



Making Athletes

Thoroughbred training centers have at their core the goal of educating young horses and getting them racetrack-ready. Several offer additional services or provide dual roles—such as working with lay-ups and doing rehabilitation, preparing horses for 2-year-olds-in-training sales, or serving as satellite facilities where trainers keep their racehorses in condition outside the hustle and bustle of the racetrack. Training centers also contribute millions of dollars and thousands of jobs to local economies. What follows are 10 stories about the people behind some of the United States' and Canada's most successful training centers and a couple stories about companies that provide valuable products and services to these facilities.

Benchmark Training Center

When Gerwyn "Taffy" Jones arrived in northeast Texas about 12 years ago, the area was not exactly a hotbed for state-of-the-art equine training facilities. At least it was nothing like Ocala, Fla., the place he had just left.

But Jones was determined to change that, and with help from an outstanding team and the right vision, the lifelong horseman has been able to cultivate a premier Thoroughbred training facility that specializes in the breaking and training of young horses and in lay-ups for injured horses.

Benchmark Training Center is located on 107 acres near Quinlan, Texas, about 40 miles east of Dallas. Jones came to the facility in the late 1990s with his wife, Jane, when it was owned by Michael Barnett. About five years later the couple bought the farm and helped transform it into one of the state's top training centers.

Complete with a five-eighths-mile training track, a Eurocizer exercise machine, and spacious two- to three-acre paddocks for horses in need of rest and relaxation, Benchmark has about 80 horses on its lush property at any given time. About three-quarters of those are weanlings, yearlings, or 2-year-olds that the Joneses raise, break, and prep for sales.

The majority of the young horses that Benchmark preps are offered at the Fasig-Tipton Texas 2-year-olds in training sale. Over the years the Joneses have built a reputation for raising healthy young horses.

"You're only as good as your help, and we have a great team," said Taffy Jones,

who employs about 18 people including farm manager Mark Brennan. "We've pretty much had the same crew here since the beginning, and I think that consistency is important in having a good program."

Jones, a native of Wales with 32 years in the business, still does the bulk of the training at Benchmark. His experience and hands-on approach give him an edge in another valuable service offered—sales consultation. The facility has an excellent reputation for purchasing successful racehorses for clients.

Another area that separates Benchmark is its outstanding care for injured horses. Nearly all of the horses that come to the farm for lay-ups are examined by Dr. David Stephens of nearby Weems and Stephens Equine Hospital, an area leader in equine medical care.

"We have a very good record of getting injured horses back to the track," Jones said. "We get a lot of rehabs because of that."—By Jason Shandler

Brett Brinkman

As a youngster, Brett Brinkman was taught a valuable lesson by his uncle, Joe King, the former manager of Waldemar Farm near Williston, Fla., which is now Stonehedge Farm South: To become a complete horseman, you must learn all aspects of the sport.

Brinkman has followed that advice well, evidenced by his multifaceted operation in which he does a little bit of everything. Brinkman, a third-generation horseman, owns 75-acre Mesa Verde near Williston,

where he raises and keeps many of his horses. Brinkman also owns and operates Le Mesa Stallions near Carencro, La., where he has about 30 horses in training, the majority of them for clients. At Le Mesa, Brinkman also stands stallions, breeds mares, and preps horses for sales.

But at heart, Brinkman's passion is breaking and training, which he has done since 1984 when he first took out his trainer's license. For the past 11 years Brinkman has been based out of Classic Mile Training Complex near Ocala, where he leases a pair of barns at the 700-acre facility owned by Domenic Martelli.

Born in Louisiana but raised in Ocala, Brinkman breaks about 50-60 horses per year. The majority of them are for clients who race. Over the years Brinkman has adopted a basic philosophy when it comes to raising young horses.

"Never let the horse have a bad day," he said. "Even if it takes a little longer to get them started, it's so important not to let them have setbacks. A horse will forget a good day tomorrow, but they will always remember a bad day."

Brinkman said Classic Mile, with its one-mile regulation main track, seven-furlong turf course, three-furlong training track, and relaxed atmosphere that includes plenty of turn-out area, is perfect for his needs.

Of all the aspects of his business, Brinkman most enjoys helping horses develop naturally.

"An old horseman once said that horses are like diamonds—they only grow from pressure," said Brinkman. "I believe that 2-year-olds are like that. You have to press on them, if they allow it. They will let you know if they are not ready, but they need to have steady progress."—By Jason Shandler

Bridlewood Farm

Bridlewood Farm has been an industry leader in Thoroughbred breeding and racing since it was acquired by the late Arthur I. Appleton in 1976. Though the renowned Ocala, Fla., farm has bred and raised scores of millionaires and stakes winners through the years, even the experienced staff knows horses such as Smarty Jones, who was sent to Bridlewood as a yearling to be prepped for his future career, don't come along every day.

Bridlewood general manager George Isaacs recalls how Smarty Jones, who would go on to captivate the nation with wins in

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the 2004 Kentucky Derby and Preakness Stakes (both gr. I), had tremendous but unharnessed ability when he came to the property in January 2002.

"It was easy to see his speed," said Isaacs, the farm's general manager since 1996. "But while speed is great in the afternoon, it can be a problem in the mornings. Our trainer, Milton Hendry, did a great job of harnessing that speed and aggressiveness when (Smarty) was a yearling."

The late Roy Chapman had sent the Elusive Quality colt to Bridlewood to be prepped for the sales, but Isaacs convinced the owner/breeder to keep him. The rest is history.

Even after Appleton's death in 2008, 870-acre Bridlewood continues to be an ideal place to breed, raise, and train horses for clients. Now owned by the Appleton family, the impeccably groomed property includes a seven-eighths-mile dirt track and an elaborate pond for swimming, as well as three 30-stall training barns and a gorgeous stallion barn—each recently renovated or constructed. Each training barn includes a large round pen, two mechanical walkers, and abundant turnout space.

Bridlewood, which has about 350 horses on its property during peak season, including 11 stallions, typically breaks between 80-100 horses every year. Though the farm does occasionally race some horses, it has had a commercial focus since 2000.

"I think what separates us from others is that we're a large, full-scale operation," Isaacs said. "We can start from the very beginning of planning a mating to taking horses all the way to the racetrack—and do everything in between. We have the same philosophy for breeding as we do racing, and that is to produce top-quality athletes.

"Whether we're breaking a horse for the racetrack or to go to the 2-year-old sales, we try to take the common-sense approach of treating each horse as an individual so as to bring the best out in every one, all the while putting the horse's welfare first."

—By Jason Shandler and Jen Taylor

Circle T Farm

Danny Turner likes to refer to his Circle T Farm operation near Lexington as a family-run outfit and himself as a straight shooter when dealing with clients.

"I like to talk to them and find out what their goals are," Turner said. "I'll ask them if they're looking to race or looking to sell. A person can talk directly to me. He or she doesn't have to go through a bunch of people. I stay up-to-date with all my clients and tell them what's going on."

Turner, whose three sons and a nephew work at the farm, offers breaking, foaling, training, prepping, and vanning.

Turner, who leases the Circle T property and operates on about 200 acres, started in the horse business in Central Kentucky as a young man. "My uncle was manager of Pharamond Farm, and I worked with the stallions," he said. "I also worked at Dixiana Farm under manager Terry Arnold, who's a good man. Before starting Circle T Farm, I owned a farm and leased one."

The Circle T client list includes individuals from Australia, California, Oklahoma, and Louisiana. Located near the Fasig-Tipton sale grounds on Newtown Pike, the farm is a short drive from Interstate 75.

Circle T does not have a training track but has the use of one at Victory Haven training center, which is located in back of Circle T. Circle T does offer a two-mile gallop.

Turner has updated Circle T since he took

charge. "We put in new fencing, new waterers, and did some repairs to the barns," he said.

Turner is assisted on the farm by brothers Gayle and Robert Bowles, who have more than 35 years of combined experience in farm management. Turner's sons Cory, 17; Shawn, 13; and Jeremy, 10; help out with farm maintenance. Turner's nephew, Les Ritchie, works in the office, handling photos and pedigree research and designing and updating the farm's web site.

Circle T is a short drive from Rood & Riddle Equine Hospital. One of the hospital veterinarians, Dr. Kevin Hyde, a reproduction specialist, is on the farm every day.

Not unexpectedly, Turner is in the breeding business. One of the 15 or so mares he owns alone or in partnership is Sentimental Tango, dam of graded winner Merengue, who is the dam of graded winner Point Determined. Sentimental Tango is in foal to Roman Ruler and has a Big Brown colt by her side.—By David Schmitz

El Primero Training Center

By his own estimate Keith Asmussen has broken and trained more than 10,000 horses during his more than 60-year career. One of the most respected horsemen in Thoroughbred racing, Asmussen has mentored or worked with many of the biggest names in the business, including Hall of Famers Ron McAnally, Bobby Frankel, D. Wayne Lukas, and Bill Mott.

How far back does Asmussen go? When Mott was still in high school, he landed his first job working as a groom and exercise rider for Asmussen. Lukas and Asmussen became close friends when they trained Quarter Horses in South Dakota more than four decades ago.

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"I broke my first horse in 1949," Asmusen recalled. "It seems like forever ago. I would say I've sent horses to about 15% of the (active) trainers."

With his nearly unmatched wealth of experience, it is no wonder that Asmusen attracts so many clients to his El Primero Training Center near Laredo, Texas. The 87-acre property, which is part of Asmusen Horse Center, is owned by Asmusen and his wife, Marilyn. Among the more than 70 employees on the farm is Asmusen's son, Cash, a former world-class jockey in France. Keith, Marilyn, and Cash do all of the training at El Primero, where about 400 horses reside at any given time.

"This is all we know. My dad (trained horses), and his dad did it before him," said Keith Asmusen, who breaks up to 150 yearlings per year for his other son, record-setting trainer Steve.

The Asmusens have been raising, breaking, and training young horse at El Primero for more than 35 years. With 400 stalls, a five-eighths-mile training track complete with a 10-horse starting gate, and 25 hotwalker machines, El Primero is an ideal facility to prepare horses for sales or to go straight to the racetrack. And the Asmusens are the ideal people to get them ready.

Asked what the key to breaking a yearling is, Keith Asmusen was very specific.

"My theory is controlled forward motion," he said. "When you watch my horses, they don't flip at the gate, run out, lug in, or buck the rider. If you can eliminate those mistakes from the start, you will have a better racehorse. You have to have complete control over the horse, but in a forward motion."—By Jason Shandler

Eponaire

When Krista Towns, founder of the equine-products company Eponaire, was attempting to rehabilitate a talented hunter/jumper after the horse was treated for serious back atrophy as a result of EPM, she sought a way to reintroduce weight to the work regimen without the need for a rider. Towns also wanted a way to have the device stay in place on the horse and distribute weight evenly.

She combined her knowledge of horses and background in design to produce Astride, a belt-like device that is strapped around the horse and contains large pockets in which weight bags are placed. The Astride itself weighs six pounds and comes with up to 14 weight bags weighing eight pounds each.

In addition to the surcingle, the Astride consists of a quilted pad manufactured specifically for the Astride. The pad is designed to eliminate pressure points along the spine.

Since Towns received a patent for Astride in 2003, it has been the cornerstone product at Eponaire.

"To see it (Astride) become a valuable training and rehabilitation aid for horses has been an undeniably rewarding experience," said Towns, who has more than 30 years' experience working with horses.

In addition to its patented weight-training system, Eponaire has since expanded into other specialized training aids and is the exclusive distributor to the racing industry of the Polar Horse Monitors that monitor heart rate. Eponaire has also added an extensive lineup of communications systems for trainers and riders.

Operating out of Wellington, Fla., one of the largest equestrian sporthorse communities in the country, Towns now counts

some of the leading racing stables and trainers among the customers for Eponaire. The company, which also sells tack products, takes orders for its products over the Internet and by phone.

According to the Eponaire web site, among the trainers and stables that use the Astride system are WinStar Farm, Bob Baffert, Mark Casse, Richard Mandella, Dan Hendricks, the McKathan brothers, and BC3 Thoroughbreds.

"We consider ourselves a company that offers select training products for serious sporthorse and racehorse owners and trainers," Towns said of Eponaire, the company she established in 2002 while in Illinois before relocating to Florida.—By Ron Mitchell

Morinda Agriculture

A Utah-based company has recently introduced a new line of equine supplements based on the South Pacific noni fruit that are intended to help equine athletes, including racehorses, better manage the stress of training, shipping, and performing. Morinda Agriculture produces the equine nutritional supplements as part of a bigger company, Morinda Holdings, which has been testing the benefits of noni fruit in humans and animals since 1995.

"The way noni works is by boosting the immune system," said Bryan Powell, a marketing assistant with Morinda Agriculture. "It helps you recover faster. In animals, they are more focused and calm. That is obviously important when you have a competitor in front of an arena full of people."

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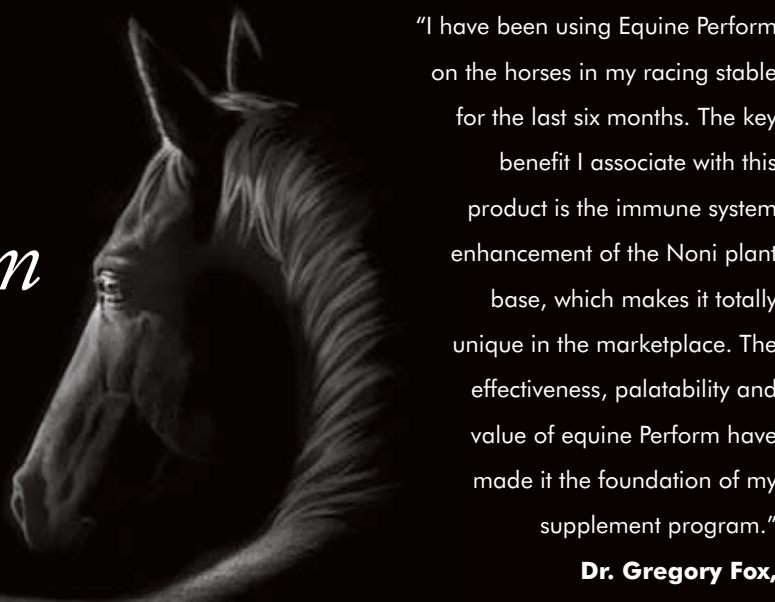
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“The noni plant is one of the most thoroughly investigated nutraceutical plants,” he said. “It does have a strong positive effect on the horses.” When asked what specific benefits he sees, Fox said what is apparent over time is the lack of negatives—less illness, better overall conditioning and health, and good appetites.

“I don’t know that you can attribute this all to the supplement, but I am having the best year I’ve ever had since I began training,” he said.

Fox learned about the supplement through a consulting client, Lance Robinson, who is the co-owner of Gulf Coast Farm. Robinson’s son Clint is a professional rodeo cowboy who in 2009 won multiple titles in steer wrestling and calf roping. The Robinsons live in Utah, and Morinda Holdings is a corporate sponsor of Clint’s rodeo career. Last November, Lance Robinson contacted Fox about participating in some clinical trials.

Fox said he has been using the human products as well.

“The more we can understand the modulating effect of some of these medicinal plants, the better we all are going to be,” he said. “All this does is help horses manage the stress we apply to them in training and shipping.”

More information about Morinda products can be found at www.morindacare.com.—By Eric Mitchell

Pegasus Training and Equine Rehabilitation Center

Veteran horseman Dr. Mark Dedomenico, a well-known heart surgeon, has an eye for beauty and an ardent sense for success. The Seattle resident, who has taken an incredible ride the last two years with multiple grade I winner Blind Luck, fulfilled a lifelong dream when he built a pristine and multi-purposeful facility called the Pegasus Training & Equine Rehabilitation Center.

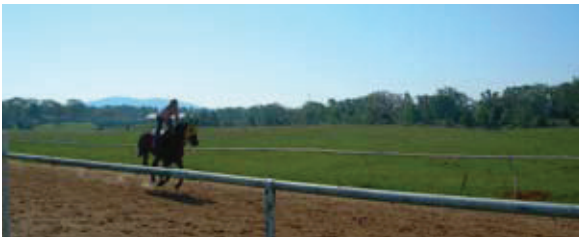
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more than 160 horses that are broken and trained for various clients by Mark Puhich. Many of Pegasus' clients are from Southern California, which is a short plane ride away from the facility, allowing easy access for owners to check on their horses.

Puhich, who took out his training license in 1984, conditioned horses in Washington, New York, Chicago, Kentucky, Texas, and California before coming to Pegasus, and scored graded stakes victories with Daros and Southern Africa.

The seasoned trainer develops and rehabilitates the horses at Pegasus with the aid of the facility's five-eighths-mile Polytrack oval, an indoor arena, covered Eurocizers, covered round pens, a swimming pool, underwater treadmill, and hyperbaric chamber.

Pegasus, which Puhich called one of "the nicest facilities in the country," was built after years of research and careful planning. Dedomenico's goal was to provide effective exercise therapies, training equipment, and cutting-edge medical equipment in order to serve a variety of needs.

"Everything is done first class; no corners are cut," said Puhich of Pegasus, which employs Dr. Wayne McIlwraith as a consulting surgeon. "Our synthetic surface is weather-friendly, and when the winter comes (the horses) don't miss a day of training. There's no better climate in the world to be breaking and training horses than here."

Some of the best horses that benefited from the amenities and training techniques at Pegasus include grade I victors Georgie Boy, Golden Doc A, and Victor's Cry, winner of the May 31 Shoemaker Mile (gr. IT).

"We cater to the individual horse; some

take a little bit more patience and time than others," Puhich explained of Pegasus, which uses an exclusive cross-training method for advancing each equine athlete to its fullest potential. "We start with ground driving, and then the round pen, and graduate to the indoor arena, and then from there to the racetrack. But every horse is treated differently, depending on their personality and how they handle it. We emphasize being patient and taking our time with the horse."—By Esther Marr

San Luis Rey Downs

San Luis Rey Downs, which was built to serve as a full-fledged racetrack in 1969 but was shuttered by the then-governor of California due to its proximity to Del Mar, is now known as one of the most prominent training centers on the West Coast.

The 202-acre facility, located near Bonsall in northern San Diego County, has a one-mile dirt main track with a training track built inside of it. Amenities include a swimming pool, Equicizers, an arena, equine scale, mechanical hotwalkers, paddocks, round pens, and all-weather trails. There are also a track kitchen, administration building, tack shop, and feed store on site.

While San Luis Rey has the facilities for breaking young horses, the training center is used more for developing runners that are already racing.

"We have an official clocker, starters, gate crew, track veterinarian, and our works show up in the *Daily Racing Form*, so that's the big advantage of San Luis Rey," said Leigh Ann Howard, who has managed the facility since 2001 and has worked there since she was a fledgling trainer in 1975. "We're kind of an in-between (facil-

ity) from the farms that do the breaking to the racetrack, where they race all the time and there's all that stress."

San Luis Rey Downs has a 24-hour security team that allows no unlicensed people on the grounds. The training center employs approximately 200, with about 300 horses boarded on the grounds.

San Luis Rey Downs, which is open for training year-round, is the only auxiliary training track continuously approved by the California Horse Racing Board since 1984, meaning horses can ship from the facility and run the same day.

A co-op of around two dozen trainers that functions under the name San Luis Rey Racing leases the 500-stall facility from Magna International Development, which bought San Luis Rey from Frank Stronach's Magna Entertainment Corporation in 2007.

In past years many notable horses have been developed at San Luis Rey, including Kentucky Derby (gr. I) winners Fusaichi Pegasus, Sunday Silence, Gato Del Sol, and Ferdinand, plus Horse of the Year Azeri.

More recently trainer Carolyn Costigan, who conditions this year's Woodbine Oaks Presented by Budweiser winner Roan Inish, kept her stock there.

"(San Luis Rey) is more for the discerning trainer that enjoys training and giving the horse what he wants," said Howard. "We're a racing facility...our goal is to (train horses) to race and earn money."

—By Esther Marr

Trophy Club Training Center

Richard and Frances Hesse have been involved in Thoroughbred racing since 1984 and up until last summer the couple did most of their business out of their

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1,000-plus-acre property, R & R Farms near Goliad, Texas.

But in 2009 the couple took advantage of an great opportunity to expand their business, purchasing Bob Holthus' storied Kilkerry Farm and Training Center near Royal, Ark. The 160-acre property, which had been in the Holthus family for more than 40 years, was renamed Trophy Club Training Center and has been an instant success.

Located just 10 miles from Hot Springs, which is home to Oaklawn Park, Trophy Club has generated outstanding results in its first 12 months. Specializing main-

ly in breaking and training, Trophy Club has produced winners at a 40% clip in 2010, and about three-quarters of the 2-year-olds it has offered at auctions have been sold. Included in the winners is Lady Giacamo, winner of the TTA Sales Futurity at Lone Star Park in June.

Richard Hesse does all the training at Trophy Club, which broke about 60 horses last year. The lush property includes a five-eighths-mile training track that has inside and outside rails and a pair of 32-stall barns. Hesse said location was a major factor in buying the farm.

"We really like Hot Springs and the meet they have at Oaklawn," said Hesse, who has been involved in the agricultural business for much of his career. "The racetrack is very successful with lucrative pots. It's one of the few places where purses are increasing, not decreasing."

The lucrative purses at Oaklawn are attractive to the Hesses, who also have about 40 horses in training that they race under their name. But training horses for clients and prepping them for sales are major focuses these days.

Richard Hesse believes putting a solid foundation under young horses is the key to long, healthy racing careers, and he practices that philosophy on all the horses that come to Trophy Club. In a down economy, he also believes in being creative at the sales.

"One of the things we've done to help clients is to take yearlings that didn't sell and bring them back to the 2-year-old sales at no cost to them," Hesse said. "It's a nice option to give people if they don't want to put any more money into the horse."

—By Jason Shandler

Webb Carroll Training Center

Webb Carroll likes to say that results speak for themselves.

The lifelong horseman has been backing up his words for nearly three decades at his Webb Carroll Training Center near St. Matthews, S.C., where he has broken and trained some of the nation's elite Thoroughbreds. Included in the scores of graded stakes winners Carroll has helped develop over the past decade are War Emblem, Tale of the Cat, Offlee Wild, Old Fashioned, Just Jenda, Ravalo, Winslow Homer, and Payton d'Oro.

Since 2008, Carroll graduates have won 628 races, including 36 stakes. The last two years a total of 45 2-year-olds reached the winner's circle.

"We specialize in the breaking and training of young horses here; that's what we do," said Carroll, a third-generation horseman. "We're proud of our track record. It's a labor of love for us, and we have a great team, including my assistant, Travis Durr."

Two major factors contribute to making the Webb Carroll Training Center an ideal place to train young horses—the climate and the facilities.

Located in the midlands of South Carolina, the training center is in an ideal region that has been home to many of the best Thoroughbreds this country has ever seen. St. Matthews is 60 miles or less from historic horse towns such as Aiken, Camden, and Columbia.

"This area is where many of the old-timers wintered because of the ideal climate," said Carroll, who is involved in all aspects of training at his farm. "It's very cool here, but not frigid. It's conducive to training horses, and when they ship north, they acclimate to the weather extremely well."



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The facilities at the property are also top-notch. Webb Carroll features three training tracks—a spacious seven-eighths-mile irrigated main track with a full-scale starting gate; a three-quarter-mile turf gallop, also fully irrigated; and a unique half-mile wooded track on an adjacent property.

The training facility also includes six- and eight-horse Equicizers, along with a swimming facility that is perfect for lay-ups.

Carroll's full team of employees enables him to take out horses in large sets, sometimes as many as 16 at a time.

"The more they can see at a young age, the better prepared they will be when they hit the races," Carroll said. "We try to give them every edge we possibly can so that they will be better acclimated to the racetrack environment."—By Jason Shandler

Wes Carter Training Stable

Wes Carter offers clients a distinct advantage when it comes to training young horses. "Unlike some trainers, I can ride, and I get on the horses because I can evaluate them better," said Carter, who owns Wes Carter Training Stable near Bamberg, S.C. "I get to ride them at least a couple of times before they go to the races."

Carter, who generally deals with 30 to 40 horses per season, uses the Bamberg farm for breaking horses and for lay-ups. He rents a barn at the Aiken Training Center, where he prepares his horses for the races.

The 65-acre property has two barns, a swimming facility, a five-eighths-mile track, and a grass gallop. "Swimming is the best exercise for horses coming off the track with bowed tendons and other physical problems," said Carter, who owns homes near Bamberg and Aiken.

"We break the babies in a relaxed atmosphere at the farm," said Carter, who has

owned the farm for 22 years. "Once they're broken, we take them to Aiken for training. It is better training them at Aiken rather than at a farm because they can experience the racetrack atmosphere early on. They get published works, gate cards, and are ready to run from the start, whether it's at Belmont Park, Keeneland, or Churchill."

Carter thinks there is a definite advantage in treating horses as individuals. "We give each horse hands-on treatment, and we know each horse by its first name, so to speak. They're not numbers, but individuals.

"My philosophy is to train the complete horse: the mind, body, and spirit. We try to make the horse think it's his idea of what to

do by going slow enough with him so they don't get speed crazy. That way, they're more professional, and when they get saddled at the track, they stay relaxed. When they go in the starting gate like that, they run more consistently. By doing all that, they have longer racing careers because we don't break them down as 2-year-olds.

"We try to get them ready to race as 2-year-olds, but the ones who aren't precious enough are given enough time to come around."

Carter's nephew is a veterinarian. "He comes around every day, and if he doesn't, one of his associates does," Carter said.

—By David Schmitz

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