

SOUTHEAST

The New Rules

*Bert Pilcher Jr. and partners reach
the big time with Three Rules*

BY KAREN M. JOHNSON



JOE DORIO

Bert Pilcher at Shade Tree Farm near Ocala, Florida

FOR 36 YEARS Bert Pilcher Jr. employed a business model that worked to his satisfaction. For a commercial breeder it was quite simple: breed mares, raise their foals, and sell them. Of course, there was the occasional horse that failed to sell, but, by and large, Pilcher stuck to the plan... that is, until he threw caution to the wind.

The horse at the center of Pilcher's change of heart is Three Rules, whom Pilcher co-bred and co-owns with his friends Geoff Roy and Tom Fitzgerald. The Florida-bred son of Gone Astray swept this year's Florida Sire Stakes series for 2-year-olds at Gulfstream Park and entered the Sentient Jet Breeders' Cup Juvenile (gr. I) undefeated in five starts. Although

not the outcome Pilcher and his partners hoped for, Three Rules' sixth-place finish at Santa Anita Park did not diminish their faith in their colt, who will be pointed toward the major 3-year-old stakes in South Florida this winter.

It's a story that almost never was—at least for Pilcher and his partners. Born, raised, and broken on Pilcher's Shade Tree Thoroughbreds farm near Reddick, Fla., Three Rules turned heads early on. The fluidity of his stride as he romped in the paddock as a youngster; his self-assured manner as a yearling; and then, later, the quickness he exhibited in his breezes had Pilcher believing this colt would command a good sum of money at the Ocala Breeders' *(continued on page 42)*

2016 LEADING SIRES IN FLORIDA



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Rank	Stallion (Foreign foaled), (YOB,Sire), Where Stands	2016 Stud Fee	Rnrs/ Wnrs	Stakes Wnrs/ Wns	Rstrct SW/ BT SW	(Chief Earner, Earnings)	Cumulative				
							2016 Earnings	Foals	Stks Wnrs	A-E Index	Comp Index
1	WILDCAT HEIR (00, Forest Wildcat)	Died, 2015	228/138	4/4	2/4	(Chief Lion, \$217,535)	\$5,521,539	*627	27	1.41	1.40
2	KANTHAROS (08, Lion Heart), Ocala Stud Farm	\$5,000	93/55	7/12	4/7	(X Y Jet, \$586,470)	\$3,935,886	140	9	1.88	1.31
3	HIGH COTTON (03, Dixie Union), Ocala Stud Farm	\$5,000	174/86	5/5	4/5	(She's Incredible, \$133,490)	\$3,154,045	*351	9	0.97	1.28
4	FIRST DUDE (07, Stephen Got Even), Double Diamond Farm	\$7,500	111/57	3/3	1/3	(Dude Fantasy, \$335,000)	\$2,978,592	180	3	1.25	1.35
5	WITH DISTINCTION (01, Storm Cat), Hartley/De Renzo Thoroughbreds	\$7,500	138/67	1/1	1/1	(We're All Set, \$145,280)	\$2,353,668	*467	11	1.10	1.20
6	GONE ASTRAY (06, Dixie Union), Northwest Stud	\$4,500	95/45	2/6	0/2	(Three Rules, \$700,640)	\$2,220,673	*138	4	1.06	1.17
7	IN SUMMATION (03, Put It Back), Ocala Stud Farm	\$2,500	111/56	3/4	0/3	(Calculator, \$254,960)	\$2,168,907	207	5	0.99	1.39
8	AWESOME OF COURSE (00, Awesome Again), Ocala Stud Farm	\$5,000	90/48	2/6	0/2	(Awesome Banner, \$480,835)	\$1,874,045	176	10	1.80	1.41
9	BIG DRAMA (06, Montbrook), Bridlewood Farm	\$15,000	66/37	1/2	1/1	(R Kinsley Doll, \$211,660)	\$1,592,948	103	2	1.12	1.31
10	TWO STEP SALSA (05, Petionville), Get Away Farm	\$7,500	91/41	1/1	0/1	(Two Step Time, \$122,785)	\$1,488,692	165	4	1.13	1.03
11	EXCLUSIVE QUALITY (03, Elusive Quality), Journeyman Stud	\$2,500	105/55	0/0	0/0	(Dreaming of Neno, \$70,260)	\$1,471,886	271	7	1.00	1.10
12	ADIOS CHARLIE (08, Indian Charlie), Ocala Stud Farm	\$3,000	53/25	2/2	1/2	(Shane's Girlfriend, \$271,200)	\$1,339,089	80	2	1.24	1.41
13	GREATNESS (99, Mr. Prospector), Prestige Stallions	\$6,000	63/32	0/0	0/0	(Great Smoke, \$106,310)	\$1,039,438	*253	7	1.31	1.01
14	MONTBROOK (90, Buckaroo)	Died	66/37	0/0	0/0	(Schivarelli, \$98,640)	\$1,006,934	*895	47	1.46	1.50
15	VALUE PLUS (01, Unbridled's Song), HallMarc Stallions at Stonewall Farm Ocala	\$4,500	51/31	1/1	0/1	(Long On Value, \$118,270)	\$826,168	*353	3	0.95	1.13
16	BURNING ROMA (98, Rubiano)	N/A	30/20	1/1	0/1	(Sheer Drama, \$252,200)	\$730,409	*179	5	0.99	1.14
17	COOL COAL MAN (05, Mineshaft), Journeyman Stud	\$3,500	43/26	0/0	0/0	(Matt King Coal, \$80,200)	\$715,453	68	1	0.80	1.04
18	WEST ACRE (95, Forty Niner)	Died, 2012	19/12	2/2	0/2	(Always Sunshine, \$197,900)	\$695,800	336	15	1.40	1.18
19	HEAR NO EVIL (00, Carson City), Ocala Stud Farm	\$2,500	32/16	1/1	0/1	(Ballet Diva, \$143,270)	\$640,088	105	7	1.71	1.54
20	FLASHSTORM (04, Storm Cat), Northwest Stud	\$2,500	39/21	1/1	0/1	(Abounding Legacy, \$97,955)	\$547,010	64	2	0.97	1.02
21	J P'S GUSTO (08, Successful Appeal), Journeyman Stud	\$2,000	22/13	0/0	0/0	(La Key, \$73,800)	\$505,954	44	0	0.90	1.15
22	WAGON LIMIT (94, Conquistador Cielo), Bridlewood Farm	\$2,000	10/8	1/2	0/1	(Delta Bluesman, \$311,600)	\$455,651	193	7	1.32	1.10
23	SILVER TREE (00, Hennessy), Vegso Racing Stable	\$2,500	24/13	0/0	0/0	(Tree Shaker, \$78,465)	\$416,941	44	1	0.77	1.10
24	FACTUM (08, Storm Cat), Stonehedge Farm South	\$10,000	24/13	0/0	0/0	(I'm a Factum, \$43,880)	\$320,677	40	0	0.52	1.43
25	¶ BIONDETTI (08, Bernardini), Woodford Thoroughbreds	\$4,000	29/7	0/0	0/0	(Bella Vincenza, \$65,700)	\$316,605	58	0	0.55	1.59
26	CROWN OF THORNS (05, Repent), Woodford Thoroughbreds	\$2,000	23/10	0/0	0/0	(Atara, \$40,594)	\$310,205	31	1	0.75	1.20
27	UNITED STATES (06, A.P. Indy), Northwest Stud	\$2,500	23/8	0/0	0/0	(U S Diva, \$97,000)	\$290,794	36	1	0.69	1.11
28	TELLING (04, A.P. Indy), Prestige Stallions	\$10,000	22/7	0/0	0/0	(Telling Tony, \$71,590)	\$272,620	34	0	0.51	1.39
29	¶ OVERDRIVEN (09, Tale of the Cat), Ocala Stud Farm	\$3,000	24/8	0/0	0/0	(Red Crescent, \$57,270)	\$270,966	50	0	0.56	1.20
30	SEÑOR SWINGER (00, El Prado), La Mancha Farm	\$5,000	26/12	0/0	0/0	(Sally Pollock High, \$45,380)	\$262,644	89	0	0.44	0.98

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Sale Co.'s auction of 2-year-olds in April.

"I liked the colt from Day 1," Pilcher said recently. "There was something about him. Everybody says that about their horse: 'Oh, he was different.' But I never really experienced it until this colt came along. There was something about him—he just seemed so confident in everything he did."

Pilcher, 59, went as far as walking into the OBS office to deliver the paperwork on Three Rules, but he just couldn't quite summon the willpower to turn it over to the clerk.

"While I was driving to OBS, I was thinking, 'Man, why am I selling this horse?'" Pilcher, who has also turned down offers on Three Rules after his racing career commenced, recalled. "I loved

him, but then I thought, well, that is the reason you should sell, because everyone else will love him, too.

"When I was fixing to hand the paperwork to the girl, something inside me told me not to do it," he continued. "I knew I would get a lot of money for him, but I wouldn't get what he was worth. He was the perfect horse for me."

His partners, who weren't keen to sell either, remarked to him later that it was Pilcher's late father, Hubert, who was the voice in his head, saying, "Don't sell this horse; he's the one you're looking for."

Hubert Pilcher Sr., who built the 57-acre Shade Tree Farm in 1980, died in 2008. As a teenager, the elder Pilcher came to Florida from his native Georgia and found a job at the legendary Ocala Stud farm. He later became the farm manager of the former Meadowbrook Farms, near Ocala. When he opened Shade Tree, working beside him every day was his son, Bert Jr., who took over operations after his father's death.

"My dad was a fabulous horseman," Pilcher said. "Some people have it, some

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Horses at Shade Tree Farm, which was started in 1980 by Hubert Pilcher Sr.

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people don't, and he had it. He loved breeding horses and had a really good eye for a good mare and a good-moving racehorse. We made our living with horses with marginal pedigrees because we didn't have the money to purchase really top stock."

The land that Shade Tree—named such for its abundance of live oak trees—was built upon was of particular appeal to Pilcher's father.

"Dad liked it because he thought the lime in the land put calcium in the water and that does something for the bone of the horse," Pilcher explained. "That was one of his theories. I can't knock it because we raise solid horses."

In addition to the original parcel of land, which has three barns, Shade Tree leases 50 nearby acres to accommodate broodmares and their foals. Pilcher also leases a training barn at Starting Point Training Center.

Shade Tree is home to about dozen broodmares owned by Pilcher and his



JOE DIORIO

Joy Rules, the dam of Three Rules

partners. There are also another dozen or so broodmares that are boarded there. Pilcher said during the breeding season the number of broodmares increases as he has clients who use the farm as a birthing facility.

Pilcher almost didn't follow in his fa-

ther's footsteps. Upon graduating from the University of Florida with an animal science degree, he had his heart set on becoming a veterinarian. But after failing twice to gain admission at the newly opened vet program at UF, which was receiving thousands of applicants for just hundreds of spots, a dean at the school sat Pilcher down and steered him back to his family's farm.

"He told me just go to your farm and you'll be a lot happier because you'll do everything there you would do here, anyway, and just enjoy your farm," Pilcher recalled. "And you know what, at the time, I hated him for it.

"But that dean was right," he added. "If I had been a veterinarian, I wouldn't have handled it as well because I get too involved with each animal, and if I was a veterinarian and saw everyone's problems, it probably would have put me over the edge. It turned out to be the right career move for me."

Pilcher lives at Shade Tree with his wife of 36 years, Martha, whom he met in college. The couple have two adult children, twins Albert III and Louise. Neither of their children is involved with the farm, but Pilcher said his wife is a valued member of the operation.

"When I built the farm—and people won't believe this—the first three years I never left the 57 acres but twice," he said. "Martha, bless her heart, she stuck with me. She loves the horses too. She's been an unbelievable partner in this deal because she does all the bookwork for me and keeps me straight and organized, which is really a hard thing for anybody to do."

As hard as Pilcher works, he emphasizes he is not a one-man show, and credits the dedication of farm manager Alejandro Sanchez and farm trainer Gene Corbin, and Three Rules' trainer, Jose Pinchin, with the success of Shade Tree Thoroughbreds.

Three Rules won his first five starts



ADAM COGLIANESE/NYRA

Three Rules winning the Birdonthewire Stakes at Gulfstream Park

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 November 20, 2016. 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.

2016 FLORIDA SIRES BY WINNERS

Sire	Rnrs	Wnrs
Wildcat Heir	228	138
High Cotton	174	86
With Distinction	138	67
First Dude	111	57
In Summation	111	56
Exclusive Quality	105	55
Kantharos	93	55
Awesome of Course	90	48
Gone Astray	95	45
Two Step Salsa	91	41
Big Drama	66	37
Montbrook	66	37
Greatness	63	32
Value Plus	51	31
Cool Coal Man	43	26
Adios Charlie	53	25
Flashstorm	39	21
Burning Roma	30	20
Hear No Evil	32	16
Factum	24	13
Silver Tree	24	13
J P's Gusto	22	13
Senor Swinger	26	12
West Acre	19	12
Crown of Thorns	23	10
Rock Hampton	23	10
Hello Broadway	14	10

this year, all at Gulfstream Park. After breaking his maiden over a sloppy track in June, he won the Birdonthewire Stakes by five lengths in his second start, then ran through the Florida Stallion Series, taking the Dr. Fager Stakes by seven lengths, the Affirmed Stakes by 5½, and the In Reality Stakes by 10. He has earned north of \$700,000 to date.

Although Pilcher has bred and sold other stakes winners, Three Rules is the first stakes winner he has owned. Besides the fact his instincts of not selling the colt proved to be spot-on, Pilcher is also proud Three Rules is a product of four generations of progeny linked to Shade Tree.

The great-granddam of Three Rules, Dark Imp, was one of the first broodmares who came to board at Shade Tree after it opened. She was owned by the late Joy Carpenter, a client of Pilcher and his father. Bert Pilcher Jr. foaled Dark Imp's first foal, Joy's Delight, the dam



Three Rules' yearling half sister by Soldat, right, is turning heads at Shade Tree Farm

of Joy Rules, Three Rules' mother.

"After Joy's Delight ran for Mrs. Carpenter, I purchased the mare with my partner Geoff Roy, who made a deal with Mrs. Carpenter because we always liked the mare. She was always really fast, although tough to handle," Pilcher explained. "I think a lot of her racing career was compromised by her disposition. Each generation has gotten better in disposition. It seems as we get farther away from Dark Imp, we keep the ability, but now we get the intelligence that Three Rules has."

Pilcher bred Joy Rules back to Gone Astray this year, so a full sibling to Three Rules awaits. In the meantime Pilcher and his partners are bullish on a half sister to Three Rules.

"I've got a yearling filly by Soldat out of the mare and, boy, is she training good," Pilcher enthused. "I've got her galloping in the paddock right now. The way she moves, she is looking like she could be something special, too. The chances of having another Three Rules are going to be real slim. But she looks like a nice filly, and if this was a regular year and I was breaking horses, she still would be my pick to go to the races and do well."

Pilcher finds himself in the same position as he was earlier this year with

Three Rules—to sell or not to sell.

"I'm trying to decide on that now because I know she will be fast at the 2-year-old sale and Soldat has a really nice (pedigree) page," Pilcher said. "The thing that has got me a little bit thinking about keeping her is she looks just like her mama and her mama is only 12, but by the time this filly will be running, mom will be 15, and we might need a replacement for her."

And, given the year Three Rules has had, this commercial breeder has every right to deviate from his business model, particularly since the colt gave him the greatest thrill of his professional career.

"Three Rules has been a godsend," Pilcher remarked. "The trip to the Breeders' Cup with him is something I will never forget. It was really an amazing experience, especially for someone like me whose whole life has been racehorses. When you get to go to the Breeders' Cup and see these horses who you think are the best that ever was, and see them training in the morning and racing, and meet their trainers, owners, and riders, and be one of the guys, it's unbelievable. I had an experience that I will never forget." **BH**

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