

Fine Wine

BY LENNY SHULMAN

It takes about 30 seconds, but Pam Robinson corrects herself. She has just stated that she hasn't had a vacation in 20 years since she and her husband, Jim, started Brandywine Farm outside Paris. Then she remembers the three-day trip she took with her sisters to Gatlinburg, Tenn., to catch a Dolly Parton show and stage a shopping spree.

"That's it," she said. "I bowl in a farm managers' league Thursday nights, and Jim goes cycling and also bird-hunts with Fred Mitchell of Clarkland Farm. Why would I want to go on a vacation when I have everything right here?"

"Everything" encompasses 500 acres three miles off the Paris bypass and about 140 Brandywine-owned mares plus another 80 or 90 boarders, a feline or two, canines McKenzie and Einstein, and a variety of exotic birds that drum up a racket when strangers visit their home. The Robinsons have just rolled 450 bales of hay off the field, and Jim frets that the fences need repainting. Nearly 100 yearlings are starting their prep work for the upcoming sales. Who has time for a vacation?

The Robinsons, both in their mid-60s and married for more than 40 years, bring the passion for horses necessary to thrive in this relatively insular world, yet they came to it down rather non-traditional

paths. Jim is a retired electrical engineer for a major telecommunications company, and Pam gave up a career as an exercise physiologist and researcher who oversaw numerous programs at the University of North Carolina. She directed a laboratory that served as a regional testing center for elite swimmers and was a member of the U.S. Olympics physiological testing committee. She now applies that knowledge to elite athletes with four legs instead of two.

After building a farm (the original Brandywine) in North Carolina and eventually upgrading their mares to the point where they were transporting and breeding dozens of them to Kentucky stallions and selling yearlings in the Bluegrass, the Robinsons decided the road trips were no longer worth it. Leaving academia and North Carolina behind, they purchased 100 acres outside Paris and established the current Brandywine (named after a beloved Irish Setter). They have since added 400 acres to that total, including an annex that is home to 14 retired broodmares.

On that land the Robinsons have raised grade



Pam and Jim Robinson keep raising stakes winners at Brandywine Farm

ANNE M. EBERHARDT



I winners Danza, Itsmyluckyday, Majestic Harbor, Ruler On Ice, and Secret Compass, all of whom were co-bred by Brandywine and Rob Whiteley's Liberation Farm. Whiteley and the Robinsons were partners from 2008-12, after which the partnership was dissolved and Brandywine bought out Whiteley's interest in about 40 broodmares. The feel at Brandywine is still that of a hands-on mom-and-pop operation although the horse population dictates that Mom and Pop need up to 10 staff members assisting them around the farm.

"They do a fantastic job," said Mark Toothaker, head of stallions at Spendthrift Farm. "They've raised so many runners, and it's not by accident. They raise them to get runners.

My wife and I have a few mares and we send them to Pam and Jim to be foaled and bred back, and we couldn't be happier with the results we get. And no one ever beats them to the breeding shed; they're always there first with their mares. They have a relentless work ethic."

"We bred 233 mares this year," said Pam. "Of course, not all ours. We have a really good client base and have picked up quite a few new clients as well as some that have been with us for 20 years."

The farm is buzzing now with yearling sales season around the corner as Brandywine has begun prepping more than 90 yearlings for Keeneland's September sale and a handful for the Fasig-Tipton July auction. The sales yearlings are turned out each night at the beginning of the process. As the auctions approach, they will go out every other night so they become accustomed to re-



During prep season, yearlings are walked daily from their barns to the free walker

MICHELLE PITTS PHOTOS

maining in a stall, which they will have to do at the sale venue. They are hand-walked and groomed for the first couple of weeks, then will have a period of time eight-10 weeks before the sales where they get more and more exercise.

The yearlings are walked daily from their barns to the free walker, where they start out doing 10 minutes and get up to 40 minutes by the time they ship to the sale grounds. The yearlings come off the walker in pairs, with one going to work on an underwater treadmill, starting at five minutes and working up to 15 minutes at a good clip, striding out against resistance.

"It's individualized for each horse," Pam said. "Some want more work; others you don't want to overtax.

"When they come out of the treadmill, myself and a staff member are on either side of them, one of us hosing them off and the other holding them. I run my hands down their legs and put green jelly (liniment) on them, so I'd say I touch every sales yearling's legs every other day, and somebody else is touching them on the off day."

The yearling that doesn't go into the underwater treadmill on any given day heads for the round pen, where Denise Purvis, who is Brandywine's foreman at the sales, lunges them. Each yearling then gets hosed off, groomed, has its feet picked, gets liniment, and heads back to their barn.

"This goes on in pairs all day long, from 7:30 in the morning to whatever time we finish at night," said Pam.

The results justify the long hours. Ruler On Ice came off the farm to win the 2011 Belmont Stakes (gr. I). Itsmyluckyday won the Holy Bull Stakes (gr. III) in 2013 and was the runner-up in that year's Preakness Stakes (gr. I) before taking the Woodward Stakes (gr. I) the following season. Danza, winner of the 2014 Arkansas Derby (gr. I), checked in third in the Kentucky Derby Presented by Yum! Brands (gr. I) after a troubled trip. Majestic Harbor has won four graded stakes, including the 2014 Gold Cup at Santa Anita Stakes (gr. I) and is still going strong at age 8 in 2016.

"I hope I'm able to take some of the knowledge I acquired working with elite human athletes for 25 years and apply it to horses," said Pam. "I think we've produced pretty good racehorses from limited funds—we don't go out and buy million-dollar mares. We just try to do the best we can for them in their development."

Added Jim Robinson: "There are so many factors along the way. You foal them, raise them, and then sell them. Somebody



ADAM COBLANESE/RYRA

Grade I winners off of Brandywine Farm (clockwise from top left: Itsmyluckyday, Danza, and Ruler On Ice

breaks them, and somebody else trains them, and finally they're ready to race and you put a jockey on them. There are an infinite number of factors and so many people who touch these horses. You can't always tell which youngsters are going to go on and develop. One of our grade I winners was the only horse we didn't nominate to the Breeders' Cup."

True animal lovers, the Robinsons tend to retire mares rather than sell them. Usually playing in the \$20,000-\$75,000 range, they purchased 20 mares last year. Ideally, they like mares 12 or younger from strong female families, and are willing to forgive mares that are unraced due to injuries. While Pam also wants to see a "big rump" on prospective purchases, Jim likes "a pretty head." Some of the farm's top broodmares include Royal Irish Lass, who is out of three-time graded stakes winner and millionaire Irish Linnet. Brandywine bought her from Liberation for \$210,000 and sold an Uncle Mo colt out of her last September for \$300,000. That colt is in training with John Shirreffs for Jerry and Ann Moss.

The Robinsons also have Champagne Sparkle, a Street Boss mare out of Cham-

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SKIP DICKSTEIN

CODY PHOTOGRAPHY

GRADED RUNNERS BRED (OR CO-BRED) BY BRANDYWINE FARM

| | |
|---------------|-----------------|
| Danza | Majestic Harbor |
| Debt Ceiling | Ruler On Ice |
| Itsmyluckyday | Secret Compass |
| Jody Slew | Vision in Gold |

pagne Royale and a half sister to Majestic Harbor and Danza. Champagne Sparkle has a Drosselmeyer colt being prepped for the September sale and a Malibu Moon filly at her side. Champagne Royale is one that Brandywine did sell after she produced the two grade I winners, getting \$825,000 for her.

"We couldn't afford not to sell her," said Pam, who reached over and lifted Champagne Royale's picture off an end table in the living room. "And Champagne Sparkle is probably the prettiest, nicest mare we've ever owned. We

intended right from the beginning not to sell her. She's in foal to Carpe Diem."

They've also kept a filly named Champagne Ice out of Champagne Glow. Champagne Glow is the dam of Ruler On Ice and grade I winner Champagne d'Oro. Twenty-eight now, Champagne Glow is out in a Brandywine paddock and best buddies with Grand Charmier, the granddam of 2006 champion 3-year-old filly Wait a While. Champagne Ice is carrying her first foal, by Distorted Humor.

The Robinsons are duly proud of



A yearling can spend up to 40 minutes in the free walker

Promenade Colony, who at 24 is still an active broodmare.

“I was going to retire her this year; she has a nice yearling and had a very nice foal this year, and she looks like she’s 16. She’s fit as a fiddle and the vet said to go ahead and breed her, so we sent her to the shed and she got in foal on one cover. We’re hoping for a filly we can keep,” said Pam. “She’s the granddam of (multiple grade I winner) Cavorting and the dam of Promenade Girl, who

is a graded stakes winner. It’s good right now to be the granddam of Cavorting.”

Including some client mares, Brandywine does matings for some 170 broodmares per season, a daunting task that requires continuous study. For their own mares, the Robinsons generally play in the \$25,000-\$30,000 stud fee range. They have invested heavily in various Share the Upside programs, most notably with Spendthrift Farm, which started the incentive program that has now spread to many stallion stations. In exchange for breeding to a stallion in its first two years at stud and paying the full stud fee both years, a breeder gets a lifetime breeding right to that stallion for free. The Robinsons were one of just a handful of breeders to hit on Into Mis-



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chief when he became available in the program, and he has since become a sought-after stallion.

“We invested heavily in the Spendthrift program,” Pam said. “We have two shares in every Share the Upside Spendthrift horse, and four in Danza, since we bred him and are very much in love with him. We’ve done similar programs with Overanalyze at WinStar, the horses at Darby Dan, and Graydar at Taylor Made. If it doesn’t work out, what have you lost? It might cost you a couple of thousand dollars more in the short term. Even

a horse like Notional, who didn’t make it in Kentucky and is in a regional market, we can sell our season to people in that region. Someone is usually interested in using it.”

Said Spendthrift’s Toothaker, “They’ve taken the program to another level. They have enough lifetime breeding rights where it will cut down enormously on their stud fees; they’ll be breeding free on a significant number of their mares.”

The Robinsons try and get around to see most of the Kentucky stallions before making their decisions, but have also relied on the advice of their good friend Fred Mitchell, who along with his family bred Beholder in the name of their Clarkland Farm.

“Fred told us that Cairo Prince (at Airdrie Stud) was a good-looking horse, and that we should breed to him,” Pam said. “We don’t usually go to one sight unseen, but Fred is as good as they come, and we got a very nice foal by Cairo Prince. He also recommended Country Day, and we ended up buying a mare Fred had in foal to that one.”

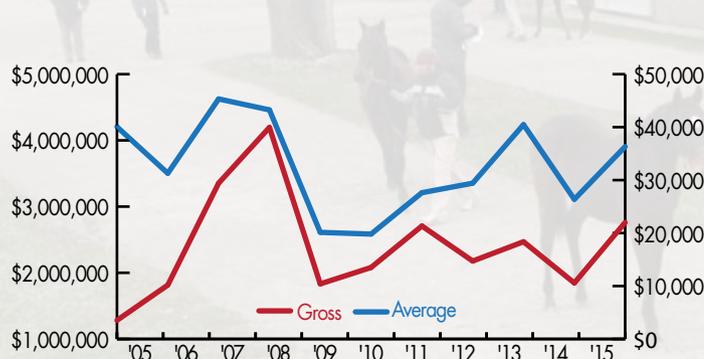
It’s not the worst method in the world, according to Jim. “I’m not so sure you’re any worse off breeding to a stallion that you haven’t looked at,” he said. “There are plenty of very good stallions you may not want to breed to off their looks.”

Said Mitchell, “They’re as hard-working a couple as you’d want to see and devoted to their horses. Jim foals all those mares, and they’re there for almost all of them. I couldn’t have a better friend in the world than Jim Robinson.”

The interview completed, it’s time to take a couple of photos with their dogs and then get back to work. Pam complains how her knees ache after climbing down off the hay-baling tractor, and Jim says there are some days where you’d rather be somewhere else. The fences still need paint, and there are worries about the shape of the yearling market. But these are the concerns of people still in love with what they do and who can’t imagine any other path that would have brought them to the present any happier.

“You have to be downright crazy to do this, and it has to be a downright passion,” Pam said. “And that passion is still running strong.” **BH**

BRANDYWINE YEARLING SALES CONSIGNMENTS



KEENE/ANDZ PHOTO