

# What's in a Number?

By Angela Kirby

*Since its inception, Stolen Horse International, Inc., has touted the benefits of permanent identification from microchips to freeze branding to lip tattoos. Now NetPosse Executive Volunteer Coordinator Angela Kirby shares the story of a once-forgotten Arabian that goes back 21 years in her own words.*

One of the tasks of NetPosse volunteers is to attend area auctions and physically search for stolen and missing horses. We know from experience that these horses often travel through auctions, sometimes several times in a matter of weeks. But another aspect of NetPosse is to offer an Internet venue for people to try and find the history of a horse purchased whether online, from a private party or at these same auctions.

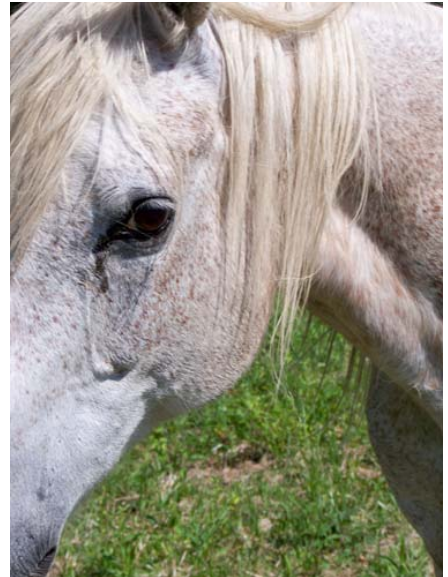
In the course of my volunteer work for NetPosse, I occasionally attend local auctions, but I try to leave that to others as I inevitably bring home a four-legged passenger. I don't have to have a truck or trailer or even a bidding number. I confess I'm shameless when I see a horse that I like at the right price.

This happened to me in April 2008, when I attended the auction with a friend. I used the friend's number to bid on a used saddle. I was looking to replace one of those stolen from me in August 2006. *Read that story at:* <http://www.netposse.com/stolenmissing/stolentack/angelatackALAugust06.htm>.

As my friend went outside to pay for the saddle and load it in my vehicle, a beautiful fleabitten gray Arabian gelding was ridden into the miniscule sales ring. I had viewed all the horses in the pens prior to the beginning of the auction but this one hadn't been there. I was struck by his typical Arabian features and quick response to the rider. With my friend outside, my heart sank as I watched a very large man drive the bid on the little horse to \$140. SOLD!

When my friend returned, I told him about the Arabian and how I thought he'd be perfect for my daughter to ride with the 4-H drill team she'd recently joined.

I sat there as other horses were run through the ring, but I continuously watched the man who'd bought "my" Arabian. After maybe 30 minutes of my internal struggle of whether or not I really needed this horse, I made my move. I approached the man and asked who he'd gotten the horse for (I prayed it wasn't him). He said for his son. Well, I had no qualms about offering to buy the Arabian, and that man didn't hesitate to turn a quick \$50 profit.



**Pinhooking a Stolen Horse?** I did what so many sellers and buyers do at these auctions – I pinhooked a horse – of course, I was brazen enough to do it right there in front of the auctioneer during the auction not out in the parking lot where many shady deals take place and obviously stolen horses are swapped around.

Well, my next problem was how did I pay for the horse? I didn't have almost \$200 cash on me. I told the man if he'd wait there I'd run to the ATM up the road and get his money. He said fine. Well, on the way out, I had a better idea. I remembered I knew the owner of the restaurant there, and he gladly cashed my check.

Next was figuring out how to get the horse home when I didn't have a truck or trailer. That problem was quickly resolved, too, because my friend had to drive by my pasture to get home.

So there I was with another horse to add to the herd. My daughter was so excited the next day when I presented her with the very personable Arabian. Because she is less experienced than I am, I saddled the horse up and took him for a ride around the pasture. I knew he was responsive and well trained. At the same time, I could feel his bottled up energy and desire to break loose into a much faster pace.



While I rode, I mentally began reviewing the stolen and missing horses listed on NetPosse. I couldn't help but think that someone might be missing this horse. Either I had gotten really lucky at the auction or someone was wondering what happened to their horse. Was there a stolen or missing fleabitten gray Arabian gelding on NetPosse.com?

Then it hit me. In the midst of the ride, I yanked out my cell phone and called Debi Metcalfe. She probably didn't catch half of what I said as the words tumbled out of my mouth. I had Debi pull up a page on the site and describe the horse's markings to me. There was a strong possibility ... was it him?

I returned to the round pen and got the camera out of the truck. I began taking close-up pictures of his facial and leg markings, hoping this would be enough to determine whether I had purchased a stolen horse since the one listed did not have the best identifiable pictures.

In the meantime, I allowed my daughter to ride the horse, but I let her know that we might have to return him to his rightful owner if he was stolen. She knows the nature of my work with NetPosse, and understood.

There were a few things we learned quickly about this horse. He "broke from the gate" in a split second and turned on a dime. I could easily hold him back even though he pranced beneath me, but if I let him have his head, he was gone!

Well, when my daughter rode out of the round pen into the pasture, the horse picked up a cue she wasn't ready for and he began running in large circles. I watched in amazement until he finally slowed enough for her to jump off unharmed and the little gelding not realizing that wasn't cool!

After an eventful morning, we packed up the truck to go back to the house, and when we arrived I immediately got online to compare my pictures of the horse my daughter named Captain Morgan to that of the stolen horse.

I was relieved for my family to note that this couldn't be the same horse due to the markings and coloring of the hooves. At the same time, I was truly hoping that we could bring closure to this horse's owner. It just wasn't meant to be.



The next thing I did was contact the person who ran the horse through the auction – a local horse dealer who ran an auction further south. I learned from him that he'd picked up the horse we called Captain along with another one from a farm in South Alabama. He intended to send both of them to a girls' camp for the summer but the one I bought was just too much horse. I completely understood. Unfortunately, I was at a dead end at this point, and decided we would just enjoy the horse that I knew was fairly aged.

However, there was one more option, but I kept forgetting about it. Over the next year, I kept telling myself I needed to check for a lip tattoo as I knew that any horse ever raced would have one. And from what I had observed of this Arabian, it was very likely he'd been on the track. While I didn't even know if Captain was registered, I believed he probably was.

Finally, in June 2009, it occurred to me to flip his lip ... and guess what ... there was his tattoo!

After taking a few pictures, I contacted the Arabian Jockey Club and was so impressed by their willingness to help. The lady gave me a few possibilities, but since I was unsure of the first character in the tattoo, neither of us could be sure which horse to research. She told me to give her a few days and she'd have an associate help research the number.

That was on Monday ... by Friday, I had a name and previous owner's information.



**So what's in a number?** A name, an age, a date of birth, a breeder, a HISTORY!

Turns out that our Captain Morgan is actually Reggae Beat. He was born May 5, 1988, on a Florida farm to the Bellamy Brothers. Yes, the Bellamy Brothers! So my horse has a claim to fame.

Captain was raced for several years and won about \$5,000. His sire is actually a very well-known racing Arabian – ZT Ali Baba.



**AliBaba**  
(c) Waldron Farms

Once I had the information from his registration papers, I did for my horse what I do all the time for other people ... I did an online search for his registered owners and within minutes was calling the wife.

When Captain's registered owner returned my call, she was so relieved to know that Reggae Beat had a great home. While she'd never searched for him, it wasn't until she heard my message that she discovered how happy she was to know what become of this Arabian she'd once adored.

Here is what I was told: Reggae Beat was donated to a boys' ranch in Florida in the mid-90s, but was still a stallion. This woman and her husband took him to train and then had him gelded. By doing this, they were able to sell him to another lady who went on to train him to do endurance, and the boys' ranch received the proceeds of the sale. She believes he was donated because he was infertile, as he was pastured with her rescued Arabian mare and she never took.

For the next couple of years, the lady I spoke with kept up with Reggae's new owner, but then fell out of touch. So she nor I have any idea where this horse was for the 15-year lapse before he came to be with me. I thought perhaps I could research endurance records, but that person entered him only in local events and his registration papers were never transferred. The registered owner had long since lost that woman's contact information.

**Life of Ease ...** When I started the quest to learn more about Captain, I didn't know if I would be successful on any level, and I certainly didn't expect to discover he had such a famous link. I pray that someone out there isn't truly missing him since the question of how he came to be at auction is still an open one.

However, Captain has a good home here on our 40-acre farm. Most days he is allowed to just be a horse and graze contentedly in the pasture with the herd, but every so often I saddle up Captain to do what he loves ... canter through the pastures and hills and stir up his memories of when I know he was a fabulous endurance horse.

If you have a horse you would like to find the history on, we invite you to list the horse on NetPosse.com. We have helped reunite many horses and former owners as well as discover a history the current owner has been seeking. It is possible to trace a lip tattoo through one of the breed associations. For more information on lip tattoos, please click here: [http://www.netposse.com/prevrec/tattoo\\_examples.htm](http://www.netposse.com/prevrec/tattoo_examples.htm).