







Mill Ridge Back in the Sire Game

Thursday, July 12, 2018 at 3:29 pm | [Back to: Shared News, Today's Edition](#)

    94   36

Updated: July 12, 2018 at 7:24 pm

[Previous Story](#) | [Next Story](#)

By **Sid Fernando**

Headley Bell, managing partner of Mill Ridge Farm in Lexington, favors long-sleeved button-down shirts and khakis, is exceedingly polite and gentlemanly, and has the unaffected air of a country squire about him. He has the pedigree to back up this image, as the grandson of Hal Price Headley, one of the founders of Keeneland, an exemplary horseman, and the master of the legendary Beaumont Farm; and as the son of Alice Chandler, now 92, who established Mill Ridge in 1962 on Beaumont land on the death of her father, stood world-class sires Diesis and Gone West, and bred Epsom



Oscar Performance | *Four Footed Fotos*

Derby winner Sir Ivor 53 years ago. If you put the microscope to him, Headley Bell is a fifth-generation horseman and his son Price Bell Jr., who is a part of the Mill Ridge equation as well as a partner in Bell's noted bloodstock consultancy Nicoma, is sixth generation.

Mill Ridge sits on 650 acres—Alice Chandler inherited 286 acres to start the farm—and is home to about 200 head nowadays, including 85 mares, mostly boarders for a group of high-end clients. At the moment it stands one semi-private horse, **Keep Up** (Unbridled's Song), and before him stood Johar (Gone West), Commendable (Gone West), and Anees (Unbridled) after the commercially robust era of Diesis and Gone West. The farm has the capability to stand six stallions as a boutique operation.

Bell has been managing Mill Ridge since 2008 and in recent years he'd "been navigating the waters, really waiting for the right opportunity" for the next commercial stallion prospect for the farm. Last week, a few days before announcing it to the press, Bell called to say that Mill Ridge had its horse. He is John and Jerry Amerman's four-year-old homebred **Oscar Performance** (Kitten's Joy—Devine Actress, by Theatrical {Ire}), a multiple Grade I winner at two and three and the sensational winner of the Gill Poker S. on the turf at Belmont in his season debut in mid-June. True to his name, the athletic bay had indeed put up an Oscar-worthy performance by shattering a 20-year track record with a final time of 1:31.23 for the mile.

Altogether, Oscar Performance is a winner of seven of 12 starts and \$1,967,632 to date, and his notable wins also include the GI Belmont Derby and the GI Secretariat S. at Arlington, both at a mile and a quarter last year, and the GI Breeders' Cup Juvenile Turf at a mile, a race in which he set fractions of 1:09.44 and 1:21.07 on his way to 1:33.28, in 2016. Bell noted that the 16-hand colt is athletic, attractive, physically correct, and races Lasix-free, aside from being handier and faster than most of the Kitten's Joys.

Back in March in Ocala—yes, at Craig Bernick's annual crawfish boil at Glen Hill Farm—Bell had mentioned that he was interested in Oscar Performance, but it wasn't until about a week before the Poker, Bell said, that he and his son had approached the colt's owner/breeders about tying up the colt for Mill Ridge.

Mill Ridge Back in the Sire Game *Continued*

Syndication

It helped that the Amermans are clients of the farm and that Bell is their pedigree advisor and had played a hand in Oscar Performance's mating. Also, the Amermans board their mares at the farm—Oscar Performance was foaled at Mill Ridge—and enjoy an excellent relationship with Alice Chandler and her son and grandson.

"We are mutually fans of each other, that's number one," Bell said. "And when this horse had demonstrated his talents early on, it became a no brainer. He won the Breeders' Cup Juvenile Turf so well and then went on and was the best at three on turf for his age, and his numbers were so strong. I know the only thing you might have contemplated was the turf angle—but we considered that an opportunity. It was fabulous because the Amermans had come in about a week before the Poker, and that's when we kind of planted the seed, because it had been seven months since he'd run before. Strategically, we felt if he won the Poker, it was time to be thinking about setting up the structure [of the syndicate]. Little did we know he was going to break the track record. The Amermans are great and the horse is great, in our opinion, so it's a great marriage. Mill Ridge will be the syndicate manager."

Mill Ridge itself owns only five mares, but Bell noted that his access to a "wide swath of relationships" was an attraction to the Amermans. "We've got the best clients. We work with the best, as far as I'm concerned. We love our people. Ultimately, the goal is to make the stallion, and we—and the Amermans—will be working towards that goal. He's a horse we believe in," Bell said.

To that end, Bell said the horse would be syndicated into 40 shares, with the Amermans retaining 10 shares. At the moment, 15 shares are being offered for \$75,000 each with a projected stud fee of \$15,000 based on what Oscar Performance has accomplished to date. After Oscar Performance is retired later this year, Bell said the other 15 shares will be offered at market value, which could be as high as \$125,000, he speculated, if the colt were to win the GI Breeders' Cup Mile and stand for \$25,000. The initial offering is a chance to get into the horse at a potentially discounted rate, and the traditional 40-share syndicate structure that was also used for Diesis and Gone West is transparent and a straightforward mechanism designed to attract owner/breeder participation—an important foundation for making a stallion.

Bell said the horse would be managed judiciously at stud with a cap of 140 mares, and each shareholder will receive a bonus season the first four years and thereafter will participate in the bonus pool. He also noted that any shareholder that doesn't initially get a mare in foal on his or her share season would be compensated \$15,000 from the bonus pool.

Pedigree

Bell is a pedigree guy and has an obvious penchant for turf racing and turf sires. For clients, he's been associated with the matings of Arc winners Trepolino (Sharpen Up {GB}) and Suave Dancer (Green Dancer), Breeders' Cup Mile winner Artie Schiller (El Prado {Ire}), European champion Rainbow View (Dynaformer), and Kentucky Derby winner Barbaro (Dynaformer), among many others. When he called last week, he was preparing a trip to Belmont to watch Analyze It, a colt he bred with his wife and Nicoma, run second by a head in the GI Belmont Derby. Analyze It is from the first crop of the Phipps-bred turf star Point of Entry (Dynaformer).

Likewise, Oscar Performance was bred for turf. His sire Kitten's Joy (El Prado {Ire}) was a U.S. turf champion in 2004; his dam Devine Actress was a winner on turf and a stakes winner on all-weather; and his broodmare sire Theatrical (Ire) was a U.S. turf champion in 1987. Oscar Performance's brother Oscar Nominated is, like him, a bona fide turf horse and a graded-stakes winning millionaire.

Mill Ridge Back in the Sire Game *Continued*

Because horses like Analyze It, Oscar Performance, and Oscar Nominated have flourished in recent all-turf domestic careers— and because a stallion like Kitten's Joy was able to lead the general sire list in the US in 2013 primarily with turf and all-weather runners—Bell correctly sees future opportunities expanding both here and abroad for horses like Oscar Performance. This turf "revolution" was examined in detail in an earlier column [here](#), and there's no doubt that the landscape now is better situated to take advantage of turf horses. Kitten's Joy, in fact, put an exclamation mark to it a few days after the Oscar Performance announcement when his son Roaring Lion won the G1 Coral-Eclipse S. at Sandown over 10 furlongs. Two years earlier, another son of Kitten's Joy, Hawkbill, had won the same race.

Bell said he was one of the few outside Ken and Sarah Ramsey to initially use Kitten's Joy, and the reason for his attraction was his sire El Prado, the first son of Sadler's Wells to make an impact on dirt racing in the U.S., something that continues through his outstanding son Medaglia d'Oro at Darley. Bell's attraction, however, wasn't the Sadler's Wells part of the pedigree as much as it was El Prado's dam, Lady Capulet. Bell thinks the speedy and precocious El Prado, a champion Irish 2-year-old, took more after his dam than sire, and that might be either insight or sentimentality, if not both, shaping his opinion.

Lady Capulet was bred by Claiborne and was by Sir Ivor from Cap and Bells, by Tom Fool. Owned by Robert Sangster and trained by Vincent O'Brien, Lady Capulet remarkably won the Irish 1000 Guineas on her racing debut. Her sire was bred by Bell's mother from a family long held by Hal Price Headley and traced to Headley's champion 2-year-old Alcibiades, Sir Ivor's fourth dam. Tom Fool meanwhile was bred by Headley's nephew Duval A. Headley and was a champion at two and a champion sprinter, older horse, and Horse of the Year at four for Greentree Stud.

Tom Fool, who sired Odgen Phipps's outstanding Buckpasser, was sired by the Headley-bred Menow, a champion 2-year-old colt by Pharamond II. The latter had been imported from Europe by Headley to stand at Beaumont, where Menow later stood as well. More importantly, Menow was produced from none other than Alcibiades. Lady Capulet, therefore, was inbred 5×4 to Alcibiades through Sir Ivor and Tom Fool and additionally has Pharamond II, a precocious two-year-old, 4×4 in her pedigree. That's a lot of speed and precocity in Lady Capulet's ancestry and it certainly makes Bell's theory about El Prado plausible.

The construction of Oscar Performance's pedigree has some interesting inbreeding as well. He has the three-quarter brothers Sadler's Wells and Nureyev balanced on both sides of his pedigree and is therefore 5×4 to the blue hen Special. He's also 4×4 to Northern Dancer and 5×5 to Hail to Reason, the sire of Roberto. It has strength in its tail-female lineage as well, tracing back to Ogden Phipps's Lady Pitt, his seventh dam and the ancestress of a massive amount of high-quality stakes winners. The sires scattered throughout the female family constitute a Who's Who, too, with Mr. Prospector, Seattle Slew, and Danzig all included.

Kitten's Joy, who's out of a Roberto-line mare, has enjoyed a successful union with mares that contain Roberto in their pedigrees—there are at least 18 black type winners by Kitten's Joy that are inbred to Roberto, including six Grade I winners—and Oscar Performance offers breeders this possibility as well. Bell knows this, and as a patron of Roberto-line horses he's sure to exploit this construct as well as others. He's a sophisticated analyst and thinker as well as a practical horseman and he has the tools and relationships to make Oscar Performance the next big thing at Mill Ridge. But more importantly, he has the horse he's been waiting for.

Sid Fernando is president and CEO of Werk Thoroughbred Consultants, Inc., originator of the Werk Nick Rating and eNicks.