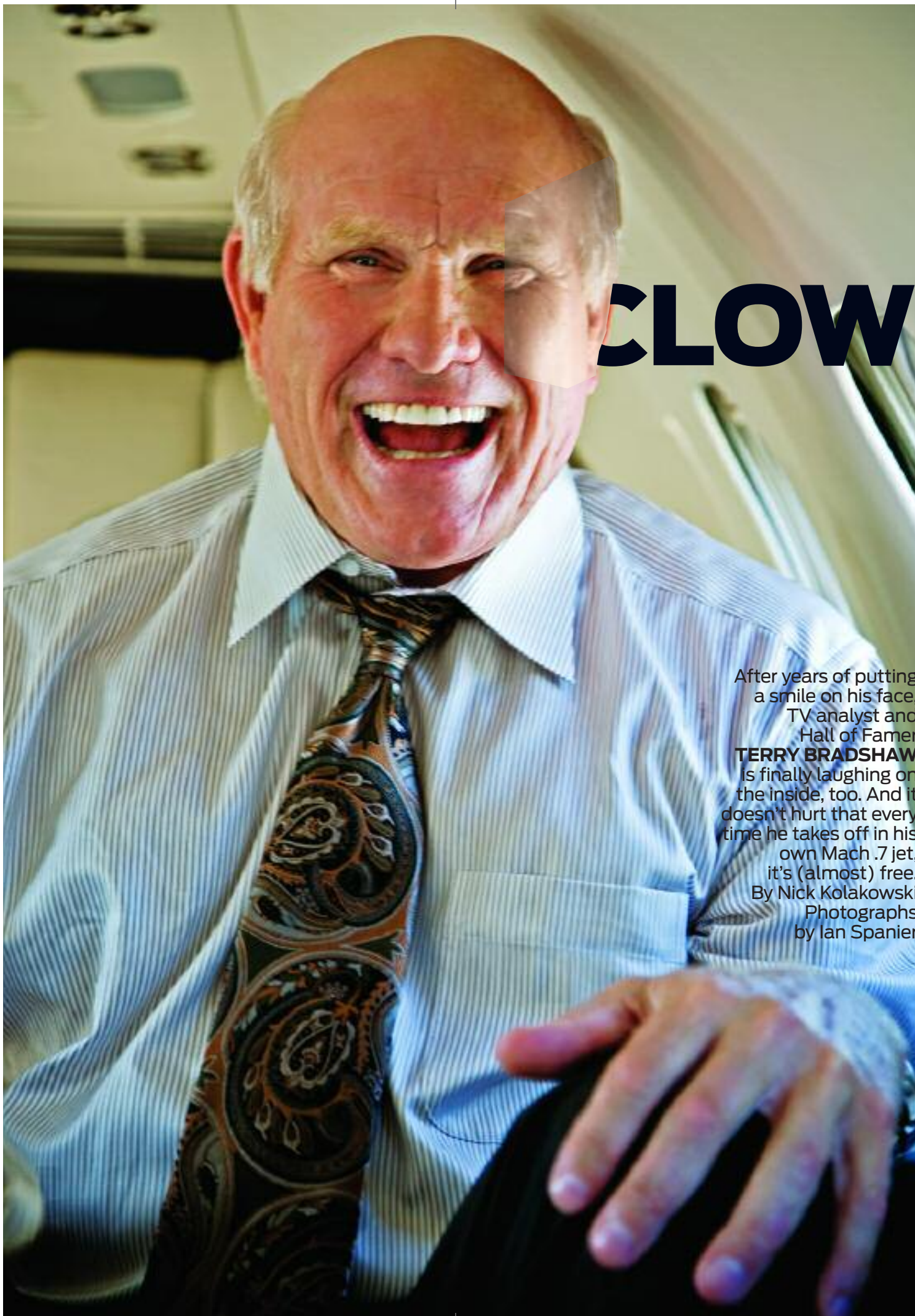


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CLOWN

After years of putting a smile on his face, TV analyst and Hall of Famer **TERRY BRADSHAW** is finally laughing on the inside, too. And it doesn't hurt that every time he takes off in his own Mach .7 jet, it's (almost) free.
By Nick Kolakowski
Photographs by Ian Spanier



erry Bradshaw folds the arms that won four Super Bowls and leans against the side of his white F-150 pickup as if tilting back in his chair on the set of Fox NFL Sunday. A smirk crosses his face, as it does every time he's about to launch into one of his antic yarns about the dumb-ass-ness of man, and from the wince around his eyes and the clench of his shoulders under his blue-and-white dress shirt, you can tell who is in for it this time. Showboating receivers and game-clock-mangling coaches can relax. Cue a certain dome-headed former quarterback from Louisiana, to get ready for a self-inflicted lickin'.

Our story opens in the Bahamas, where number 12 has flown down on a private jet and, after several days spent futilely slathering the melon with SPF80, discovers, much to his delight, that the country has no trade embargo with Cuba. "I walked into this one cigar place . . . I was like a kid in a candy store," he says. "I must have bought \$1,500 worth of Cubans. I put them onboard the plane when we headed back, just in my luggage like no big deal, because — well, for some reason, I forgot private planes need to go through customs."

(You can imagine Howie Long's body twitching like a lineman in anticipation of the verbal hit he's about to deliver or Jimmy Johnson, not exactly a man given to impulse control, blurting: "Oh, Terry, how could you?")

The jet lands Stateside, Bradshaw looks out the window and — oops — there on the tarmac is a customs agent and his cigar-crazed sniffer dog. (Jimmy again: "Maybe we should have thought this one through before getting onboard?")

"I'm thinking, 'Should I dump them down the commode?' It was \$1,500 worth of cigars," Bradshaw says. "I'm looking around for a place to hide the things. Maybe under the seat cushions."

(Now Howie's turn: "Oh, that's a great idea. Because no one would have thought to look under the bulges in the seats. . . . Hee hee.")

But Bradshaw, ever quick on his feet, has a better idea: Tucking the carry-on stuffed with Castro sticks under his arm, he makes a break for it. He marches off the plane — "Nice doggie, good doggie" — straight into customs. He strides past the guy who checks passports — "Great to see ya!" — and makes it to the next one, the steely-eyed agent who unzips your luggage and holds up your cupid-print briefs for your crew to see. He opens Bradshaw's bag and says, "Um, Mr. Bradshaw?"

Bradshaw's face freezes in a wide-eyed stare: "Yeeees?"

"Are these Cuban cigars?"

Still with the petrified smile, visions of Nancy Grace dancing in his head: "Yeeees."

A lengthy pause. Then: "Can I have one?"

"Yes! Take two! Please!"

In the end, Bradshaw made it back into the U.S. without a strip search or even any handcuffs being brandished, proving once again that, for a "dummy," he's pretty smart.

BRADSHAW TO HIS CPA . . . SCORES!

It's hard to say when the light bulb went on, exactly. It has been a long, at times excruciating, transition from the raw-boned, mistake-prone young quarterback ridiculed by the media for his purported lack of intelligence to the grandfatherly television analyst and part-time movie actor who plays the red-neck for laughs. As late as 1979, with two Super Bowl victories already behind him, Bradshaw endured the media glare prior to Super Bowl XIII defending himself against Dallas Cowboy linebacker Thomas "Hollywood" Henderson's devastating assessment: "[Bradshaw] couldn't spell *cat* if you spotted him the *c* and *t*." Bradshaw's Steelers, of course, defeated Henderson's Cowboys 35–31, Bradshaw passing for 318 yards and being named the game's MVP. (Henderson later admitted that when he uttered those words he was using cocaine.) Still, even today, many fans forget that of the two future Hall of Fame quarterbacks who squared off in that memorable game, Bradshaw was the one who called his own plays and was the master of the audible — changing plays at the line of scrimmage to counter what the defense had in store — while brainy Naval Academy grad Roger Staubach simply read from the script called in from the Dallas bench.

But one person will never doubt Bradshaw's genius. No, not famed Steelers running back Franco Harris or a film-studies professor enthralled with his performance in *Smokey and the Bandit II*. That person is Bradshaw's former accountant, who three years ago was so impressed with his client's financial acumen, he uttered four words that have, perhaps, never been spoken by any other accountant:

"Don't sell that plane."

At the time, Bradshaw owned a Lear 31, not an item typically found on a list of smart wealth-management strategies, and was considering buying an eight-passenger Lear 35. However, his accountant fretted that the upgrade might upset the delicate balance that had resulted in one of those once-in-a-lifetime earning statements.

When Bradshaw bought his first Lear, he did so largely to help navigate his increasingly far-flung business interests. The thing was, many of those interests — Fox, the various movie studios, TV-commercial sponsors and dozens of corporations that hired him to speak every year — paid for him to fly commercial, not private. So he made a calculated and decidedly un-flashy executive decision: Anytime someone was willing to foot the bill for his travel, he would let him, and have Million Air, the national general-aviation flight-services company, charter out his plane for a couple thousand dollars an hour.

Soon enough, Bradshaw's extravagance was chartered for 60 some hours a month. He was so effective at offsetting his usual finance, fuel and maintenance costs that when he did use the jet for the several non-funded business and personal trips each month, he essentially flew for free. "Maybe when all was said and done, at the end of the year it cost me, like, \$5,000," he says.

You can understand, then, why his accountant would be nervous about Bradshaw's buying a new plane. But although it required some persuasion, Bradshaw convinced the protective bean counter that he planned on using the Lear 35 to save on air and refueling time, not drive up his flight hours. "Frankly, I wish did it years ago," he says. "I have a need for speed."

RUN THE TAPE

Back to the game. To say Bradshaw was a great quarterback is like saying Gisele Bundchen looks good in a bathing suit. After coming into the league in 1970 as the top draft pick out of Louisiana Tech, he dominated the decade as surely as bad haircuts and leisure suits. If you lived in Pittsburgh at the time, you remember those games playing on every television set in every bar and home — Steelers fans falling to their knees in quasi-religious euphoria as Bradshaw stepped back after the snap and unleashed The Arm, the ball spiraling in the late-afternoon sunlight toward the waiting arms of John Stallworth or Lynn Swann, the caesura of a million people holding their breath, the moment of the touchdown, the roar going up, scaring the birds, sending the dogs to howling: "Yeah! Terry! Terry!"



They were good years for Pittsburgh civic pride — good years, at least on the surface, for the outgoing, 215-pound flaxen-haired country boy. In the days before free agency and collective bargaining agreements, the majority of players were shackled to their teams for the duration of their career. To watch old Steelers games now is to admire the almost telepathic ways longtime teammates communicated — Bradshaw threw the ball seemingly on instinct, knowing how his receivers moved even when they were obscured by opposing defenders as big and fast as rocket-propelled refrigerators.

Yet underneath it all, Bradshaw wasn't happy. A shoulder injury in 1974 meant he played in near-constant pain. Two marriages, the second to figure-skating champion JoJo Starbuck, ended in divorce. And, as always, there was the needling in the press questioning whether anyone was home upstairs. "I'm sick of it," he said in 1975. "Even when I play well I'm a dumbbell. I go to the trouble to have lunch with a lady reporter this week, and the first thing she asks me is, 'Terry, are you really that dumb?' I just

He leaps a fence with startling agility.
"That doesn't mean it doesn't still *hurt*."



walked away.” To this day, he is reluctant to discuss these years. “I’m proud of everything we accomplished,” he says. “But I don’t do well with looking back. I’m not comfortable with reunions, with rehashing yesterday.”

His career wound down in 1983, against the Jets in the last game ever played in New York’s Shea Stadium. Bradshaw, suiting up despite having to endure an almost Biblical amount of hurt thanks to a recent elbow surgery, hurled a touchdown pass — and felt a snap. (Actually, it was more like “a knife being jammed into my elbow,” he says.) That pass, his second touchdown of the game, was the last he would ever throw. The two TDs did, at least, allow him to finish his career with two more touchdowns (212) than interceptions (210).

THE SECOND HALF

“**W**ith professional sports, there has to be another career,” Bradshaw says. Not for financial reasons — even with endorsement deals that paled next to his current haul (after his first Super Bowl win he made a grand total of \$1,250 endorsing cars), Bradshaw had enough money by the end of his playing career never to have to work again. He just needed something else to do.

In ’81, with his days on the field numbered and Pittsburgh missing the playoffs for the first time in 10 years, CBS asked him to be a guest commentator during the playoffs. Network brass must have liked what they heard, because two years later, they tracked him down on his family’s Louisiana ranch and offered him \$100,000 a year to join the regular rotation. “You get to sit back and watch games with great people. There you go,” says Bradshaw, describing the complicated analysis he performed before accepting the deal.

Of course, after years of midweek practices, film sessions, training camp and off-season conditioning, Bradshaw still had some hours to fill. “I’m a sophisticated country boy who has ADD. I need a lot of stuff to keep me busy,” he says. “There’s a lot out there; I love activity.” Which explains the country music he recorded (“It was a bet. I won. There you go”) and the quarterhorse-breeding operation he started (“I had a farm with studs out the cahoots”), and even, to an extent, his first Lear (“I’ve always been an aviation freak, always loved airplanes, always wanted to own one”).

Then, in 1999, his third marriage ended in divorce. This time, the dark moods that accompanied other major setbacks wouldn’t go away. There you go.

Bradshaw, as he later revealed in his 2001 memoir, *It’s Only a Game*, had battled clinical depression for much of his adult life. But unlike in the ’70s, when he suffered frequent anxiety attacks after games, there was now an effective treatment for his affliction. He was prescribed Paxil, later became a spokesperson for the antidepressant and a leading advocate for raising public awareness about depression, particularly in men. Maybe it was the serotonin talking, or the all the money he was making with his Lear, but that, it seems, is when the light bulb turned on.





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“I don’t know what it is. I’ve got this huge villa in Westlake, Texas, but my ranch is the only place I want to be.”

outside and found one of his mares giving birth. There just was one problem: He didn’t even know she was pregnant. “I’ve learned a lot since then,” he says.

Today, Bradshaw owns 50 horses, including eight world-champion mares, contentedly chewing grass under his watch. Leaping a fence with startling agility given his wear-and-tear (“That doesn’t mean it doesn’t still *hurt*”), he bounds into a field of nonplussed mares and conducts an impromptu inspection. “You just walk around and look,” he says, patting one on the back. “She’s big-hearted, has a pretty head . . . not a heavy-muscled mare. Just look at that shine.”

“My grandfather owned Clydesdales for farming,” he says, clambering back over the fence. In a few months he plans to add cattle to his spread, bringing him back, full circle, to his country-boy roots.

A short time later, while sitting around the kitchen table of his single-story ranch house — which boasts high ceilings, wood-lined rooms and sweeping views of fields and wooded hills — Bradshaw talks about what draws him to this land. “I don’t know what it is. I’ve got this huge villa in Westlake, Texas, four bedrooms on a golf course, the whole works — but this is the only place I really want to be,” he says. He has changed out of the dress shirt into a heavily faded, probably once-purple wife-beater (it’s now more the color of boiled liver) from what looks like the early Paleolithic Age. When he stands, the material is so threadbare, it practically weeps as it stretches in vain to extend to belt level. This, of course, leaves a perfect silver-tufted spot in front for scratching — which Bradshaw proceeds to make contented use of.

Then he grabs a couple of spinning rods and leads the way to the pond to fish before the sun goes down. His battered shoulder and ice-picked elbow seem surprisingly supple — the lure soars, tracing a silvery arc in the deepening light before plunking onto the water’s still surface. Bradshaw breaks into a booming laugh, one that seems drawn from every inch of his massive frame. Who’s the dumb one now? Here in rolling hill country, among the horses and leaping bass, the look on his face isn’t joking or wise, but something else entirely: that of a man who has finally found a measure of peace. ■

HOME

From the airport, Bradshaw can drive out of Dallas and head north, strip malls and cloverleaf highways giving way to two-lane roads slicing through rolling green hills. After about an hour and a half, you zip past a sign marking the Oklahoma border; a few minutes later, you take a right onto a sun-dappled road that runs between rows of scrub oak. And you run smack into a bulldozer.

The 780-acre ranch Bradshaw owns in southern Oklahoma is something of a work in progress (the construction equipment is for a show barn he’s building by the front gate), which is fine by him. Besides being both a cash cow and a convenient way to visit his family, his Lear offers another benefit: Bradshaw can jet off to his favorite cigar isle or a *Tonight Show* appearance (like the time Jay Leno tried for the segment’s entirety to signal to Bradshaw that his fly was open) and be back in no time pattering among his quarterhorses.

Despite having grown up in Louisiana, Bradshaw hasn’t always been a horse whisperer. Soon after buying his first ranch, he went