

Saratoga Sale Finishes With Upswings

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Photo: Skip Dickstein

After a [Bernardini](#) colt she bred brought \$1.2 million during the second and final session of the Fasig-Tipton Saratoga select yearling sale, Nancy Dillman declared she was going to step outside the Humphrey S. Finney Pavilion and "let out a good, big yahoo!" The Louisville, Ky., resident wasn't the only one who felt like celebrating as one of the world's fanciest Thoroughbred auctions ended its run the evening of Aug. 9 in upstate New York.

At a time of economic turmoil and uncertainty here and abroad, the sale generated a series of impressive results, including an average price that increased 15.9% from a year ago. The gross revenue rose 1.2% even though 15 fewer horses were sold than in 2010 and the median price grew 4.2%. In addition, the auction's buy-back rate dropped to 22% from 28% in 2010

"I would describe it as a damn good horse sale," said Fasig-Tipton president Boyd Browning during a post-sale press conference in which he praised consignors for sending the company some of their top yearlings in terms of pedigree and conformation. "We're very pleased, not only for what it means for Saratoga in 2011 and in the future, but also because it came at a very good time for all of our overall industry. Hopefully, this will help propel future yearling sales in 2011, which will lead to stronger November sales, which will lead to increases in the 2-year-old market next year. All of our markets are interrelated and strength and confidence are important to any marketplace, particularly in the world that we've been living in."

The gross for the 103 horses that were sold was \$32,892,000. The average was \$319,340 and the median was \$250,000, which equaled the sale record established in 2009.

"I feel relieved," said consignor Dan Kenny of Four Star Sales. "When you see the world economy falling all around you, it gives you some pause and causes loss of sleep. Now, we've gotten over the hurdle. The people of wealth have shown that they're not afraid to come and compete for horses, and that helps us all."

No shopper was more enthusiastic than Sheikh Mohammed, who spent \$8,530,000 through his bloodstock manager, John Ferguson, to acquire 13 yearlings. The Dubai ruler's expenditures accounted for 25.9% of the auction's gross. Other buyers who bought horses for Sheikh Mohammed's family, friends, and associates included English trainer Mark Johnston and Rabbah Bloodstock. In addition, there were other European bloodstock agents and horsemen who spent a lot of time with Sheikh Mohammed's entourage and made purchases.

Ferguson signed the sale ticket for Dillman's Bernardini colt. The spiffy bay yearling's price was the second session's most expensive and he shared the auction's top-priced honors with a [Medaglia d'Oro](#) —Supercharger colt that Ferguson had acquired during the sale's Aug. 8 opening session. Both Medaglia d'Oro and Bernardini stand at Sheikh Mohammed's Darley operation in Kentucky, and Bernardini was a homebred champion and classic winner for the Saratoga sale's biggest spender.

Mill Ridge Farm's sales division consigned the Bernardini colt for Dillman, who is one of the Central Kentucky

nursery's long-time clients. She also bred Diminuendo (by Diesis), who was a European champion in 1988.

"Mill Ridge is a farm that produces countless good horses, so when you see a really good, well-made horse coming off a farm like Mill Ridge, you've got to pay attention," Ferguson said. "We loved him because he was a so athletic; he could really move. Horses have to have (good) conformation, but at the end of the day, they have to be athletes as well, and he just looked like a really athletic horse."

Ferguson added that the Kentucky-bred colt probably would be sent to Europe to race. Produced from the winning Carson City mare Eastern Bunnette, the yearling is a half brother to 2011 Apple Blossom Handicap (gr. I) winner [Havre de Grace](#) (by Saint Liam), who has earned more than \$1.5 million.

"He's was very exceptional horse and we're delighted, obviously, for Sheikh Mohammed to have him; he has been a big supporter of our farm," said Mill Ridge's Headley Bell. "This colt was so beautifully balanced and so agile, and he was always attentive to things. He was everything you would ever want in a horse and then he had a pedigree to match. If a horse is going to bring that kind of money, I think he's the one."

Trainer Dale Romans, who saddled [Shackleford](#) to win this year's Preakness Stakes (gr. I), purchased the second session's second-most-expensive yearling, a \$775,000 son of [Unbridled's Song](#) _ named Whippendale. Romans, who was acting as agent in the transaction, said the gray or roan colt would be syndicated for racing purposes and that Texan Mike Rutherford would be one of the investors.

Lane's End consigned Whippendale on behalf of Florida-based Kinsman Farm, which is owned by the family of the late George Steinbrenner. Out of grade I winner Dream Supreme (by Seeking the Gold), the smooth-walking Kentucky-bred yearling is a half brother to three stakes winners, including grade I winner [Majestic Warrior](#) _ (by [A.P. Indy](#) _).

The second session's results included a gross of \$16,737,000 for the 54 yearlings that were sold. The average was \$309,944 and the median was \$225,000. The buy-back rate was 19.4%.