



SOUTHEAST

Junior Class

Longtime trainer Junior Serna keeps sending out winners

BY BILL GIAUQUE

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Now in his sixth decade as a horseman, Junior Serna of Ocala, Fla., and Lambholm South could best be described as a “stayer.” A stayer, as defined in Tom Ainslie’s book “Ainslie’s Complete Guide to Thoroughbred Racing,” is “a reliable router.”

Serna certainly can stay the distance—and has. And there is no question he is reliable, but both are understatements that leave out the class of the man and his horses.

“Since I started working, I was never out of a job,” Serna said. “Didn’t even get one vacation day for travel between jobs. Never had to look for a job, never, never,” the pleasant horse trainer said, breaking into a laugh because he is not really comfortable talking about himself or his many accomplishments.

A person doesn’t work almost 60 years in the horse business without being reliable. And if a person has not had to look for a job over that time, he must be doing something right. The lunge lines of Serna’s accomplishments reach far and wide, into North American horse racing and beyond.

To see how far his influence reaches, a person need only pop in a tape of the 2002 Breeders’ Cup, when Azeri and Farda Amiga ran one-two in the Distaff (gr. I). Both fillies were broken and given their early training by Serna.

The next race, the Long John Silver’s Breeders’ Cup Juvenile Fillies (gr. I), produced another link to Serna. Storm Flag Flying won to become the 2-year-



Junior Serna works with a horse in training at Roy Lerman’s Lambholm South near Ocala, Fla.

JOE DIORIO PHOTOS

MASS MEDIA



Leading Third Crop APEX Sires

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For stallions that stand, will stand, or stood (deceased) in Florida (exported stallions are excluded), and have runners in North America. Listed below are all available statistics for the Northern Hemisphere through December 31, 2011. As supplied to The Blood-Horse by The Jockey Club Information Systems Inc., earnings exclude monies from Japan and Hong Kong. Current year stakes winners include all N.H.-foaled stakes winners worldwide and any S.H.-foaled horses that won a N.H. stakes. *Foal counts include Southern Hemisphere. Cumulative stakes winners includes all countries. (A ♯ indicates a sire represented by his first crop to race).

Rank	Stallion (Foaling Year, Sire), Farm Standing	2012 Stud Fee	Rnrs/ Wnrs	Stakes Wnrs/ Wns	Rstrct SW/ BT SW	(Chief Earner, Earnings)	2011 Earnings	Cumulative			
								Foals	Stks Wnrs	*A-E Index	*Comp Index
1	WILDCAT HEIR (00, Forest Wildcat), Journeyman Stud	\$10,000	181/110	8/13	3/8	(John Johnny Jak, \$215,061)	\$4,828,734	*258	14	1.64	1.55
2	LEROIDESANIMAUX (BRZ) (00, Candy Stripes), Stonewall Farm Ocala	\$22,500	88/48	4/6	0/4	(Animal Kingdom, \$1,904,900)	\$4,034,567	*157	5	2.36	1.79
3	GRAEME HALL (97, Dehere), Winding Oaks Farm	\$5,000	125/77	4/4	0/4	(Duke of Mischief, \$721,681)	\$3,168,375	*286	19	1.57	1.31
4	CHAPEL ROYAL (01, Montbrook), Signature Stallions	\$10,000	225/102	1/3	1/1	(Navy Chapel, \$139,515)	\$3,103,519	*463	6	0.96	1.21
5	REPENT (99, Louis Quatorze), Cloverleaf Farms II	\$3,000	160/86	10/11	3/10	(It's Never to Late, \$165,050)	\$2,933,947	*367	20	1.25	1.26
6	WITH DISTINCTION (01, Storm Cat), Hartley/De Renzo Thoroughbreds	\$7,500	136/67	4/6	2/4	(Decisive Moment, \$409,300)	\$2,745,427	202	4	1.13	1.22
7	GRAND REWARD (01, Storm Cat)	N/A	121/60	3/7	2/3	(Bad Debt, \$235,140)	\$2,564,691	*377	4	1.23	1.42
8	CONCORDE'S TUNE (89, Concorde Bound), Ocala Stud Farm	\$2,500	81/40	1/5	0/1	(Musical Romance, \$1,040,734)	\$2,493,514	449	25	1.28	1.14
9	GREATNESS (99, Mr. Prospector), Stonewall Farm Ocala	\$2,500	73/43	3/10	0/3	(Immortal Eyes, \$271,215)	\$2,365,826	*161	6	1.47	1.07
10	PUT IT BACK (98, Honour and Glory), Bridlewood Farm	\$5,000	162/69	5/9	1/5	(It's Me Mom, \$206,500)	\$2,362,297	*516	23	1.44	1.35
11	POMEROY (01, Boundary), Vinery Florida	\$10,000	82/43	6/11	0/6	(Pomeroy's Pistol, \$521,188)	\$2,182,075	*133	6	1.40	1.44
12	MONTBROOK (90, Buckaroo), Ocala Stud Farm	\$7,500	83/42	3/6	0/3	(Tackleberry, \$599,667)	\$2,137,336	*734	47	1.63	1.58
13	HALO'S IMAGE (91, Halo)	Died, 2010	83/43	5/8	1/5	(Atlantic Hurricane, \$391,033)	\$2,104,602	*527	22	1.33	1.33
14	FULL MANDATE (99, A.P. Indy), Hartley/De Renzo Thoroughbreds	\$2,500	118/64	2/3	0/2	(Full of Gut, \$151,320)	\$2,064,225	*313	4	0.91	1.05
15	D'WILDCAT (98, Forest Wildcat), Vinery Florida	\$6,500	118/60	1/1	0/1	(D'cats Meow, \$134,446)	\$2,012,531	241	6	1.53	1.37
16	VALUE PLUS (01, Unbridled's Song), Stonewall Farm Ocala	\$5,000	121/67	1/1	1/1	(All Due Respect, \$100,638)	\$1,915,540	208	1	1.05	1.26
17	ROAR OF THE TIGER (99, Storm Cat)	Died, 2010	117/59	3/4	1/3	(Tazz, \$134,691)	\$1,697,269	*249	5	0.84	1.21
18	THREE WONDERS (97, Storm Cat)	Died, 2008	106/59	1/2	0/1	(Trelawny, \$121,309)	\$1,661,085	278	5	1.03	1.14
19	BURNING ROMA (98, Rubiano), Stonewall Farm Ocala	\$3,000	90/53	3/3	1/3	(Queen Drama, \$126,705)	\$1,469,193	137	4	0.84	1.31
20	SUAVE (01, A.P. Indy)	\$4,500	99/48	2/2	0/2	(Indy Tune, \$83,296)	\$1,436,815	*140	3	1.03	1.28
21	WEST ACRE (95, Forty Niner), Stonehedge Farm South	\$2,500	49/34	4/4	1/4	(Watch Me Go, \$258,070)	\$1,403,346	291	12	1.43	1.21
22	BLACK MAMBO (99, Kingmambo)	Died, 2009	89/46	1/1	0/1	(Argentine Tango, \$113,075)	\$1,362,310	*170	2	0.95	1.34
23	MASS MEDIA (01, Touch Gold), Journeyman Stud	\$2,000	44/33	3/8	1/3	(Manicero, \$271,500)	\$1,247,766	70	3	1.61	1.13
24	CITY PLACE (00, Storm Cat), Hartley/De Renzo Thoroughbreds	\$5,000	65/37	2/2	1/2	(City Sage, \$123,042)	\$1,241,522	160	6	1.47	1.09
25	INDIAN OCEAN (02, Stormy Atlantic), Bridlewood Farm	\$2,500	89/48	1/1	0/1	(Ocean Princess, \$122,504)	\$1,226,567	*177	2	0.83	1.33

*A-E and COMPARABLE INDEX: The lifetime Average-Earnings Index indicates how much purse money the progeny of one sire has earned, on the average, in relation to the average earnings of all runners in the same years; average earnings of all runners in any year is represented by an index of 1.00. The Comparable Index indicates the average earnings of progeny produced from mares bred to one sire, when these same mares were bred to other sires. Only 32% of all sires have a lifetime AEI higher than their mares Comparable Index.

old filly champion. While Serna did not break and train Storm Flag Flying, she is the granddaughter of the undefeated champion Personal Ensign, who was broken and trained by Serna.

The future trainer of champions was born and raised in the small Texas town of Alice, between Laredo to the west and Corpus Christi to the east. It's a long way from the nation's major race-tracks, but the small Texas town did

have a link to big-time racing.

"Actually, we were only 28 miles from King Ranch and Kingsville, Texas," Serna pointed out. Alice, the town, was named for Alice Gertrudis King Kleberg, the daughter of King Ranch founder Richard King.

At the time Serna was growing up, King Ranch was a major force in horse racing. It bred and raced Assault, 1946 Triple Crown winner, and 1950 Kentucky Derby winner

Middleground. It was about the time Middleground won the Derby that Serna had a memorable encounter with a horse.

"My brother had bought this Quarter Horse mare," he recalled. "It didn't take him very long to say, 'Well, look, I don't want to do this.' I kind of took over the little mare—feedin' her, takin' care of her, and ridin' her."

Serna's childhood home has always been horse country, and the Quarter Horse is king. Many a young rider or trainer-to-be gained his first experience riding match races in the Texas countryside or at fair grounds.

"The next thing we know we've got a little exercise saddle," Serna said in his understated way. "Then, in the summer there would be a couple of friends whose families had ranches, and they had some horses, some Quarter Horses, and we would go match racin' on weekends. In the summers I would work at the ranches.

"By the age of 10, I was competing in those match races," he said. "I picked it up. The guys were just looking for the lightest riders they could put on a horse. I think I might have weighed about 50-some-odd pounds. I just kind of got goin' there."

Being humble, Serna said "we won" a bunch of races, but he downplayed the achievement by saying he never went to a recognized Thoroughbred track in those early days. Slowly, though, the world of horses opened up for the young Texan.

"As time passed, I began readin' about



Serna, with nearly 60 years in the business, has plenty of wisdom to share


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Like us on 



Serna at the Lambholm South training track with Roy Lerman

racing,” Serna said. “And then I talked with some people around home that had been to the races; some of those boys would come out of King Ranch on the weekend to ride in the match races, and some of them had already been up with Max Hirsch, galloping horses in New York.”

Hirsch trained Assault and Middle-ground and was inducted into the Hall of Fame in 1959.

Weight finally stopped Serna’s jockey career, although he continued as an exercise rider.

“I wasn’t that heavy,” he explained. “I galloped horses for a long time after that in Hot Springs, Ohio, New York, and New Jersey.”

By the time Serna finished high school, opportunity came his way in the form of a Texas horse owner. Clyde Jennings of Corpus Christi owned a farm in nearby Skidmore. He had Thoroughbreds and Quarter Horses.

“I got the job on his farm in Skidmore,” Serna said. “They needed someone to go to Oaklawn, and Mr. Jennings asked me right after high school. I went up there as an exercise rider and groom. I was just a rider, but I did everything.”

By the time he was 20, the exercise rider from Alice hooked on with Walnut Hill Farm. The farm was near Latrobe, Penn., where owner Bruno Ferrari owned a large construction company. The trainer there was Nick Gonzalez.

Serna stepped up to assistant trainer with the stable’s horses at Hialeah. From there he went to New York.

“Nick Gonzalez was the gentleman who was to train Bold Reasoning, Seattle Slew’s sire,” Serna said.

A year or so later they split the stable, sending some of the horses to California, some to Florida, and some to Garden State Park in the fall.

“Nick told Ferrari, ‘Yeah, (Serna’s) ready

to do whatever you want to do,” Serna recalled with quiet pride. “This was in 1962. They asked me if I would go to Garden State Park with those horses. I got my trainer’s license at Garden State Park.

“I trained for Walnut Hill for 10 or 12 years,” Serna recalled. The stable included Harmonizing, a turf horse who conquered such giants as Bald Eagle, Sword Dancer, and Wolfram. It won the Alcibiades at Keeneland with Little Tumbler, the 1961 Fayette Handicap with Zumbador II, and the Fayette again in 1966 with Yumbel.

“In 1963 I ran Gray Pet in the Derby,” Serna said. Serna was 23 at the time. “He was second in the Bahamas Stakes. He was second in the Derby Trial. I think he was fourth in the Blue Grass.

“The boss said ‘let’s go in the Derby,’ ” Serna remembered. “You know how you get. You get there and then you want to go on. Of course, he was against Chateaugay, Candy Spots, Never Bend. It was a nice field of horses. As the years go on, you know it was a pretty good field of horses.”

In his low-key way, Serna added, “It was a good experience. That was my first trip to Churchill.”

When asked if he ever thought about doing anything else, Serna replied, “Nothing. That’s it.” When pressed, he said, “Never! Nothing! Seven days a week. I couldn’t tell you the last time I had a vacation.” The trainer gave a kind of a high-pitched chuckle and said, “I think when I was in the hospital.

“I came to Ocala with the Murty Brothers,” he said. “There were three brothers—the twins—Wayne and Duane, and Robert. They had the farm in Ocala, a farm in Kentucky, and a bloodstock agency. They also had one of the major horse transport companies.

“I had been (to Ocala) before, and I liked it. I loved it,” Serna exclaimed.

It was 1977 when Serna arrived in

Ocala. Seattle Slew won the Triple Crown that year, and it wasn’t long before Dr. Jim Hill and Mickey Taylor bought in with the Murty Brothers to have a training center for their Seattle Slew offspring. The farm name was changed from Murty Farm to Wooden Horse Stud.

“They had asked me to stay,” Serna said. “I stayed. They came in with a bunch of Slew babies. We had a lot of good horses. They had all these nice mares and were doing these partnerships. They really needed a place, so they brought their babies here. We had the facilities there for the weanlings or yearlings.”

The horses from the Slew Crew included Slew o’ Gold. He won seven grade I stakes and was champion 3-year-old colt and champion older horse at 4. Coupled with Mugatea, Slew o’ Gold was the odds-on favorite for the inaugural Breeders’ Cup Classic (gr. I) in 1984.

Mugatea, who also received his early preparations for the races from Serna, won the Forego Handicap (gr. II) and stood at stud at Wooden Horse Stud.

Other top horses Serna prepared for the Slew Crew included Slew the Dragon, winner of the Hollywood Derby (gr. IT). Tax Dodge won a stakes and was grade-I placed.

After a few years the use of the farm by the Hills and Taylors began to diminish.

“(Allen) Paulson wanted to buy a training center down here,” Serna said. “I met with him on a Sunday afternoon. Basically, he said to me, ‘Look, I know your reputation. And I’m going to buy a training center down here.’ He said, ‘I want my horses to come down here to train. I want you to work for me.’

“I had gained a lot of clients through the years. People had been with me for years, since I started. I told Mr. Paulson that I had a handful of clients who had been very good and true to our program.

“He said, ‘I don’t know if that’s going to work, Junior. But if you feel that is something we have to do, maybe we could try it.’

“He left and he called me back the next day and said, ‘I’m buying (Wooden Horse Stud). Get ready because I’m going to start sending horses.’ ”

Once again, Serna stayed. He had outlasted the Murty Brothers and the Slew Crew and would continue his career on the farm, now renamed Brookside South.

At this point Serna’s influence reached across the Atlantic Ocean.

“We broke (Zagreb), the horse that won the (Budweiser) Irish Derby (Ire-I) for Mr. Paulson. Dermot Weld was the trainer,” Serna noted. Zagreb, a son of Theatrical, eventually stood at stud in Japan.

Paulson, who founded Gulfstream Aviation, used aviation checkpoints to name his horses. Zagreb, for example, was a checkpoint in Croatia. For Paulson and Serna, the flights reached great heights.

Ajina, champion 3-year-old filly in 1997, won the Breeders' Cup Distaff, the Coaching Club American Oaks, and the Mother Goose Stakes (all grade I).

Escena, champion older female in 1998, won the Breeders' Cup Distaff, the Vanity Invitational Handicap (gr. I), and the Apple Blossom Handicap (gr. I) and almost \$3 million.

Yagli won the Manhattan Handicap, the United Nations Handicap, and the Gulfstream Park Breeders' Cup Handicap, once again, all grade Is, at age 6. He earned \$1.7 million.

Azeri earned Horse of the Year honors in 2002 in addition to champion older female in 2002, 2003, and 2004. She won 17 of 24 starts and 14 stakes races, all graded, to earn just over \$4 million.

Serna's approach to breaking and training stresses common sense and patience.

"Our program has always been keyed on the fact we want a horse for the future," he said. "Not a horse for today or tomorrow. Some little thing happens and you have to go 'Whoa. Let's look at it. Let's go over this pretty good.'

"Young horses run into a lot of little things and by just stoppin' on them, they disappear and you can go back to training again. You might have to stop on them again. You let each of them tell you how they want to go. That's how it's been, and it's worked out pretty good."

Although too many to mention, not all of Serna's successes came with horses from the Slew Crew and Paulson.

Farda Amiga won the 3-year-old filly championship. She won the Kentucky Oaks and the Alabama Stakes (both gr. I). Broken and trained by Serna, she belonged to a group of partners from Brazil called Old Friends. The partnership included Jose De Camargo, Julio Camargo, and Marcos Simon.

Bred and owned by Ogden Phipps, Personal Ensign retired undefeated from 13 starts, including her incredible come-from-behind win in the 1988 Breeders' Cup Distaff at Churchill Downs when she caught Kentucky Derby winner Winning Colors on the wire. She earned almost \$1.7 million.

Saint Liam went out from his early training with Serna to capture four grade I races and Horse of the Year and champion older male honors in 2005 for owners Mr. and Mrs. William K. Warren. He banked more than \$4.45 million.

"Speightstown came to me from the Keeneland yearling sale. Eugene Melnyk paid \$2 million for him as a yearling," said Serna. This was before Melnyk bought his own farm in Florida. Speightstown went on to win the Breeders' Cup Sprint (gr. I) and the Eclipse Award for sprint champion. Having won 10 of 16 starts, the horse that is now among the nation's leading stallions rolled up earn-


ings of \$1.25 million.

Epitome came to Serna from the storied Kentucky farm Jonabell, now Darley. Champion 2-year-old filly of 1987, Epitome won the Breeders' Cup Juvenile Fillies and \$631,755.

After the death of Paulson in 2000, the farm was sold once again, this time to Roy Lerman, a Washington, D.C., attorney and horseman. As the breeder of Breeders' Cup Classic winner Alphabet Soup and as a trainer, Lerman has had his share of success in the horse business. The farm was named Lambholm South, and, once again, Serna stayed.

Speightstown, Saint Liam, and Farda Amiga were all broken and trained under the banner of Lambholm South.

Five years later Lerman purchased historic Hobeau Farm from Jack J. Dreyfus and renamed it Lambholm South. This time Serna had to move in order to stay, but it was only a couple of miles as the crow flies.

Here Serna continues his craft, like a patient stayer wearing down the competition. One day at a time, he's producing a steady stream of quality racehorses with solid foundations consistently, reliably, and with class. 

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Immediate Family of Champions

First dam is half-sister to Champion 3yo filly **SMUGGLER**. Second dam is Champion Older Mare **INSIDE INFORMATION**, winner of six Grade I events, earner of \$1.6 million and is a half-sister to Grade I winner and millionaire **EDUCATED RISK**.

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