

# BREEDING

## Pedigree Analysis



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### TOM BOWLING, THE WILD HORSE

When Tom Bowling was a foal in 1870, a visitor remarked the colt would never stay a mile. Brilliant, quirky, and downright dangerous, he grew into one of the greatest runners ever bred in America and earned the nickname “the Wild Horse.”

Tom Bowling was bred by H.P. McGrath, a gambler who bought a farm north of Lexington which he named McGrathiana. His mare, Lucy Fowler, had produced the stakes winner R. B. Connolly, by Lexington, in 1864, so she was sent back to that great sire and got an even better one in Tom Bowling. A true blue hen, she later produced the high class Aaron Pennington (1871) and Belmont Stakes winner Calvin (1872), both by McGrath's stallion Tipperary.

A bright bay with a narrow blaze on his face and stockings on his hind legs, Tom Bowling bore a strong resemblance to his sire. He was handed over to Ansel Williamson, a former slave who was already a great trainer.

Second by a head in his juvenile debut in the Hopeful Stakes at Monmouth, Tom Bowling lost the July Stakes by a neck, but then a legend was born. In the Thespian Stakes, he held up the start for 30 minutes, then broke “like a streak of lightning” and ran away from his field to set a new juvenile record for six furlongs. In the August Stakes at a mile at Saratoga, he won by more than 11 lengths. His win in the half-mile Flash Stakes at Saratoga was his last start of the year, suggesting an injury, and he went home to Kentucky to heal and grow.

As with many other great horses, it wasn't what Tom Bowling did but how he did it, and with Tom, he won

despite himself. Getting Tom Bowling to the races was a furious battle with him biting, striking, and kicking at his handlers. Never fully under control, he would next target his rider by biting, and, failing that, trying to rub him off on the rails.

Delaying the break became a habit. One observer noted, “Usually when the flag fell, he was turned the wrong way of the track, but when he saw the field was really off, the chestnut (sic) rogue would whirl and follow. He was so fleet that he would give an ordinary field a distance and catch it without seriously stretching his neck, and only the very best horses of his time could give him any kind of a race.”

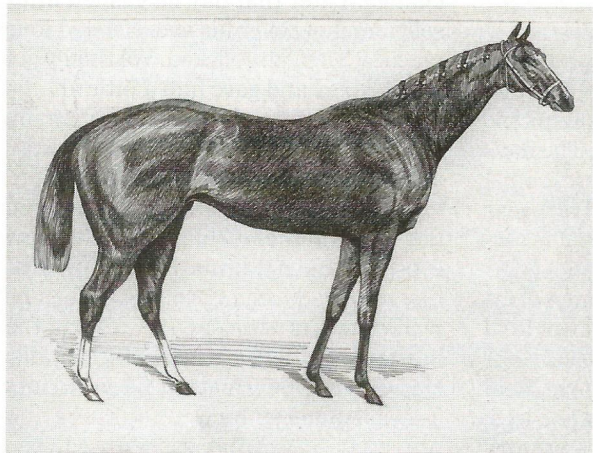
For everyone else, he was dangerous at both ends, even branded a man-eater, but for his owner he stood quietly, which made him McGrath's darling. After races, the bachelor McGrath would untwine the green and orange ribbons from the colt's mane and offer them as souvenirs to the ladies.

At 3 Tom Bowling started in Lexington in May, where he won a sweepstakes, taking both mile heats in 1:43½, a new record. In the Jersey Derby, he beat Belmont Stakes winner Springbok by five lengths, then met shocking defeat by Lizzie Lucas in the Ocean Hotel Stakes. He won the Robbins Stakes in a gallop and faced Springbok again in the Travers. They ran as a team until the eighth pole, when Springbok tripped and fell, losing his rider, and Tom Bowling sailed home to another effortless score. Having suffered a cut on the left fore leg in his Travers mishap, Springbok recovered but still couldn't beat him in the Jerome Stakes, when Tom set an unofficial record of 3:40 for two miles. In the Annual Sweepstakes, Tom Bowling beat his only opponent, Mart Jordan, setting another record for two miles in 3:37¼. His final start of the year was another easy win in the Dixie Stakes at Pimlico.

Tom Bowling continued his streak at 4. He set an American record for 1½ miles in 2:34¾ at Lexington, winning by a huge margin. He won the Monmouth Cup and then two days later, the Mansion House Stakes, both at 2½ miles before straining his left front tendon and retiring with 14 wins from 17 starts.

He was promised a home for life at McGrathiana until McGrath himself died in 1881. From McGrath's dispersal he passed through many hands, never staying long in one spot. In 1884 he left Kentucky for Montana, “where he was kept like a caged tiger,” returning to Kentucky in 1891. Unfortunately, Tom Bowling wasn't a good sire, getting just a handful of stakes winners including the good handicapper General Monroe.

In 1894 he was acquired by McGrath's nephew Richard A. McGrath and lived a few more years as a pensioner, dying in 1897 in Garrard County, Ky. at the age of 27. The man-eater, the wild horse, the great Tom Bowling finally found peace. **BH**



John Feebach's sketch of Tom Bowling  
from Walter Vosburgh's description

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