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Flower Power

Henry Mast goes from greenhouses to winner's circle

BY ESTHER MARR

ONE OF MICHIGAN-BASED Thoroughbred owner/breeder Henry Mast's life motto—"Business is easy"—is etched on a sign on his office door. The simple phrase reminds Mast of his long-standing secret to success.

"Business is real easy if you do what you say you're going to do, you do it for a fair price, and you do it on time," said Mast. "Those are pretty basic principles that are true in any business."

With a multi-million-dollar flower company and a profitable Thoroughbred operation to his credit, Mast's philosophy has proved effective.

Mast, 67, is now retired from his professional career, but the breeding and racing program he maintains with fellow Michigan horseman Bob Gorham still produces quality racehorses at an impressive rate.

Best known for racing Michigan horses of the year Rockem Sockem and Weatherstorm, Mast was not raised in the horse industry like many of his competitors. Just as he helped his father, Henry Mast Sr., build Henry Mast Greenhouses and Masterpiece Flower Company from the ground up, the younger Mast's involvement in the Thoroughbred business started from scratch.

Mast immigrated to the United States from the Netherlands with his parents and two siblings in the late 1940s. At the time, his father had \$300 in his pocket, but he put it to good use by renting a Michigan greenhouse to raise and sell cut flowers and vegetables to small retailers.

Looking back, Mast realizes the skills he learned while working part time in that greenhouse provided him with the courage, knowledge, and integrity to take over the company and eventually venture into the Thoroughbred world.

"One of the skills I garnered while working with my father for 20 years was the ability to work through issues," said Mast. "Did we get along famously every day...absolutely not, but we did develop a way of appreciating each other and the different skills we each brought to the table."

Together they built a successful company by focusing on the customer, being as concerned with their customers' profitability as their own, and by offering high-quality products. The skills he gained working with his father as a team were valuable later when



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Henry Mast with some yearlings; above, the early days of Henry Mast Greenhouses

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2013 Leading Sires in Canada

Rank	Stallion (Foreign foaled), (YOB,Sire), Where Stands	2013 Stud Fee Can \$	Rnrs/ Wnrs	Stakes Wnrs/ Wns	Rstrct SW/ BT SW	(Chief Earner, Earnings)	2013 Earnings	Cumulative			
								Foals	Stks Wnrs	A-E Index	Comp Index
1	WILKO (02, Awesome Again), Highfield Stock Farm	\$2,000	26/8	1/1	1/1	(Qiaona, \$169,524)	\$360,825	*116	2	0.76	1.39
2	MILWAUKEE BREW (97, Wild Again), Adena Springs Canada	\$10,000	59/11	0/0	0/0	(Implied, \$44,450)	\$306,611	*434	17	1.20	1.60
3	SLIGO BAY (IRE) (98, Sadler's Wells), Adena Springs Canada	\$6,000	35/11	1/1	1/1	(Regalo Mia, \$90,000)	\$239,611	*314	8	1.08	1.50
4	OLMODAVOR (99, A.P. Indy), Rivard Stables	\$1,250	36/11	1/1	0/1	(Persuasive Paul, \$78,490)	\$236,052	*230	9	0.88	1.37
5	NORTH LIGHT (IRE) (01, Danehill), Adena Springs Canada	\$7,500	46/9	0/0	0/0	(Feisty Albert, \$29,480)	\$218,215	*287	7	1.16	1.51
6	SILENT NAME (JPN) (02, Sunday Silence), Adena Springs Canada	\$5,000	21/2	0/0	0/0	(Silentio, \$78,000)	\$156,667	*158	4	1.28	1.30
7	FORMAL GOLD (93, Black Tie Affair), Esquirol Farms	\$2,500	28/4	0/0	0/0	(Gotta Go Gold, \$27,200)	\$110,846	476	19	1.12	1.33
8	FINALITY (99, Dehere), Red Rock Farm	\$2,500	15/5	1/2	0/1	(Eleadora, \$14,617)	\$103,418	193	13	0.70	0.78
9	GOLD LEGEND (90, Seattle Slew)	Died	5/3	2/2	2/2	(Coyote Legend, \$60,000)	\$99,519	414	21	1.23	1.14
10	SKIMMING (96, Nureyev), Pacific Stud	\$4,000	17/4	1/1	0/1	(Mah Gellin, \$40,320)	\$89,985	317	15	0.80	1.06
11	BOLD EXECUTIVE (84, Bold Ruckus)	Died, 2011	20/4	0/0	0/0	(Finally Together, \$18,600)	\$82,758	777	45	1.65	1.30
12	WANDO (00, Langfuhr), Schonberg Farm	\$3,500	22/5	0/0	0/0	(Rusted Through, \$19,200)	\$77,911	*127	2	1.30	1.21
13	GILDED TIME (90, Timeless Moment), Bar None Ranches Ltd.	N/A	14/3	0/0	0/0	(Lookinforchange, \$46,530)	\$75,691	*1243	53	1.36	1.61
14	THE TRADER'S ECHO (94, Eastern Echo), Bar 17 Stable	\$3,000	4/2	1/1	1/1	(Lester's Echo, \$51,000)	\$74,315	58	1	0.69	1.01
15	FOREST GROVE (01, Forestry), Canmor Farms	\$2,500	18/5	0/0	0/0	(Liberty for All, \$19,570)	\$71,705	88	2	0.96	1.33

he got into racing and breeding.

"In my view, life is all about relationships...whether in marriage, friendships, or business," said Mast.

He completed a degree in aerospace engineering at the University of Michigan, but after graduating in the 1960s, he decided to switch gears and join his father's newly launched company, Henry Mast Greenhouses. Business took off when both Meijer and Frank's Nursery & Crafts in Grand Rapids, Mich., hired the company to grow various plants for their supercenters.

Mast and his brother took over Mast Greenhouses in 1984 when their father retired, and by the 1990s six million flowering plants were being delivered to customers each year. Masterpiece Flower Company, the sales, marketing, and distribution component of Henry Mast Greenhouses, was launched following the younger Mast's retirement in 2005.

The company, now run by Mast's son, son-in-law, and other partners, employs 700 people and operates its own trucking company. It serves Meijer and Home Depot stores with potted plants and cut flowers throughout seven Midwestern states.

Around the same time the younger Mast took over his father's company, he also decided to delve into the horse industry. Mast knew little about horses, but he had always been interested in riding. With some money he had set aside, he built a small barn and bought a couple of Quarter Horses, one of which he ended up breeding, later racing its offspring.

"One day the trainer of that horse, Richard Rettele, said, 'If you like racing, you ought to buy a Thoroughbred,'" remembered Mast. "So I ended up buying a couple that raced at (the now defunct) Detroit Race Course."

Mast enjoyed his early experiences in the industry, but due to the increasing pressures from his growing business, as well as the need to spend quality time with his wife, Connie, and his children, he decided to take a hiatus from his equine hobby.

"I thought later in life, when I can afford it and have the time, I'll get back in it," said Mast. True to his word, Mast reignited his Thoroughbred interest in the late 1990s when he overheard some acquaintances talking about the possibility of opening a new racetrack in Muskegon, Mich., (the eventual Great Lakes Downs, which raced from 1999-2007).

"I told them, 'If you guys ever pull that off, give me a call,'" Mast remembered. Six months later Mast received the call and attended a breakfast meeting, where he was introduced to Gorham and connected with other men interested in joining the game.

Mast entered a racing partnership and bought some horses for Gorham to train. After a few years, however, the group dissolved and only Mast was left. But that turned out to be a blessing in disguise as the strength from that owner/trainer relationship has resulted in many rewarding industry experiences.

Two Are Better Than One

Mast's partnership with Gorham has been an integral aspect of his longevity in the Thoroughbred business. The two men admit they're much better as a team than they are on their own, as their differing skills and strengths have combined to make numerous profitable decisions.

"Partnerships don't last 15-20 years by accident," said Mast. "They take the effort and the willingness to see someone else's view as clearly as your own and the ability to vocalize occasional issues and resolve them."

Among the best horses Mast and Gorham have teamed to campaign are Weatherstorm, Rockem Sockem, and Prince of Time. Weatherstorm and Rockem Sockem earned Michigan horse of the year titles in 2006 and 2004-05, respectively, while homebred Prince of Time is the partners' most recent black-type earner, taking the 2011 Indiana Futurity at Hoosier Park and 2012 Governor's Stakes at Indiana Downs.

Regular communication about the breeding and racing programs has helped Mast and Gorham's relationship remain strong.

"We stay in sync on our race strategies, as well as placement and entries—where we're going to enter, how, and who we're going to run against," Mast explained. "That's part of the business I enjoy. I don't tell him what to do...we share opinions with each other and then come to a consensus."

Gorham praised Mast's innate horse sense and overall understanding of the racing business. Those qualities coupled with constant contact and realistic expectations have helped reduce misunderstandings along the way, he said.

"The communication and relationship between the owner and trainer are very important in terms of not only being successful from a business perspective, but also enjoying the intangibles of the racing business," Gorham explained.

"Also, Henry and I are realistic in terms of goals and expectations. While it's perhaps unusual in some respects (to have a partnership for this long), if you look through history, you'll find the most successful owner/trainer partnerships are the ones that have lasted decades and even lifetimes."

Special Note For Sire Lists:

For stallions that stand, will stand, or stood (deceased) in North America (stallions exported prior to the 2009 breeding season are excluded), and have runners in North America. All available statistics listed for the Northern Hemisphere through March 26, 2013. 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.)

*AVERAGE-EARNINGS INDEX and COMPARABLE INDEX: Lifetime AVERAGE-EARNINGS INDEX indicates how much purse money the progeny of one sire has earned 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; 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 AVERAGE-EARNINGS INDEX higher than their mares' COMPARABLE INDEX.



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2013 Leading Sires in Indiana

Rank	Stallion (Foreign foaled), (YOB,Sire), Where Stands	2013 Stud Fee	Rnrs/ Wnrs	Stakes Wnrs/ Wns	Rstrct SW/ BT SW	(Chief Earner, Earnings)	2013 Earnings	Foals	Cumulative		
									Stks Wnrs	A-E Index	Comp Index
1	STRONG HOPE (00, Grand Slam), Midwest Equine & Veterinary Hospital	\$2,500	48/19	0/0	0/0	(Bullet Catcher, \$47,400)	\$286,926	291	5	1.01	1.79
2	DESERT WARRIOR (00, Deputy Minister), Haffner Farm	\$1,500	27/7	0/0	0/0	(Jerusalem Stone, \$57,000)	\$236,222	*239	0	0.87	0.99
3	SPANISH STEPS (01, Unbridled), Lake Shore Farm	\$5,000	40/7	1/1	0/1	(Animal Style, \$83,400)	\$219,082	211	7	1.52	1.33
4	DOMESTIC DISPUTE (00, Unbridled's Song), Indiana Stallion Station	\$2,000	37/10	0/0	0/0	(A Lady Called Max, \$27,160)	\$208,460	*306	1	0.91	1.23
5	ACTION THIS DAY (01, Kris S.), Indiana Stallion Station	\$1,000	39/9	0/0	0/0	(Shellys Wild, \$43,200)	\$141,293	249	3	0.67	1.28
6	ALLUVIAL (02, Forestry), Still Creek Farms	\$1,500	22/8	0/0	0/0	(Mi Viento, \$31,000)	\$112,503	117	0	0.53	0.86
7	SIR SHACKLETON (01, Miswaki), Indiana Stallion Station	\$1,000	14/4	0/0	0/0	(Sir Newcastle, \$14,750)	\$69,033	*87	1	0.59	1.14
8	ZAVATA (00, Phone Trick), Foot Fall Farm	\$2,000	16/4	0/0	0/0	(Hi Ho Bambino, \$34,400)	\$66,693	*239	4	0.95	1.10
9	DREWMAN (98, Unbridled), Breakway Farm	\$1,500	10/3	0/0	0/0	(Very Playful, \$23,720)	\$54,246	209	4	0.82	1.28
10	ENTREPRENEUR (97, Cure the Blues), Nicks Stables	\$1,000	11/3	0/0	0/0	(Chief Ted, \$18,800)	\$52,998	67	0	0.58	0.89

Racing and Breeding Strategies

Over the years Mast has used similar strategies in both his flower company and his horse business.

He believes one aspect that helped Mast Greenhouses flourish was its partnership with Michigan State University's floriculture program, which taught the company how to grow and transport plants better. In his Thoroughbred business Mast has also utilized scientific processes to make decisions.

"I started poking around on the Internet and discovered Equix Biomechanics was doing a fair amount of body measurements and predicting future race ability," said Mast. "That really intrigued me."

Mast developed a solid business relationship with Equix's Mike McMahon. The bloodstock expert helped him select some horses at the Ocala Breeders' Sales Co.'s April sale of 2-year-olds in training, including stable star Miss Lodi (for \$45,000).

Trained by Tom Amoss, the daughter of Mr. Greeley's career got off to a fast start

when she broke her maiden by 11½ lengths in her debut at Fair Grounds at 3. Following that eye-catching victory, Mast received an offer from Richard Colton Jr. to purchase half of the filly for "a small fortune."

Mast obliged, and the two men campaigned Miss Lodi to win or place in five stakes, including a score in the 2002 Safely Kept Stakes (gr. III) and a third in the 2003 Humana Distaff Handicap (gr. I). She retired from racing with a record of 6-4-1 from 17 starts, for earnings of \$342,319.

Miss Lodi's career gave Mast plenty of thrills, but her performance in the auction ring was the icing on the cake.

"We bred her to A.P. Indy and put her in the (2004) Keeneland November sale and she sold for \$2 million, which absolutely floored me," remembered Mast. "I thought she'd sell for \$600,000 or \$700,000....we were high-fiving at \$1 million and taking pictures of the sales board, but the bidding just kept on going."

The sale of Miss Lodi proved to be a turning point in Mast's Thoroughbred career,

as it led to the purchase of his Mast Thoroughbreds farm near Caledonia, Mich.

"I called my dad and said, 'You and I have spent our lifetime working hard for a living, and I just sold a horse for \$2 million,'" said Mast.

Mast's farm resembles a Kentucky operation, with 130 acres of rolling land. He built a new 20-stall barn on the property and also refurbished a century-old structure to store equipment and use as a run-in area for yearlings.

The land investment allowed Mast to build his own broodmare band and begin a full-scale breeding operation. He currently co-owns 15-18 mares with Gorham and breeds the majority of them to race.

"We try to breed like-to-like and not change too much dramatically," said Mast, who uses TrueNicks key ancestors' information to assist in his mating decisions. "Horses have to fit each other."

One of the most prominent members of Mast's current broodmare band is stakes winner Christmas Time (by Gilded Time),

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2013 Leading Sires in Ohio

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Rank	Stallion (Foreign foaled), (YOB,Sire), Where Stands	2013 Stud Fee	Rnrs/ Wnrs	Stakes Wnrs/ Wns	Rstrct SW/ BT SW	(Chief Earner, Earnings)	2013 Earnings	Foals	Cumulative		
									Stks Wnrs	A-E Index	Comp Index
1	LUNARPAL (02, Successful Appeal), Mapleton Thoroughbred Farms	\$2,000	26/7	0/0	0/0	(Moon Larry, \$80,800)	\$225,887	97	2	0.86	1.07
2	OUTRAGEOUSLYFUNNY (02, Distorted Humor), Poplar Creek Horse Center	N/A	2/1	1/1	0/1	(Funnys Approval, \$150,000)	\$150,338	7	1	1.68	0.92
3	THE CLIFF'S EDGE (01, Gulch), Fair Winds Farm	\$2,500	29/5	0/0	0/0	(Taste the Fortune, \$28,040)	\$111,088	214	4	0.89	1.21
4	LIGHTNIN N THUNDER (01, Storm Cat), Frontrunner Thoroughbreds	N/A	15/5	0/0	0/0	(Super Jetset, \$30,536)	\$92,528	178	7	0.90	1.12
5	MR. SINATRA (94, Mining), Richards Farm	\$500	9/3	0/0	0/0	(Joe Bagadonuts, \$21,116)	\$57,240	58	0	0.92	1.14
6	TROPICAL STORM (00, Storm Cat), Raimonde Farms	\$1,500	12/4	0/0	0/0	(El Oh El A, \$22,660)	\$56,947	*84	0	0.59	0.77
7	PACIFIC WAVES (93, Seattle Slew), Raimonde Farms	\$1,000	8/5	0/0	0/0	(Plain Ol' Willard, \$9,114)	\$33,885	73	2	0.74	0.93
8	MOBIL (00, Langfuhr), Mapleton Thoroughbred Farms	\$2,500	9/2	0/0	0/0	(Oilton, \$17,200)	\$32,808	*137	5	1.41	1.45
9	AENEAS (99, Capote), Poplar Creek Horse Center	\$1,000	22/2	0/0	0/0	(To Vegas, \$6,668)	\$27,897	78	0	0.32	0.87
10	BOLD TRUTH (99, Seattle Slew), Belford Farm	\$2,000	5/2	0/0	0/0	(Deadly Truth, \$12,300)	\$27,613	*39	2	0.86	1.02

the dam of graded stakes-placed Honey Chile, stakes winner Prince of Time, and stakes-placed Clyde Park. Currently in foal to Henrythenavigator, Christmas Time is booked to Lemon Drop Kid for 2014.

Another valuable broodmare is Candor, who produced Perfectly Candid, a multiple stakes winner in Indiana.

Due to the state of the struggling Michigan Thoroughbred industry, Mast switched gears a few years ago and sent all of his mares to deliver their foals in Indiana and Ohio in order to take advantage of those states' breeding programs.

"We still live in Michigan, but (breeding and racing) are not what they used to be by any stretch and certainly won't support an operation like mine," said Mast.

Michigan currently has only one Thoroughbred racetrack, Mt. Pleasant Meadows, which races about 40 days a year. Pinnacle Race Course, which opened in the Detroit suburbs just prior to the nationwide economic downturn in 2008, shuttered in December 2010 due to financial constraints.

The biggest issue that continues to plague the Michigan Thoroughbred industry is the

state's more than two dozen casinos, none of which are located at racetracks or benefit the state's Thoroughbred industry. The situation makes it difficult for Michigan to compete with surrounding states that offer better purses and breeders' rewards programs due to gaming funds.

Mast races a few Michigan-breds at Mt. Pleasant Meadows, but the main focus of his racing program is in Indiana and Ohio. Indiana already offers gaming at its major racetracks while Ohio is in the process of setting up gaming facilities at River Downs, Beulah Park, and Raceway Park.

When asked about his favorite aspect of being involved in the industry, Mast admitted he most loved seeing his runners perform on the track.

"I particularly enjoy it when I start racing horses that went through our mating process, breeding process, foaling, breaking, and training," said Mast. "That makes it that much more special."

Future Aspirations

Mast is currently anticipating the career debut of a homebred 2-year-old Giant's Causeway colt named Cadillac Key.

"He'll run in Indiana sometime in July or August," said Mast. "We're pretty excited about him."

Mast also owns a 2-year-old in a partnership with Team Valor, a group with which he has been sporadically involved over the years. In the past Mast was a member of Team Valor groups that campaigned such prominent horses as grade I victor and Kentucky Derby Presented by Yum! Brands (gr. I) contender Visionaire; plus Pluck, winner of the 2010 Breeders' Cup Juvenile Turf (gr. IIT).

"Pluck's victory just came out of the clouds...I don't think any other sport has moments like that; they're just special," said Mast.

"I've had some really great things happen with Team Valor," he added. "I got involved with them primarily for the education...I have a lot of respect for Barry Irwin and his methodology, and I thought I could learn from it."

Mast's only clearly defined goal for the future is to continue building his program's success.

"We've done real well on a state level, so I'd like to see us step up a little more nationally," he explained. "Whether that will happen, who knows, but we'll keep trying."

By focusing on tactics that have worked well in the past—such as staying true to his word and nurturing business relationships—Mast hopes good things will follow. Whatever may be, he's dedicated to the sport until the end.

"I often ask myself how long I'm going to keep trucking," said Mast. "But I figure I'll be in this business until the day I go—in one form or another." **BH**

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