

SOUTHEAST

# Next Step

*Tristan de Meric is making his own way in the Thoroughbred business*

BY ERIN SHEA / PHOTOS BY JOE DIORIO



Tristan and Valery de Meric with daughter Elizabeth and son Nathaniel

**PINHOOKING AND PREPARING** young horses for the racetrack are not easy. Not only does one need a good eye for what makes a great racehorse and the horsemanship skills to take those horses to the next level, one needs the skills to cultivate relationships with clients while simultaneously attempting to predict the future. One also needs a trustworthy team...and a whole lot of luck.

One young pinhooker is starting to put all of these pieces together and to reap the rewards.

Last year was particularly successful for Tristan de Meric, 29, who runs his operation along with his wife, Valery, near Ocala, Fla. Their training center is adjacent to the farm where de Meric grew up—de Meric Stables, owned by his parents Nick and Jaqui de Meric, who have run a successful training,

sales, and consignment operation in Central Florida since the mid '80s.

Both generations' businesses are run closely together, in regard to location, approach, and personnel. The younger de Meric got his start after graduating high school, when he immediately joined his father as an assistant. A few years ago he broke out on his own and with his wife purchased the neighboring property.

However, most mornings he still helps train his father's horses before jumping over to his property to work with his own—they even use the same riders, but have separate grounds crews. Their set-up seems to be a winning combination as graduates of their sales and training program are finding their way into winner's circles around the country.

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# The Two Year Old Source

*In 2017*

**March 14 - 15**  
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## Track Performance

Two Year Old Sales Graduates  
in North America 2016

	OBS Safetrack	FT Dirt	BAR
G1 Winners	11	2	0
G1 Horses	32	6	2
Graded Winners	43	9	1
Graded Horses	118	26	12

### Two Year Olds of 2016

G1 Winners	5	0	0
G1 Horses	14	1	0
Graded Winners	10	0	0
Graded Horses	29	3	3

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Sandra Madison photo

## 2016 LEADING SIRE IN FLORIDA



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Rank	Stallion (Foreign foaled), (YOB,Sire), Where Stands	2017 Stud Fee	Rnrs/ Wnrs	BT SWnrs/ Wns	Rstrct SW/ BT SW	(Chief Earner, Earnings)	Cumulative				
							2016 Earnings	Foals	Stks Wnrs	A-E Index	Comp Index
1	<b>WILDCAT HEIR</b> (00, Forest Wildcat)	Died, 2015	235/148	4/5	2/4	(Chief Lion, \$305,915)	<b>\$6,061,217</b>	*628	27	1.41	1.40
2	<b>HIGH COTTON</b> (03, Dixie Union), Ocala Stud	\$4,000	180/92	5/6	3/5	(R Angel Katelyn, \$147,120)	<b>\$3,476,436</b>	*351	9	0.97	1.28
3	<b>FIRST DUDE</b> (07, Stephen Got Even), Double Diamond Farm	\$10,000	116/65	3/3	1/3	(Dude Fantasy, \$335,000)	<b>\$3,249,001</b>	181	3	1.25	1.33
4	<b>WITH DISTINCTION</b> (01, Storm Cat)	N/A	139/71	1/1	1/1	(We're All Set, \$155,280)	<b>\$2,541,491</b>	*467	11	1.10	1.20
5	<b>IN SUMMATION</b> (03, Put It Back), Ocala Stud	\$2,500	118/58	3/5	0/3	(Calculator, \$254,960)	<b>\$2,341,742</b>	209	5	0.98	1.39
6	<b>GONE ASTRAY</b> (06, Dixie Union), Northwest Stud	\$5,000	101/46	2/6	0/2	(Three Rules, \$700,640)	<b>\$2,318,604</b>	*140	4	1.02	1.17
7	<b>AWESOME OF COURSE</b> (00, Awesome Again), Ocala Stud	\$5,000	93/48	2/6	0/2	(Awesome Banner, \$526,035)	<b>\$2,029,120</b>	176	10	1.76	1.40
8	<b>BIG DRAMA</b> (06, Montbrook)	N/A	71/40	1/2	1/1	(R Kinsley Doll, \$211,660)	<b>\$1,674,496</b>	104	2	1.06	1.34
9	<b>TWO STEP SALSA</b> (05, Petionville), Get Away Farm	\$7,500	94/45	1/1	0/1	(Two Step Time, \$129,835)	<b>\$1,601,980</b>	166	4	1.11	1.15
10	<b>EXCLUSIVE QUALITY</b> (03, Elusive Quality)	N/A	106/57	0/0	0/0	(Dreaming of Neno, \$70,260)	<b>\$1,572,817</b>	275	7	1.00	1.10
11	<b>ADIOS CHARLIE</b> (08, Indian Charlie), Ocala Stud	\$2,500	56/30	2/2	1/2	(Shane's Girlfriend, \$271,200)	<b>\$1,521,699</b>	83	2	1.30	1.39
12	<b>GREATNESS</b> (99, Mr. Prospector), Prestige Stallions	\$6,000	65/33	0/0	0/0	(Great Smoke, \$106,310)	<b>\$1,097,281</b>	*253	7	1.31	1.01
13	<b>MONTBROOK</b> (90, Buckaroo)	Died	66/37	0/0	0/0	(Schivarelli, \$98,640)	<b>\$1,046,425</b>	*895	47	1.46	1.50
14	<b>VALUE PLUS</b> (01, Unbridled's Song), HallMarc Stallions at Stonewall Farm Ocala	\$4,500	51/31	1/1	0/1	(Long On Value, \$118,270)	<b>\$863,859</b>	*354	3	0.95	1.13
15	<b>COOL COAL MAN</b> (05, Mineshaft)	N/A	45/27	0/0	0/0	(Matt King Coal, \$94,000)	<b>\$774,868</b>	70	1	0.80	1.03
16	<b>BURNING ROMA</b> (98, Rubiano), Prestige Stallions	\$6,000	30/20	1/1	0/1	(Sheer Drama, \$252,200)	<b>\$757,168</b>	*179	5	0.99	1.14
17	<b>WEST ACRE</b> (95, Forty Niner)	Died, 2012	19/12	2/2	0/2	(Always Sunshine, \$197,900)	<b>\$717,037</b>	336	15	1.40	1.18
18	<b>HEAR NO EVIL</b> (00, Carson City), Ocala Stud	\$2,500	32/16	1/1	0/1	(Ballet Diva, \$143,270)	<b>\$663,953</b>	105	7	1.70	1.53
19	<b>FLASHSTORM</b> (04, Storm Cat), Northwest Stud	\$2,500	42/21	1/1	0/1	(Abounding Legacy, \$97,955)	<b>\$592,724</b>	64	2	0.94	1.01
20	<b>J P'S GUSTO</b> (08, Successful Appeal), Bridlewood Farm	\$2,000	22/13	0/0	0/0	(La Key, \$74,000)	<b>\$535,946</b>	44	0	0.94	1.12
21	<b>WAGON LIMIT</b> (94, Conquistador Cielo), Bridlewood Farm	\$2,000	11/9	1/2	0/1	(Delta Bluesman, \$341,600)	<b>\$523,422</b>	193	7	1.33	1.10
22	<b>SILVER TREE</b> (00, Hennessy), Vegso Racing Stable	\$2,500	24/14	0/0	0/0	(Tree Shaker, \$80,085)	<b>\$434,501</b>	44	1	0.77	1.09
23	<b>¶ BIONDETTI</b> (08, Bernardini), Woodford Thoroughbreds	\$4,000	37/10	0/0	0/0	(Bella Vincenza, \$69,338)	<b>\$401,462</b>	62	0	0.54	1.58
24	<b>CROWN OF THORNS</b> (05, Repent), Woodford Thoroughbreds	\$2,000	26/12	0/0	0/0	(Kristie's Heart, \$55,145)	<b>\$371,949</b>	31	1	0.74	1.19
25	<b>FACTUM</b> (08, Storm Cat)	N/A	24/13	0/0	0/0	(I'm a Factum, \$47,950)	<b>\$342,912</b>	40	0	0.54	1.43
26	<b>UNITED STATES</b> (06, A.P. Indy)	N/A	27/8	0/0	0/0	(U S Diva, \$97,750)	<b>\$337,485</b>	36	1	0.69	1.12
27	<b>¶ OVERDRIVEN</b> (09, Tale of the Cat), Ocala Stud	\$2,500	28/9	0/0	0/0	(Red Crescent, \$58,390)	<b>\$335,495</b>	53	0	0.56	1.16
28	<b>TELLING</b> (04, A.P. Indy), Prestige Stallions	\$10,000	23/8	0/0	0/0	(Telling Tony, \$71,590)	<b>\$290,410</b>	35	0	0.52	1.33
29	<b>SPELLBINDER</b> (01, Tale of the Cat)	N/A	13/5	0/0	0/0	(Gryvon, \$61,330)	<b>\$282,312</b>	35	1	1.03	1.19
30	<b>BACKTALK</b> (07, Smarty Jones), Bridlewood Farm	\$3,000	17/7	0/0	0/0	(We've Got to Talk, \$51,996)	<b>\$279,370</b>	35	0	0.75	0.85
31	<b>ROCK HAMPTON</b> (04, Storm Cat)	N/A	23/11	0/0	0/0	(Love Flute, \$55,070)	<b>\$277,627</b>	40	0	0.65	1.06
32	<b>SEÑOR SWINGER</b> (00, El Prado)	N/A	27/13	0/0	0/0	(Sally Pollock High, \$49,475)	<b>\$277,079</b>	89	0	0.44	0.98
33	<b>CONCORDE'S TUNE</b> (89, Concorde Bound)	Died, 2011	20/9	0/0	0/0	(Grey by You, \$93,728)	<b>\$263,203</b>	487	25	1.23	1.10
34	<b>FORTY GRAMS</b> (04, Distorted Humor), Valdes Farm	\$2,500	11/7	0/0	0/0	(Chloe's White Sox, \$83,004)	<b>\$241,549</b>	22	0	1.02	1.01
35	<b>SARAVA</b> (99, Wild Again)	Pnsd	17/10	0/0	0/0	(Torniquette, \$46,954)	<b>\$227,774</b>	196	2	0.65	1.10

"The best part of the business for me is going out and seeing our graduates perform well on the track," Tristan de Meric said. "That's the most rewarding thing—watching our babies grow up and become top athletes on the track and perform all over the country and the world."

The de Meric family had a number of horses win big in 2016. In particular, Champagne Room, who was broken and sold by de Meric Sales for \$310,000 as a 2-year-old, closed her juvenile season with a win in the 14 Hands Winery Breeders' Cup Juvenile Fillies (G1); Practical Joke, broken by the de Merics, won the Hopeful Stakes and the Champagne Stakes (both G1); Annals of Time, purchased and

trained by de Meric Sales, won the Hollywood Derby (G1T); Paulsilverlining, broken and trained by Tristan and Valery, won three graded stakes and pushed her total earnings over the \$1 million line.

The list of horses that have passed through the family's program is an impressive lot: grade 2 winners Paid Up Subscriber, Ancient Secret, Takeover Target, and Catalina Red; grade 3 winners Sharp Azteca and Mr. Jordan; stakes winner Full Salute, multiple graded stakes-placed Money Multiplier, among many others.

Success in this business isn't something that comes in a day or even a year, or without a lot of effort and a few failures. But having a solid career in racing is something

that de Meric has been training for his entire life. Growing up on his parents' farm and serving as an assistant to his father have given de Meric invaluable insight and experience in the sales and training side of the industry and a lifelong passion that further fuels his drive to succeed.

"I've always loved horses and (working in the industry) was an obvious choice for me," de Meric said. "I never really looked back after high school and jumped right in with both feet. We've been fortunate. I can't think of a more rewarding lifestyle.

"It's hard to put into words—it's just the horses, being around animals," he said of what keeps him motivated to stay in the sport. "It's so rewarding to be around these

#### 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 2012 are excluded), and have runners in North America. Listed below are all available statistics for the Northern Hemisphere through December 31, 2016. As supplied to BloodHorse 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 2015 is \$21,782 or 50% of the 2015 average purse in Japan. To put earnings on par, all Japanese progeny earnings are multiplied by 50% before being credited to a sire's progeny earnings. Hong Kong earnings are adjusted by 17%; Singapore by 57%. 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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### POSEIDON'S WARRIOR

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### BEAU CHOIX

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### BRETHREN

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Father and son on the job: Nick de Meric, on horseback, with Tristan

young horses and to watch their development and be a part of their futures.”

The passion runs in the family. His sister, Alexandra de Meric, and her husband, Brandon Rice, run RiceHorse Stables, also located in Central Florida. Their farm focuses on purchasing, training, and selling young horses. One of their most notable graduates is three-time grade 1 winner I'm a Chatterbox.

Nick de Meric said that while his daughter was the most direct about her interest in working in the horse business when she was younger, he knows both children learned a lot about the industry just from listening to conversations and watching their parents.

“(Tristan) was absorbing a lot more at the table about what was going on than we ever gave him credit for at the time,” Nick de Meric said. “I think that's become very apparent; (he was) absorbing stuff that we never really realized he was absorbing.”

But Nick does attribute his children's successes to their early immersion in the sport.

“Even when the kids were young, they had small investments in the business, mainly through yearling to 2-year-old pinhooks,” Nick de Meric said. “This has the effect of magnifying every detail in a horse's progress and development. Each glimpse of promise or hiccup in the road feels like a major triumph or disaster, and the learning curve is therefore much

steeper. I know this has accelerated Tris' progression as an accomplished young professional and helped hone the skills he needs to compete in a competitive environment.”

However, as most horsemen know, sometimes the best skills for survival in the industry are the ones you can't teach. The younger de Meric's eye for horses and attention to detail only add to his ability to run a successful Thoroughbred operation.

“There are a lot of things that you can teach in terms of conformation and judgment and picking horses at sales, and there are some things you can't teach—you either have it or you don't,” Nick de Meric added. “And (Tristan) has emphatically got it. I know I'm his father, but I think most people would agree that he does.

“Nothing gets by him,” he added. “I've known that from when he was running barns for me. He and I own a lot of horses together in partnership, and most of those are in his care—I'm completely comfortable with that, and there aren't too many people I'd honestly say that about.

“When I've got my own money invested, you get pretty picky about the day-to-day care and the training. And in my case, most of those horses are with Tris.”

But, according to the younger de Meric, the most important thing he learned from his parents goes beyond the business aspects, the horsemanship, barn management, and attention to detail.

## 2016 FLORIDA SIRES BY WINNERS

Sire	Rnrs	Wnrs
Wildcat Heir	235	148
High Cotton	180	92
With Distinction	139	71
First Dude	116	65
In Summation	118	58
Exclusive Quality	106	57
Awesome of Course	93	48
Gone Astray	101	46
Two Step Salsa	94	45
Big Drama	71	40
Montbrook	66	37
Greatness	65	33
Value Plus	51	31
Adios Charlie	56	30
Cool Coal Man	45	27
Flashstorm	42	21
Burning Roma	30	20
Hear No Evil	32	16
Silver Tree	24	14
Senor Swinger	27	13
Factum	24	13
J P's Gusto	22	13
Crown of Thorns	26	12
West Acre	19	12
Rock Hampton	23	11
Biondetti	37	10
Sarava	17	10
Hello Broadway	14	10
Overdriven	28	9
Concorde's Tune	20	9
The Green Monkey	14	9
Wagon Limit	11	9

“(My parents have) always been the most honest people,” de Meric said, adding that the importance of honesty was drilled into his head from day one. “Honesty and integrity are the first couple of words that come to mind when people talk about my parents. I think that takes you a long way in this business.”

Apparently all of the lessons throughout his early years have paid off, as his own relatively new business continues to grow and he makes more of a name for himself independent of his parents.

One of the younger de Meric's biggest pinhooks—a career-defining deal—was selling a Macho Uno colt, now named Macho Rocket, for \$825,000 at the 2011 Ocala Breeders' Sales Co.'s spring 2-year-olds in training sale. He had purchased the



de Meric watches as some of the training center's horses go through their paces

horse for \$22,000 from Bridlewood Farm at the 2010 OBS January mixed sale with a small partnership he had put together that was in its second year.

"We got a really good kickstart out of that horse," he said. "That was obviously our most memorable pinhook, but we've had a lot of good turnovers since then."

His father said although he can't put an exact date on it, he knew his son had made it in the business when he started to have his own loyal following of clients.

"(Tristan) has, quite independently of Jaqui and me, developed a following of his own and a clientele of his own that are not only loyal to him but have great faith in his judgment and his actions," Nick de Meric said.

One more aspect that plays a vital role in de Meric's operation is its location near Ocala, which along with Central Kentucky lays claim to the title "Horse Capital of the World." With the Florida Horse Park, numerous sport horse facilities, Thoroughbred farms, riding clubs, and sales facilities calling the area home, Ocala and Marion County make a compelling argument for the title.

"In my opinion, there is simply no better winter training ground in the Northern Hemisphere. Between land, climate, and peripherals, for what we do, you can't compete with horses who winter in Florida," Tristan de Meric said, adding that

feed companies, blacksmiths, veterinarians, and other equine specialists are all a stone's throw away.

And this year, de Meric and Valery, an accomplished horsewoman who is a former assistant to pinhooker Eddie Woods, look to make the most of their location, experience, and luck to reach their goal of getting their clients and their horses to the winner's circle on Saturday afternoons. De Meric said their group of about 50 newly turned 2-year-olds is one of the best crops they've had.

"We have a really nice group of horses to sell, plenty of really exciting horses

that are going straight to the racetrack," he said, explaining that about half of their operation goes through the sale ring while the others belong to clients and typically go directly to the track.

"Every horse is an individual. We always treat each horse individually, and we create a program to fit every one," he said. "We try to focus on quality and train the best stock we can get our hands on."

And the future seems bright for the operation as well. Just as de Meric and his sister did as children, his children have already caught the horse bug and are developing an early passion, aided by de Meric providing hands-on experience.

"They both love horses, especially my daughter," de Meric said of Elizabeth, 6, and his son Nathaniel, 4.

"(Elizabeth) just loves to be around horses. She talks about horses all day; she has horse books and coloring books. Her entire room is covered in horse stuff. She sleeps and breathes horses," he said, adding that she has her own pony that she helps care for daily.

Although it's a long way off, it seems inevitable that one of his kids will join him and his wife in the family business.

"That's kind of the same way we grew up," Tristan de Meric said. "It's really nice; it's fun to have the kids on that same property that I grew up on, and it's a great way to spend their childhood. They're lucky, and we're really lucky." **BH**



de Meric tries to 'train the best stock we can get our hands on'