

Profile

Propulsion

Power Player

Propulsion excels in Europe after a modest beginning in the U.S.

story by **Melissa Keith**



On August 2, 2015, a prominent Swedish trainer returned to the U.S. to fulfill an earlier wish. Daniel Redén was the successful bidder on Propulsion at the Meadowlands Summer Mixed Sale, bringing home the sales topper for Brixton Medical AB of Orsundsbro, Sweden. The young stallion sold for \$210,000. It was the second time Redén had pursued Propulsion, a Muscle Hill son out of the Andover Hall mare Danae 3,1:54.2 (\$529,099).

“I had seen him already as a yearling in Lexington, and I was close to purchasing him,” said Redén. “Instead, I bought Trixton (2012’s highest-priced trotting yearling) at \$360,000, and we could not afford two horses in that price class.”

Propulsion—then named Deyrolle—sold to Brittany Farms, Marvin Katz, Al Libfeld, Sam Goldband, Joe Sbrocco and Little E LLC for \$250,000 at the 2012 Lexington Selected Yearling Sale.

Bred by Bluestone Farms and Fredericka V. Caldwell, the colt did not make any pari-mutuel starts at 2. He did, however, race in four qualifiers at Red Mile during September and October 2013, not yet flashing the ability he would display with maturity, but made no breaks and timed in a personal best 1:56.2 (finishing third).

His first winning qualifier came May 3, 2014, when he edged out Revrac Harbour in 1:56.1 at The Meadowlands. Lightly campaigned by Tony Alagna at age 3 as well, Propulsion broke his maiden Aug. 28 at Woodbine Mohawk Racetrack with a 1:56.4 win in a conditioned event for 2- and 3-year-olds.

Trixton and Jimmy Takter outdueled Nuncio and John Campbell to claim the 2014 Hambletonian in 1:50.3, while classmate Propulsion was still finding himself during his sophomore season. He recorded three wins in eight purse starts, none of them stakes races, earning just \$30,040.

Redén remained interested in the still-developing colt, who was never worse than third from August through December.

“As a yearling, he was very good-looking and his pedigree is strong,” he said. “I liked him a lot. During Propulsion’s first season, I saw some races and followed him with one eye on the computer.”

“I thought that he had some chances to become a really good horse, but the line between ‘good’ and ‘one of the best’ in this sport depends on many things. Luckily for me, Propulsion has developed every year.”

Daniel Redén



Also following the colt closely was Cane Run Farm’s Elizabeth Caldwell, daughter of co-breeder Fredericka.

“Propulsion, he was immature as a yearling, pretty awkward,” she said, likening the high-withered horse to Danae’s first foal, world champion D’Orsay 4,1:51.4 (\$445,732). “I think he just needed some time to come into his own. He grew a lot between the time that we sold him and when I saw him at Tony Alagna’s barn at Red Mile, in August or September of the next year. It was a big difference.”

Propulsion found the Red Mile winner’s circle Oct. 4, 2014, trotting to his seasonal best 1:52.3 victory over Odds

On Amethyst. Redén, trainer for Bengt Ågerup’s Stall Zet stable, remained tuned in as he continued to improve.

“I thought that he had some chances to become a really good horse, but the line between ‘good’ and ‘one of the best’ in this sport depends on many things,” he said. “Luckily for me, Propulsion has developed every year.”

The trotter won two legs of The Meadowlands’ Super Bowl series early in his 4-year-old campaign for Alagna. In what would prove to be his last race on North American shores, Propulsion unleashed a 27.1 closing quarter on Tag Up And Go, charging home three-wide at the three-quarters for a 1:52.1 victory at The Meadowlands, July 24.

LATE BLOOMER / Above:

Unraced at 2, Propulsion broke his maiden at 3 in late August 2014 under the guidance of trainer Tony Alagna. **Opposite:** Although Alagna raced him lightly in the U.S., the stallion proved a quick study for trainer Daniel Redén after a move to Sweden at the end of 2015, winning several prestigious European races in 2016, including the Norrbottens Grand Prix, an event he ended up winning three years in a row.

After changing ownership at the Meadowlands Mixed Sale, the horse was in for the trip of a lifetime: to his new home at Redén’s base in Enköping, Sweden.

“I think he came to the Netherlands by plane from the U.S., and from there it takes maybe 18-20 hours (in a trailer) to reach my farm,” said the trainer.

Redén took charge of Propulsion’s career at a moment when the trotter was reaching a physical and mental

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Profile: Propulsion

prime. The 4-year-old stallion adapted well to his new surroundings.

"Quite soon, he learned how to train on my track, which is deep sand and clay, but I was unsure about his abilities at the racetrack," said Redén.

"When he made his debut at Solvalla that fall, he had a strong performance, and I had tested him at Solvalla in a very fast heat a couple of weeks before the race. By that time, I understood that he is some kind of a special horse."

On Oct. 7, 2015, Propulsion dispelled any lingering doubts as Redén drove him to victory that day at Solvalla. The race distance was 2,140 meters, whereas most North American races are still contested over the standard 1,609-meter (one-mile) distance. The trotter won twice more that season in 2,140-meter events at Solvalla and Gävle racetracks for new driver Örjan Kihlström.

"He won the first time he raced and continued to win as a 5-year-old, even though he had to fight much stronger

had matured so much, and he was gorgeous," she said, adding that training on straight tracks and occasionally racing barefoot may have contributed to his overseas success. "It's pretty interesting to see how clean-gaited he is. It looks like very little equipment to me, compared to some of our trotters over here."

Propulsion had trotting hobbles removed for his first European start, and currently races without them—a requirement for Elitlopp entrants. Third in their elimination for the "Elite Trot," Propulsion and Kihlström ended up fourth behind fellow American import Nuncio in the 2016 final. But with five more victories that season, and three place finishes, all in Group 1 European competition, there could be no real disappointment with the colt.

In the Åby Stora Pris, he captured the first one-mile heat, finished second to Un Mec d'Héripuré in the second heat, and ultimately finished second to his French adversary in the two-horse race-off final.

“He just has this other gear, like, ‘Am I really seeing this?’ It’s very exciting—I’ve been over to Europe to watch him now five times. I’ve been watching him, so I haven’t made it to Florida (for the winter) in the past few years.”

Elizabeth Caldwell

horses by that time,” Redén said. “So I must say that he was a quick learner, with our kinds of tracks and everything.”

Propulsion's 5-year-old season proved to be a breakthrough for the horse. He trotted the fastest of the Swedish year (1:11.2 kilometer rate for 1,640 meters) in the Prince Carl Philips Jubilee Cup at the Färjestad racecourse March 25. Leaving restricted company, his win streak continued, carrying him and Kihlström to Finland's top event, the Finlandia-Ajo. Propulsion outsprinted Tycoon Conway Hall and Anna Mix, setting a track record of 1:10.2 (kilometer rate) for 1,609 meters (one mile) and earning a coveted Elitlopp invitation.

Caldwell was reunited with Propulsion before the stallion's first Elitlopp.

"They brought him out for me to see him, and I was just blown away. He

Last year brought new challenges for Propulsion, including his first starts in France, and another shot at the Elitlopp, where he finished second in his elimination (to Nuncio) and the final (to Timoko) for catch driver Johan Untersteiner.

Redén, however, noted that the finest effort of Propulsion's career came in defending his title in the Hugo Åbergs Memorial on July 25, 2017, in a new Swedish record time of 1:08.1 (kilometer rate) for the mile.

"It's hard to say anything else about the Hugo Åbergs Memorial last year," he said. "That performance, in second line (stalking leader Twister Bi, from the two-wide path, throughout) the whole race, was spectacular."

Propulsion has embarked on his stud career without concluding his racing days. Svensk Travsport, the Swedish

national breed registry, approved him as a breeding stallion in November 2016, giving him a “high” rating on the basis of his racing achievements at age 5, deep pedigree, well-proportioned body, and ease of handling.

“I think that approximately 100 mares or more have been bred to him in Europe this season,” Redén said. “Of course, he will continue to stand stud next year and as long as he can after that.”

Caldwell said Cane Run had tried to access Propulsion for their mares this past breeding season. “I think Tony Alagna wanted to breed [mares] to him this year too, but it didn’t work out with the rules of shipping the semen over here,” she said. “I think they have to do a special quarantine, so I don’t know how that affects his race schedule.”

The Georgetown, Ky. breeding farm where Propulsion was foaled originally named him “Deyrolle,” after a famous Paris taxidermy shop. Caldwell said the subsequent name change suited his racing style in Europe, where the naturally “laid-back” trotter characteristically turns on the jets to close rapidly

over varied distances.

“He just has this other gear, like, ‘Am I really seeing this?’” Caldwell said. “It’s very exciting—I’ve been over to Europe to watch him now five times. I’ve been watching him, so I haven’t made it to Florida (for the winter) in the past few years.”

Propulsion has a full brother named Damien, who is destined for the Lexington yearling sale next fall. Unfortunately, a yearling full brother had to be euthanized, and Danae lost her Muscle Hill pregnancy at the end of the 2018 breeding season. Propulsion’s 3-year-old Yankee Glide half-sister was retained by co-owners Bluestone Farms and Fredericka Caldwell.

“We’re racing Deschanel 2,1:57, (\$67,380), and hoping that she’s going in the right direction,” Caldwell said. “Sometimes it just seems like they need a little extra time to figure it all out.”

Propulsion’s 4-year-old full sister, Dream Together 4,1:51.3 (\$647,348), set her mark in winning the Dr. John Steele Memorial at odds of more than 50-1 on Hambletonian Day at The Meadowlands.

Affectionately known as “Proppen”

to those who work with him, notably caretaker Ellinor Wennebring, Propulsion became the first horse ever to capture the prestigious Aabergs Memorial in Sweden three times in a row on July 31. He has now earned \$2.1 million in his career.

“He trains two times a week, intervals in the sand, nothing else,” Redén said. “All the other days, he stays in the paddock (outdoors) from early morning until noon.”

A relatively unscripted life suits the 7-year-old European star.

“I really don’t plan so much for him, but if he remains sound, then we’ll see,” Redén said. “I can’t say if we’re going for the Elitlopp 2019.”

What sets Propulsion apart, in the eyes of his trainer?

“His physique, his heart and lungs, his willingness to run in the races,” Redén said. “For me, he’s an extremely good-looking athlete, and it makes sense that he performs like he does.” **IB**

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