

Mastering Michigan

BY ESTHER MARR

*Marilyn McMaster's operation has risen
to the top of the state's market*

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As breeder/owner Marilyn McMaster looked at splashy photographs of yearlings galloping across lush pastures, her favorite gray mare posing beneath a weeping willow tree, and her intricately self-built log home, memories of her humble beginnings came rushing back.

She remembered a day during the mid-1970s when an acquaintance owed her late husband, Rolland "Mac" McMaster, a significant sum of money and offered a few of his Thoroughbred mares as a means to cover the debt.

At the time, Mac and Marilyn owned a farm in Central Michigan where they kept a few Quarter Horses, a herd of cattle, and offered boarding services. But aside from attending a few races at Arlington Park, they had never been directly involved in the Thoroughbred industry until the peace offering of backyard mares was handed over to them.

Three decades later the McMasters' operation has risen to the top of the Michigan market. And even though Mac is no longer present to share the success, Marilyn knows it was their collaborative teamwork from the beginning that has now paid off.

After toiling from the bottom up to breed and/or own eight stakes winners and obtain a leading regional sire, an industry that was in neither



Marilyn McMaster

PHOTOS COURTESY OF MARILYN MCMMASTER

Marilyn's nor Rolland's background quickly became their lifeline, as well as their most prominent passion.

A MODEST FOUNDATION

A few years after the McMasters acquired those initial mares, they obtained their first stallion, More Pleasure, again via a customer who had failed to pay boarding fees.

"He actually had a pretty good pedigree, even though he wasn't real fashionable," Marilyn said of the stakes-winning son of Princely Pleasure—Disabled Maid, by Correlation.

Having decided to concentrate solely on the horse industry after that, the McMasters sold all their non-Thoroughbred stock, purchased their 100-acre McMaster Farm near Hartland, and built barns from scratch to accommodate their growing broodmare band.

"After selling the other farm, we had some money to go buy horses, and I went down and had a ball at the Ocala Breeders' sale," remembered Marilyn.

Marilyn, 56, who was involved politically in the industry, removed herself from that arena two years ago to care for Mac when his health began to decline. He passed away in 2007.

"My husband was an incredible man...he was like a man's man—a John Wayne," said Marilyn of Mac, who was a retired member of the International Brotherhood of Teamsters, a part-owner of an automobile company, and board member of the Michigan Thoroughbred Owners and Breeders Association. "We were together 36 years. He had a real nice presence about him, and everyone in the horse industry liked him. He was fascinating and interesting—he was not an ordinary man."

Born in Pennsylvania where she attended business school (Harrisburg Central University), Marilyn formerly worked in the financial district in Chicago, where she met her husband.

While some may have given up on such a daunting enterprise as continuing in the Thoroughbred industry after the loss of a spouse, it didn't seem like an option for Marilyn, who by then considered her horses as members of the family.

Still persevering in spite of the downward-spiraling economy, McMaster currently has a 25-member broodmare band, 17 yearlings, and stallions Demaloot Demashoot, a graded stakes-winning son of Bold Ruckus; Syncline, a stakes-winning son of Danzig; Perfect Circle, a son of Unbridled; and Man From Eldorado, a grade II-winning son of Mr. Prospector.

She also has six horses in training with Lisa Campbell and Ronnie Allen.

To keep her farm afloat in the turbulent financial climate, Marilyn will have to sell a few mares and yearlings this year but is far from giving up.

"I would like to see the industry really improve in Michigan. That would be exciting—to get our purse level up to a couple hundred thousand a day and have a lot more race dates," said Marilyn. "It would be exciting to have this farm pay for itself. I won't create a pipe dream, but it's kind of a necessary thing in Michigan for all breeders. We've lost a lot. We used to have an industry 15 years ago of about 50,000. Now we have about 18,000 people related to this industry. That's a crying shame."



McMaster with guard dog Michelob, assistant Kim Hackett, and farm manager Dan Boik

The silver lining of the situation lies in Pinnacle Race Course near Detroit, which ran its inaugural meet last summer following the closing of Great Lakes Downs in Western Michigan in November 2007. The new track was built by Thoroughbred owner and banking executive Jerry Campbell, who operates Post It Stables.

"Pinnacle is a lovely facility, and they're trying to go forward

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State sire lists updated daily online.
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For stallions that stand, will stand, or stood (deceased) in Michigan (exported stallions are excluded), and have runners in North America. Listed below are all available statistics for the Northern Hemisphere through March 18, 2009. As supplied to The Blood-Horse by The Jockey Club Information Systems Inc., earnings exclude monies from Japan and Hong Kong. *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	2009 Stud Fee	Rnrs/Wnrs	Stakes Wnrs/Wns	Rstrct SW/ BT SW	(Chief Earner, Earnings)	2009 Earnings	Cumulative			
								Foals	Stks Wnrs	*A-E Index	*Comp Index
1	SERVICE STRIPE (91, Deputy Minister), Belair Farm	\$2,000	44/13	0/0	0/0	(Shipwrecktreasure, \$35,980)	\$231,745	307	14	1.33	1.14
2	THE DEPUTY (IRE) (97, Petardia), Hubel Farms	\$2,000	34/8	0/0	0/0	(She's the Cure, \$24,150)	\$91,258	188	4	0.61	1.01
3	SYNCLINE (97, Danzig), McMaster Farm	\$1,500	12/6	0/0	0/0	(Wedding Diamond, \$16,200)	\$67,173	79	1	1.06	0.99
4	MEADOW PRAYER (95, Meadowlake), Arnold Farms	\$1,500	4/1	0/0	0/0	(Bucky's Prayer, \$24,990)	\$26,787	84	6	1.25	0.78
5	DEMALOOT DEMASHOOT (90, Bold Ruckus), McMaster Farm	\$2,500	12/2	0/0	0/0	(Armored Truck, \$7,200)	\$23,583	297	9	0.97	1.09

*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.

with it," said Marilyn. "We now have a new fan base, with some new owners coming into the industry, and a few of them come (board horses) to our farm."

When Marilyn was president of MTOBA and sat on the board of the local Horsemen's Benevolent and Protective Association around 10 years ago, she helped the state obtain an owners' award program, which became a vital way for horsemen to benefit financially from raising their horses in Michigan.

Despite making some progress, however, Marilyn stressed the Michigan industry has a long way to go.

CAMPBELL STABLES

Standing

FIRE BLITZ

Storm Cat—Primarily, by Lord At War

Half-brother to Champion 2YOs POETICALLY and PRIMALY, Leading Sire WHISKEY WISDOM, and G1SW CITRONNADE. First foal 2YOs in 2009.
2009 Fee \$1,500

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Valid Appeal—Contrefaire,
by Sham

2009 Fee \$1,000

WAR IMAGE

Halo's Image—War Goddess,
by War

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INGREDIENTS OF SUCCESS

Nine years ago the McMasters hired farm manager Dan Boik, who grew the operation from 13 horses in 2000 to between 80 and 100 that now cycle through the farm each season.

"The industry is a learning process—every day you learn something new," said Boik, who worked in the cattle and hay industries before switching to Thoroughbreds. "A couple years ago I broke my leg and I couldn't work for six months, and I put my head in a computer and learned more and more about pedigrees and nicking patterns. There's always something more to learn. I love doing what I'm doing."

Aside from his regular duties as farm and stallion manager, Boik is also the stallion handler, and mare, yearling, and weanling manager. With the help of his wife, Renee, he foals out 35 to 40 mares a year.

Boik explained how some of McMaster's mares are sent to such states as Kentucky and Florida to be bred. The self-taught farm manager has a breeding philosophy that focuses on producing quality over quantity.

"When we have clients calling wanting to breed to our stallions, we just don't accept any mare," he explained. "We look at the mare—I dig deep—I go back four generations. I just like to see the whole pedigree work really well with the stallion. (That philosophy) is proving itself to be working with our stallions."

The farm's best stallion, Demaloot Demashoot, whom the McMasters acquired in 2001 from Frank Stronach's Adena Springs South near Ocala, Fla., was named Michigan's leading sire for eight straight years (2001-2008).

"If you look at Demaloot's top 10 runners, we bred the top seven," said Boik. "They're pretty much on a nicking pattern with Demaloot. In Reality mares are the best thing for Demaloot, and that's what we try to get mainly for him."

It was also in 2007 that Marilyn's mare In the Valley was named the state's top broodmare. The daughter of In Reality—Merrimac Valley, by Buckpasser, was one of the first mares Marilyn ever bought at an OBS sale, and she wound up producing champion homebred Valley Loot, a nine-time stakes-winning daughter of Demaloot Demashoot.

The mares currently boarded at McMaster are a mixture of horses Marilyn has bought and bred herself. One of the best mares she bred, the winning Real Courage mare My Lady Amelia, is the dam of grade III winner Lord Robyn.

Another successful mare, Vanline, a daughter of Pass the Line, produced 2004 Michigan champion 2-year-old male Demaguary.

POSSIBILITY BECOMES REALITY! 2 of Michigan's Top-5 Sires Stand at McMaster Farm!

SYNCLINE

Danzig—Annie Edge (ire), by Nebbiolo

#2 Leading MI Sire by 2008 Earnings

Sire of 2008 MSW **SUGAR BAY** (\$542,820), one of Canada's leading 3-year-old fillies and winner of 4 consecutive \$150,000 stakes on synthetic and turf at Woodbine! By sire of sires DANZIG and a half-brother to **SELKIRK**, leading sire of 72 SWs (12% from starters). Fee: \$1,500 LFSN

DEMALOOT DEMASHOOT

Bold Ruckus—Trouble Free, by Nodouble

#2 Leading Sire of MI Breds by 2009 Earnings

With lifetime earnings of \$11M+ and 22 SHs, including leading earner and 6X SW **TRICKEY TREVOR** (G2, \$701,224), plus 2007-2008 Michigan Horse of the Year **VALLEY LOOT** (\$420,210, 11 wins in 17 career starts) and 2yo SP **Sheza Riot** (3rd \$50,000 Sickle's Image S.). Fee: \$2,500 LFSN

Also Standing:

Perfect Circle

Unbridled—Missed the Storm, by Storm Cat
Fee: \$1,200 LFSN

Man From Eldorado

Mr. Prospector—Promising Girl, by Youth
Fee: \$1,000 LFSN

All nominated to Michigan Sire Stakes



Dan Boik, Farm Manager / 810.853.5000

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2009 Leading Sires in Indiana

State sire lists updated daily online.
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1	CENTURY CITY (IRE) (99, Danzig), Breakway Farm	\$2,500	26/5	0/0	0/0	(Zegarra, \$26,800)	\$108,270	*108	0	0.54	1.53
2	INDY KING (99, A.P. Indy), Indiana Stallion Station	\$1,500	24/6	0/0	0/0	(Indycency, \$27,280)	\$106,672	81	1	0.90	0.93
3	HAP (96, Theatrical), Still Creek Farm	N/A	15/4	0/0	0/0	(Hapaheart, \$20,375)	\$50,220	67	0	0.56	0.89
4	WILD ZONE (90, Wild Again), Breakway Farm	\$3,000	30/3	0/0	0/0	(Uno Ducksy, \$12,000)	\$48,312	*443	12	0.83	1.14
5	WILD DEPUTY (93, Wild Again), WinRich Farms	\$900	24/4	0/0	0/0	(Blanding, \$9,580)	\$46,035	149	3	0.67	0.84

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INDUSTRY HIGHS, FUTURE GOALS

Though breeding and racing are currently Marilyn's full-time profession, she has an impressive resumé that includes several prestigious business ventures.

"I was quite involved in entrepreneurship, and I was one of the founding members of Southeast Michigan Venture Capitol," said Marilyn, who was also a past vice president of strategic planning for a printing company in Detroit. "I've been business-oriented for most of my life, and (my farm) is a business. The problem I first had getting involved (in the horse industry) was getting too attached to individual (horses)—that's one of the things Dan and I argue about."

Though it was hard for her to choose a favorite moment in the industry from the past three decades, Marilyn settled on the story of a stakes winner she had campaigned named Medieval Mac.

"We bought a Medieval Man horse at OBS who was related to our stallion More Pleasure, and he ran in a stakes race down at Calder Race Course (the 1993 Hollywood Handicap) and won, and that was so thrilling, because I named him after my husband—Medieval Mac," said Marilyn. "That was really a big thrill and was special for my husband."

Marilyn's all-time favorite horse over the years was not one of her big stakes winners, but rather a large gray mare named Darndana Anna. The stakes-placed daughter of Darn That Alarm had to be retired from racing early because of a sesamoid injury and is now a member of Marilyn's broodmare band.

"She is just big, beautiful, and is out of one of my favorite broodmares (Bamboula), an On to Glory mare. (Darndana Anna) had tremendous talent. She had an independent mind, but trainers could not handle her. She was feisty, strong, and a little bit belligerent; she reminded me a little bit of myself," Marilyn laughed, adding that Darndana Anna's 2-year-old by farm stallion Man From Eldorado looks impressive and will start racing this year.


While Marilyn has experienced many highs in the industry, breeding other stakes winners such as Worthy Notion, Kash Klip, and Charge de Buck, her immediate goal is to raise the kind of equine star that could completely turn her operation around.

"I want to move out of financial stress and get a big horse," she said simply. "I sold four Michigan Sire Stakes winners (Demagoguery, Charge de Buck, Valley Loot, and Worthy Notion) collectively for less than \$20,000, and collectively, they've earned about \$2 million. I'd like to be in a position where I didn't have to sell, and I could just do the racing myself. It's tough spending money on horses that you have to sell."

Perhaps Marilyn could find that much anticipated star runner in homebred Man That Alarm, the aforementioned 2-year-old colt by Man From Eldorado out of Darndana Anna.

"From the day he was born, he was an absolute gorgeous horse," said Boik of the colt, who is expected to make his first start this summer. "When we sent him out to be broken, the first thing the people at the farm (where he was boarded) said was,

'This horse is very athletic and smart.' He's a little high strung, but he's got a body, and he's the type of horse you just look out in the field and say, 'Ok, that's one of the ones.' "

Only time will tell. 



McMaster's mare Darndana Anna

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Bassett Photo

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- Champion 3YO Indiana Colt & Two-Time Champion Indiana Older Male

2009 Fee: \$3,500 LFG



SWIFTY



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