

Prepping Your Horse for Sale



Lee Thomas

When it comes to raising racehorses, their father literally wrote the book. Now the Taylors share their philosophy on prepping horses for sale.

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While Central Kentucky can still remember its last snowfall of the winter, John Hall, yearling manager at Taylor Made, is already thinking about sales preparation programs for the horses in his care.

“Timing is critical...we’ve already started looking at the yearlings to decide which sales they’re going to go to,” said Hall.

Hall, who has some 40 years in the horse business (16 of them at Taylor Made), says that while prep programs begin formally on the farm around Derby Day, initial assessments began months before, when horses were separated by gender and temperament.

When sales prep begins in earnest, Hall says he likes to look at the process as a pyramid, with good nutrition at its base.

“You’re always feeding to improve, whether you’re feeding to get a horse heavier, or lighter, or maintain what you’ve got, you’re always looking to polish the apple a little bit more, not to cookie-cut,” said Hall.

Taylor Made has a nutritionist on consult and has their feed custom-made to work best with the richness of the grass in a given year or season. The farm also uses certain supplements such as Body Builder and/or wheat germ oil to build condition and a healthy haircoat.

While the ultimate goal of the program is to encourage development, it is also crucial to avoid excessive growth spurts

that can lead to joint stress, physitis and obesity. And when the rich, Kentucky bluegrass comes out in the Spring, Hall has noticed that yearling conformation can change almost overnight. “You really have to monitor every horse on a daily basis looking for subtle changes and then making the necessary adjustments,” he said.

In the last weeks before a yearling ships to sale, Hall says managers should adjust their horses’ feeding programs to



John Hall, Taylor Made yearling manager since 1996



DROSSELMAYER, CREATIVE CAUSE & TO HONOR AND SERVE, recent Grade 1 winners prepped at Taylor Made Farm

account for the stress shipping may place on them. Particularly nervous horses will lose more condition than others in just a brief van ride, which is compounded on longer trips such as the ride to Saratoga.

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Hall also stresses that the feeding program for a young horse should be tailored to the individual horse however, and not the calendar.

Even a trio of Taylor Made’s most successful recent graduates—CREATIVE CAUSE (G1), DROSSELMAYER (G1), and TO HONOR AND SERVE (G1) were very different to manage as youngsters according to Hall, even though all three obviously achieved great success on the track. While Drosselmeyer was on point with his development at each stage of the prep process, Creative Cause was a late starter, while To Honor and Serve had a magnificent frame which he filled into over the summer of his yearling year.



Taylor Made Sales Prep Pyramid

The next step up in Hall’s pyramid is hoof care. Taylor Made employs its own blacksmith, Bobby Langley, who makes subtle adjustments to hooves over time to keep heels open and get a lot of foot on the ground.

Exercise is also an important component of yearling prep; Taylor Made begins by handwalking horses for 10 minutes at a time, gradually working up to 30 minutes either by hand or on Taylor Made’s European-style free walkers. While Hall prefers the automatic walkers, he sometimes elects to handwalk or swim yearlings who need extra attention. Many Taylor Made yearlings are also started in the roundpen using Monty Roberts

training techniques. “It’s very important that the horse get as much exercise as possible to develop bone and substance. That’s why it’s so important this time of year to keep them out as much as you can,” he said.

While Taylor Made provides guidelines on its websites for owners wishing to prep their horses at home, those that are sent to the farm for sales prep receive no less individual attention despite the large volume that the company consigns each year.

“One of the greatest things about Taylor Made is that there are so many gifted professional horse people here who really want to see every horse succeed,” said Hall. “They call me the yearling manager, but Frank Taylor’s looking at the horses constantly, Mark [Taylor]’s looking at them constantly, the account managers are all involved and look at the horses regularly.”

The Taylor Made staff is meticulous about the details, from mane to tail. Manes are trained to lie on the right side of the neck by braiding with yarn (not bands, to avoid cutting the hair). Tails are watched from early in the year to avoid damage from nibbling pasturemates and are not to be touched with combs once intensive prep has begun in order to avoid ripping out strands and thinning the tail.

This attention to the smallest details of raising racehorses is the legacy of Joe Taylor. His systems, philosophies and passion for horses is the backbone of Taylor Made’s unique formula for raising young horses who reach their highest potential both in the sale ring and on the track.

The Taylors attribute their success to three things: Great customers, great team members and the wisdom passed down from their father, the late Joe Taylor.

If you would like to discuss boarding and/or selling your horse with Taylor Made, contact Mark or Frank Taylor
859-885-3345
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