

King of the Castle

James 'J.J.' Crupi uses training experience to buy and sell bloodstock

BY JULIE HAZELWOOD CASTRO

CONSIGNOR AND BLOODSTOCK adviser to several of the biggest names in American racing, James “J.J.” Crupi, founder of Crupi’s New Castle Farm, has built a solid reputation and business strategy that draw clientele back to his shedrow year after year. He is backed by a competent team and training program, and his instincts to recognize an athlete and his principled honesty are the backbone of his success as a pinhooker.

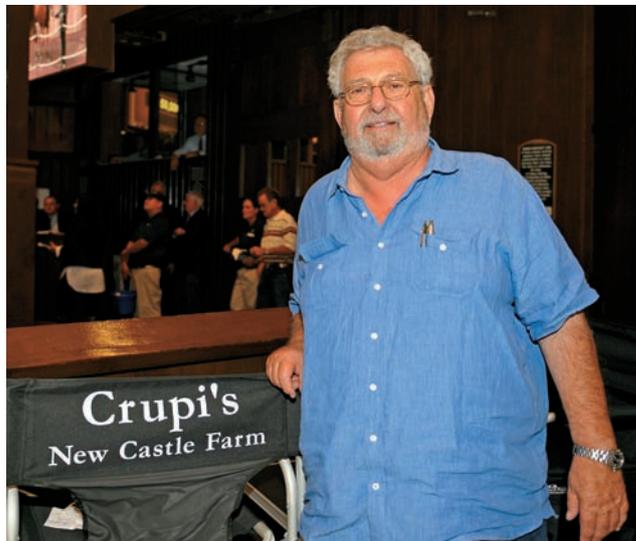
Last March, Crupi’s New Castle Farm kicked off the sale season by selling seven of nine juveniles for \$3.82 million at Fasig-Tipton’s Florida Sale at Gulfstream Park. A Scat Daddy half brother to Breeders’ Cup Classic (gr. I) winner Bayern was the standout. After working an eighth of a mile in :10½, the colt attracted a \$1.4 million bid from Coolmore’s M.V. Magnier to top the sale.

New Castle Farm is consigning up to 85 horses to various 2-year-old sales in 2016. Twenty of 22 cataloged for the March 2 Fasig-Tipton sale are set to ship south for the Feb. 29 preview. The consignment has hopes for another Scat Daddy colt, and juveniles by first-crop sires Tapizar, Stay Thirsty, and Bodemeister. A couple by leading juvenile sire and freshman sire Uncle Mo are also in the group.

Crupi has emerged as one of the biggest players in the bloodstock arena. At last year’s Keeneland September yearling sale, Crupi’s New Castle was the third-leading buyer in Book 1, spending \$4,385,000 for 10 yearlings. Overall, the operation spent \$7,190,000 for 25 yearlings, ending up as the second-leading buyer at the auction.

Crupi is invested in all or in part of every pinhook horse he sells. Several prominent owners and farms have been brought on board over the years, thus increasing the venture capital available and the class of horse obtained. Of the overall optimism within the Thoroughbred industry, he said, “It’s on the up,” and emphasized, “Really on the up.”

He is building a reputation where people feel comfortable and trust buying horses from the consignment.



James “J.J.” Crupi at last year’s Keeneland September sale

ANNE M. EBERHARDT

One point Crupi is clear on: All of the horses are for sale. “You have to sell good horses for people to come back to you.”

Diversification is part of Crupi’s counseling.

“You have to be in every aspect of the business,” he said. “I think that you have to do a certain amount of broodmares down to weanlings, a certain amount of yearlings, sell a certain amount in sales, and also race.”

Buying young is buying value. The overall leading buyer of weanlings by gross in 2015—15 lots for more than \$4.6 million—Crupi’s approach to buying weanlings is not unlike buying bloodstock at any other age.

“I like to buy a horse with size, good pedigree, and who is very correct,” he said. Some of the weanlings will race for their owners, and some are to sell.

As agent, he picked up a weanling Tapit filly for \$1.3 million at the Keeneland November breeding stock sale. She is a half sister to grade I winners Hoppertunity and Executive-privilege from the immediate family of champion Davona Dale. The main advantage Crupi feels to buying young is to be able to raise them and feed them on his own program. Now a yearling, the filly and her pasture mates are flourishing at the farm under the care of weanling manager Timmy Hall, a former trainer and son of veterinarian Peter Hall.

“This used to be the old Happy Valley (farm). I’ve got paddocks like Kentucky,” Crupi claimed.

The Wolfson brothers’ Eclipse Award-producing Happy Valley Farm was perhaps pre-destined to the stewardship of Crupi, a New Jersey native. Following a downturn in the economy in the late 1980s, Hugh Dailey of SunTrust Bank

(continued on page 44)

ADVERTISERS’ INDEX

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AIKEN TRIALS.....	45
www.aikentrials.com	

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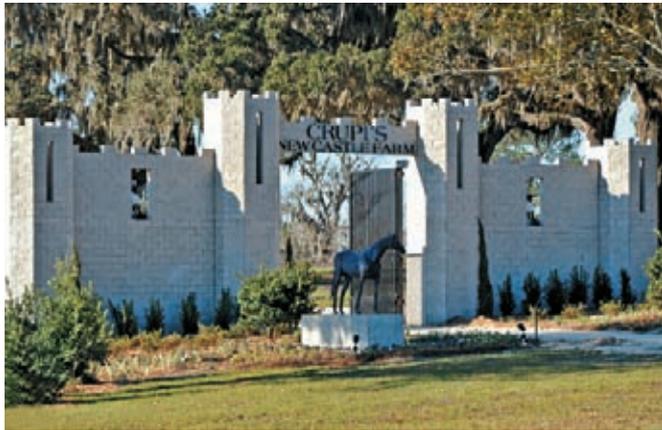
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COURTESY CRUPI'S NEW CASTLE FARM PHOTOS

Crupi has an interesting entry to New Castle Farm

(continued from page 42)

had contacted Crupi to offer the entire property, including the training facility, to him for \$1 million. At the time he didn't have the funding.

As he put it, "I was leading trainer several times over and broke."

With five racing titles between Monmouth Park and the Meadows, Crupi soul-searched and walked away from a 30-year career as a public trainer. Lured by the prospects of better weather and financial forecasts, he took up breaking and training yearlings at the Classic Mile near Ocala. Having been accustomed to training imperfect animals, in his initial pinhook undertakings Crupi bought horses he thought looked like runners. He quickly found out that crooked-legged horses were very difficult to resell.

Banking on his vast conditioning skills and with his buying philosophies amended, his horses began to sell well and the real estate market turned.

"I bought 200 acres for \$700,000," Crupi said. "Now, I just bought 55 acres for \$740,000."

When asked if he was attempting to piece Happy Valley back together, the bearded squire smiled and chuckled, "I'm trying."

At Crupi's New Castle Farm, a village of 11 barns is within a horse-path stroll to the well-manicured three-quarter-mile race-track. Originally installed by New York Racing Association track superintendent Joe King, the track has since been resurfaced and upgraded with safety rails. Crupi deems the consistency of the cushioned surface as one of his highest priorities. One member of his maintenance crew works exclusively on the track, harrowing daily and grading regularly.

The farm expansion this past year included a new quixotic renaissance castle gate designed with arrow slits in the towers and fortified walls. Noble allied flags hang in reverence to Old Glory flying regally above the farm insignia. A bronze horse relocated from the former entrance looks on. The farm added more grazing land and a larger office. Two barns of 2-year-olds are to be merged under a single roof of the newly constructed 50-stall sale barn. Built for safety with wood-paneled stalls, it has steel and screen sliding doors, plus offices.

Each barn has a credentialed trainer and foreman who conduct the stable with the same approach as a first-class racing stable. Every day, all of the horses are touched and legs checked.

"I obviously can't touch 350 horses every day," Crupi said.

Crupi is alerted should an issue arise. Early on, he convinced his son, Robert, training at Remington Park at the time, to come to Florida. Jockey Felipe Magana; Charles Browning who worked

for D. Wayne Lukas; and Marian Longaro are also among the staff.

"Whatever the horses need, they get," is the motto. At the therapy barn two handlers ease a horse over one-inch thick floor matting into the walk-through whirlpool spa. Healing Dead Sea salt water chilled to 36 degrees bubbles around the colt's belly. Even a seven-minute session will ease joints and tighten tendons. A couple of the stalls have vibrating floors. Framed photos of Vineyard Haven, Uncle Mo, and Stay Thirsty winning stakes races hang nearby. On the outer wall of the "spa barn" is a mural in shades of blue—the handiwork of equine artist Maureen Hahn, one of the farm's secretaries. The design is aptly named "Water Horses," and is surrounded by plaques of stakes-winning graduates of the farm including Ten Most Wanted, Awesome Gem, Zensational, and Little Mike.

On any given day, Johnny Sacco, an old friend from New Jersey, and Crupi sit trackside on the clocker's stand deck discussing a set. Sacco runs the farm. Nothing goes unnoticed. Crupi quizzes his rider about his mount galloping with her head a little high, then makes a call to the barn. "Have Charlie check her teeth again, and try her in a rubber bit tomorrow."

Working seven days a week is the norm for Crupi. One Sunday his wife, Edith, asked why he insisted on going to the farm, which is just 10 minutes away.

"You have 60 employees. Surely, they can handle it," she said.

He knows it would be fair to sleep in, but his reasoning is simple. "I love what I do."

Crupi governs with zeal.

"It's a big job overseeing every aspect of this farm," he said.

Even growing up, he was always ambitious, rigidly organized, and impatient.

"I'm a 'get it done' kind of guy."

He humorously described one of his maintenance crew.

"I call him 'Tommy Tomorra.' He is always telling me, 'I'll catch it tomorrow, Boss.'"

Procrastination is not tolerated.

Monique Delk is the daughter of Crupi's longtime friend, Danny Delk, a fellow trainer. She has known Crupi since she was a little girl. Upon her father's passing, Crupi phoned and asked her to join his team. In her words, "I hit the ground running."

Now six years in as the sales coordinator, Delk accompanies Crupi to every sale. They evaluate the short-listed horses together, and she is by his side throughout the bidding process, signing and scanning sales receipts to email to the farm and arranging transportation for the horses.

(continued on page 46)



Youngsters on the training track at Crupi's New Castle Farm

March 19th, 2016

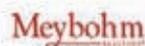
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2015 LEADING SIRE IN FLORIDA



Rank	Stallion (Foreign foaled), (YOB,Sire), Where Stands	2016 Stud Fee	Rnrs/ Wnrs	Stakes Wnrs/ Wns	Rstrct SW/ BT SW	(Chief Earner, Earnings)	Cumulative				
							2015 Earnings	Foals	Stks Wnrs	A-E Index	Comp Index
1	WILDCAT HEIR (00, Forest Wildcat)	Died, 2015	233/143	5/11	1/5	(Wild Dude, \$634,667)	\$6,969,206	*545	26	1.44	1.43
2	WITH DISTINCTION (01, Storm Cat), Hartley/De Renzo Thoroughbreds	\$7,500	168/93	2/3	1/2	(Distinctiv Passion, \$146,220)	\$3,116,868	*429	10	1.12	1.21
3	EXCLUSIVE QUALITY (03, Elusive Quality), Journeyman Stud	\$2,500	120/62	2/2	2/2	(Sr. Quisqueyano, \$187,770)	\$2,216,056	*241	7	1.06	1.12
4	HIGH COTTON (03, Dixie Union), Ocala Stud Farm	\$5,000	124/62	1/1	1/1	(Dream of Me, \$168,440)	\$2,078,575	*259	5	0.98	1.29
5	IN SUMMATION (03, Put It Back), Ocala Stud Farm	\$2,500	92/60	2/2	0/2	(Summation Time, \$110,858)	\$1,996,110	*155	3	0.97	1.43
6	BURNING ROMA (98, Rubiano)	N/A	45/27	1/3	0/1	(Sheer Drama, \$1,234,720)	\$1,945,301	*177	5	0.97	1.16
7	KANTHAROS (08, Lion Heart), Ocala Stud Farm	\$5,000	46/30	5/5	2/5	(Katie's Kiss, \$198,195)	\$1,780,874	*74	5	1.77	1.27
8	AWESOME OF COURSE (00, Awesome Again), Ocala Stud Farm	\$5,000	60/30	3/4	2/3	(Fellowship, \$391,150)	\$1,682,250	133	8	2.12	1.44
9	TWO STEP SALSA (05, Petionville), Get Away Farm	\$7,500	80/41	2/2	1/2	(Classic Salsa, \$191,810)	\$1,678,233	118	3	1.29	1.01
10	MONTBROOK (90, Buckaroo)	Died	87/44	0/0	0/0	(Score One, \$90,820)	\$1,435,195	*892	47	1.48	1.52

(continued from page 44)

"He's very good at balancing everybody," Delk said.

Each of Crupi's clients has a price range that they are comfortable in and they respectfully don't step on toes.

The night before a sale day, Delk organizes the short list and plots out the most expedient course through the barn area. Without looking at the catalog page or knowing the sire, Crupi will scan a horse from head to toe before offering any opinion.

"J.J. has an amazing ability to pick an athlete, a specific type of horse," Delk said. "He can just tell if they're runners or not. Immediately, he sees it."

Preferring a horse with a look of class, he will study their attitude and the way they carry themselves. If they are bad actors, he will walk away. When shopping for a yearling to pinhook, he is attracted to big, shorter-coupled, speedier types. Fillies and colts are equally considered.

Pedigree analysis and putting their selections into price points and the client's needs are a different part of the process. Delk also coordinates all of the veterinary inspections.

"I will not buy one that has a questionable throat, ever," Crupi stressed.

Crupi thinks long-term.

"I'm not looking to produce a horse that can only run an eighth of a mile," Crupi said.

Back home, Delk has an entire barn of horses to prepare for various sales across the country.

"Not every horse is precocious enough to sell at the Florida Sale," Delk remarked.

Her job also entails helping Crupi place them in the proper sale and handling all the applications.

The sheer volume of horses in training allows for any horse that encounters a set-back to be given time to advance at its own level.

"If a horse stubs his toe, I have another one to fill the sale slot," she said.

Delk mentioned that last year's

2-year-olds at the Florida Sale were a very special group. At the end of the night, with the gear packed and the help paid, she visited stall after stall to give her students a grateful pat and a kiss on the muzzle. She wished them a good life and a big career. One of the clients noticed her actions and approached. She was heart-warmed to notice Delk's wet eyes. Delk believes it matters. They matter. The horses are hardly just numbers. All of the stretched days, the traveling, and the responsibility; the paycheck is not the reward. This lifestyle and horse racing are in her blood.

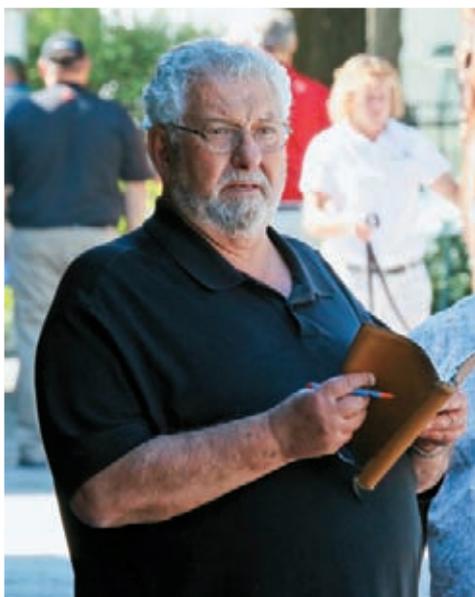
Crupi gets the biggest charge from his horses leaving his farm and going on to perform well.

At the Breeders' Cup World Championships last Oct. 30 at Keeneland, owner Teresa Viola asked Crupi to lead Liam's Map into the winner's circle after a record-setting romp in the Las Vegas Breeders' Cup Dirt Mile (gr. I). It was a surreal moment. Flattered by her request, he recalls it was one of the proudest walks of his career. After the colt was handed to his groom, an elated troop sidled alongside Teresa, her husband, Vincent, and

West Point Thoroughbreds' Terry Finley to pose for their prized portrait. All eyes were forward except Crupi's, whose gaze was fixed on the winner's nostrils. Even at the pinnacle, his concern was how Liam's Map, a colt that he spent a lot of time with at the farm, had handled the effort.

Later on the Breeders' Cup Friday program, another farm trainee, Stop-chargingmaria, won the Longines Breeders' Cup Distaff (gr. I). It capped what had already been a great day and a phenomenal year for the Crupi team. Along the way, Greenpointcrusader had also won the Champagne Stakes (gr. I) at Belmont Park.

The perpetual horseman with a big personality, Crupi has been known to boast on his horses' abilities. Delk smiled. "The amazing thing is, nine out of 10—if all goes well and the horse stays sound, he's right. He's likely to tell you which stakes the horse is going to win." **BH**



FASIE-TIPTON PHOTO

"J.J. has an amazing ability to pick an athlete. He can just tell if they're runners or not. Immediately, he sees it."

Special Note For Sire Lists:

For stallions that stand, will stand, or stood (deceased) in the states featured in this section (stallions that are dead or exported prior to 2011 are excluded), and have runners in North America. Listed below are all available statistics for the Northern Hemisphere through December 31, 2015. As supplied to Blood-Horse by The Jockey Club Information Systems Inc., include adjusted money from Japan, Hong Kong, and Singapore. Adjusted earnings are put on par with average North American earnings from the previous year. For example, the average North American purse in 2014 is \$21,617 or 45% of the 2014 average purse in Japan. To put earnings on par, all Japanese progeny earnings are multiplied by 45% before being credited to a sire's progeny earnings. Hong Kong earnings are adjusted by 19%; Singapore by 54%. 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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Mark J. Barrett photo

Adios Charlie

Indian Charlie - Teak Totem, by Northern Afleet

\$3,000

Awesome of Course

Awesome Again - Mais Oui, by Lyphard

\$5,000

Brooks 'n Down **NEW**

Montbrook - Precious Feather, by Gone West

\$2,500

Hear No Evil

Carson City - Nizy, by Cox's Ridge

\$2,500

High Cotton

Dixie Union - Happy Tune, by A.P. Indy

\$5,000

I Spent It **NEW**

Super Saver - Rateeba, by Sky Mesa

\$3,000

In Summation

Put It Back - Fiesta Baby, by Dayjur

\$2,500

Kantharos

Lion Heart - Contessa Halo, by Southern Halo

\$5,000

Overdriven

Tale of the Cat - Air France, by French Deputy

\$3,000

Prospective

Malibu Moon - Spirited Away, by Awesome Again

\$5,000

The Big Beast **NEW**

Yes It's True - V V S Flawless, by Deputy Minister

\$6,000

Uncaptured

Lion Heart - Captivating, by Arch

\$6,000



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