

“I had an interest in Saddlebred’s when I was too young to even know it,” says Adrian Neufeld. His father, Neil, purchased two or three at a Joe Fulkerth dispersal sale



in the early 1950’s.

As a young adult, Adrian was saving up for his pilot’s licence. His circumstances changed and he met Roger Dye, who showed him Saddlebred horses for sale. “One day out of your life changes everything,” says Adrian, who purchased a broodmare and a foal instead of his pilot’s licence and never looked back.

Skip 40 years into the future and meet Valenfire’s Attractive Image, Adrian’s current co-pilot who goes by the barn name “Fire.” He is an 18 year old chestnut Saddlebred gelding that has been in the Neufeld family from birth and has been passed through three generations: Neil Neufeld, brothers Gerald and Adrian, and Adrian’s daughter Lindsay.

Fire was the last colt raised by Neil. He owned the dam, Alberta’s Attractive Lady, and the sire is Valen-fire, located in Bowden. Neil gave Fire to his son Gerald. When Gerald did not have a place to keep Fire, he passed him to Adrian.

As a yearling, Fire’s life was almost cut short when he ran into a metal shelter and sustained a life-threatening cut, almost to his jugular. While some people thought Fire should be euthanized on the spot, he was taken to the vet and made a full recovery. Although there is still a scar, it has not prevented Fire from having a successful career.

During his show career, Fire was shown primarily in the country pleasure and halter classes by Adrian's daughter, Lindsay. One year, he ended up getting the Red Seal, Silver Seal, and Gold Seal in the Merit Awards with the American Saddlebred Horse Association of Alberta.



After his "official" show career had ended, Fire was used as a lesson horse and many young riding students learned to ride on him and even showed him. He has also been used as a vaulting horse. "He is an amazing horse," says Adrian, "It's kind of hard to describe. He will go all day and at the end of the day will be the same horse that he was at the beginning of the day."

Adrian and Fire have been involved with the Calgary Stampede's Extreme Cowboy Competition and with Spruce Meadow's Battle of the Breeds.

The inaugural Extreme Cowboy Competition saw Adrian being asked to build the obstacles. Since it wouldn't be fair for him to compete on his own obstacle course, Adrian and Fire were denied being entered. The second year, Adrian told the organizers, "Don't let me build any of the obstacles, I want to compete!"

In what is seen as a Quarter Horse competition, a flashy Saddlebred certainly stood out. One of the competitors from the USA approached Adrian, took one look at Fire, and said "Hmm... this should be interesting." By the end of the day, that same competitor went back to Adrian and commented on what a fantastic horse Fire was.

Fire has also spent more than 10 years competing with Adrian as part of Team Saddlebred at Spruce Meadow's Battle of the Breeds. For the last 5 or 6 years, Fire has competed in all five

events, although Adrian states that driving and trail are their best events. He was also shown at the Battle of the Breeds by daughters Lindsay and Lisa.

Adrian himself has been a part of the Battle of the Breeds through demonstrations at Spruce Meadows since 1984 and has not missed a year. "I'm the only one who



had been there from the beginning," comments Adrian.

"My goal was to reach 25 years, and I did that. Now, I'm at 29 years, so my new goal is 30 years," he says. "This whole journey was a family affair," says Adrian who recognizes the involvement of his wife Suzi and daughters Lisa and Lindsay.

Adrian has been battling cancer but refuses to let it dampen his spirits or interfere with his goals. "During this past year, I've had to put everything on hold but I had a goal," says Adrian, "My goal was to do Spruce Meadows." He wants to encourage people going through the same situation to keep a positive attitude and to keep going. "You rise to the occasion and you don't beat yourself up."

And, although Team Saddlebred has taken second placed 5 times in a row, they have never won. But expect to see Adrian and Fire there next year, fighting for the win.