the European Union for having unfair trade barriers. For our company this will be very good but I also believe though it will be good for the Swedish industry as a whole.”



This decision will have financial ramifications in Canada and the United States as well. Stallions like Angus Hall and newcomer Ken Warkentin for example, should be able to expand their respective market overseas. But it is not quite as simple as it sounds.

“While the market for frozen semen is well established now, some owners of North American stallions do not want to ship frozen semen. They fear it will stop European buyers from coming to the North American yearling sales. But they are wrong because Europeans are not buying like they once did. To not send frozen semen is a serious loss of money for them,” says Anders.

“Take a horse like Credit Winner. I think he bred 100 mares by frozen semen in Europe last year. That is a good stream of money for the people who own the stallion.”


One of the questions North American breeders ponder is this seemingly unending appetite Europeans have for new sire prospects in all price levels.

“We are always playing catch-up with sires. North American sires have better genetics which we want but our racing system is so different. There is far less emphasis on two-year-olds and that will not change. Because of that horses which have fallen out of favour in North America so quickly can still work in Europe quite nicely.”

He points to Pine Chip as a good example. That sire was purchased for a reported \$3 million in 2000. Being able to service 150 mares with fresh semen in Sweden plus another 150 by frozen semen throughout Europe made the financial equation work.

In the 2005 breeding season Perretti Farms of New Jersey took a bold step by striking a deal to stand the European champion Revenue in an attempt to deal with the disturbing problem of inbreeding in North American trotters.

“We do not handle the frozen semen for Revenue in Europe so I am objective when I say that Revenue presents a great opportunity for the breeding industry. It’s a wonderful change to broaden the genetics by introducing a sire that has a French/Swedish cross. In Sweden it is widely accepted that 25 per cent French blood in an animal is very effective particularly if it is on the dam’s side.”




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Europeans like to think of themselves as being very informed and worldly but Lindfors admits the level of knowledge regarding Canadian racing is shamefully low.

"There was a time that I knew very little about racing in Canada. I was shocked to learn how much larger Ontario is than Kentucky. I would say that remains much the case for the average breeder in Scandinavia."

So their focus largely remains on the United States where they see an interesting situation breed-wise in that there is no dominant trotting sire at the moment. They view it as a plus to have Yankee Glide, Muscles Yankee, Credit Winner and several others all having strong credentials without being dominant.

"All the European farms are looking for sons of these horses and I do not see a problem with this situation. In fact, not having a dominant sire is a benefit in that it gives people more realistic options."

A keen observer of trends in Europe, Lindfors was intrigued with a February

2005 article in *The Harness Edge* on the disappointing live foal ratio relative to mares bred in North America. Despite the latest technological advances only 55 per cent are born as compared with 70 per cent in Sweden.

"It appears that breeders in Sweden use more equine veterinarians rather than mixed practice vets for one thing. People in North America tell us that they think some of the North American vets are just not up to the mark where equine reproduction is concerned. Technically, I believe our vets are very good in Sweden," he offers.

"It is a big plus for us that the farms where we ship semen to must be licensed by the Swedish Trotting Association. Therefore, there are certain standards which must be met. I also think that maybe our breeders are a little more patient in trying to get their mares in foal."

It has been said that North American breeders are lacking in marketing skills which may be simply an observation that applies the world over. Although trained

in accounting Lindfors recognizes the need for marketing and as such sees that Offspring makes a big effort in that direction.

Four times a year the company publishes Hingst which is a newsletter focusing on stallion information and developments which it distributes free of charge to 6,500 subscribers.

This is in addition to maintaining the company website [www.offspringab.com](http://www.offspringab.com) which provides regular updates on the progress of the stallions that the farm is associated with.

"After 28 years I still very much enjoy doing this. It's very different from what I was originally trained to do. Every year brings a new set of circumstances, new stallions and more competition," he observes.

"Anna and I have made many friends over the years in Europe and North America. It's just become a way of life. We quite look forward to the new rules on frozen semen but really I just hope that racing is as good to me when I'm 60 as it is today." 🐾

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