

SOUTHEAST

Return To Splendor

John and Leslie Malone revitalize Bridlewood

BY ALICIA WINCZE HUGHES

GEORGE ISAACS KNEW.

The longtime general manager of Bridlewood Farm acknowledges how preposterous it sounds to admit such a claim in the aftermath; after success has already started to trickle in, after commitment to a grand plan has already been recognized for its legitimacy. For a significant part of Isaacs' adult life, however, the Ocala-based, 800-acre property he oversees has been a massive part of both his professional career and emotional heartstrings.

So when Connecticut natives John and Leslie Malone walked through the door four years ago and said they would be interested in purchasing one of the signature operations of the Florida breeding and racing industry, Isaacs did his due diligence and learned in short order his gut reaction was correct.

"As soon as I met the Malones, I could tell. I hate to sound provincial, but I could tell that God had placed them at my doorstep," Isaacs recalled. "I knew right away they would be great stewards of the property.

"After a lot of time spent with them, I could tell (the Malones) were truly breeders at heart. I have a deep love for Bridlewood, and it was important that we perpetuate the legacy, so to speak."

It was not a small task for the Malones to take on, and Isaacs made sure they knew as much. More than 100 Florida-bred stakes winners had come off the property in Isaacs' time, so quality was something that had to be maintained in the aftermath of the passing of the farm's founder and owner, Arthur I. Appleton, in 2008.

A business plan was presented and weighed. An offer made



LOUISE E. REINAGEL PHOTOS

Bridlewood Farm general manager George Isaacs with Leslie's Harmony, a half sister to Beholder by Curlin

and accepted. And in the relatively short time since the Malones took on the vocation of revitalizing Bridlewood's standing within Florida's Thoroughbred landscape, they have put their own stamp on what they hope is a new era of prominence.

It takes special mettle to step into sizable shoes and fill them to one's accord. Since purchasing Bridlewood in August 2013, the Malones have used their business savvy and equine aptitude to pick up the mantle Appleton originally crafted and develop a breeding program that is working its way toward becoming one of the elite boutique operations in the industry.

A quick rundown of the current bloodstock within the Bridlewood barns serves as a testament to how far the operation has come in the four years since the Malones came on board and agreed to the vision Isaacs helped carve out. Included in the murderers' row of regal bloodlines the Malones have ob-

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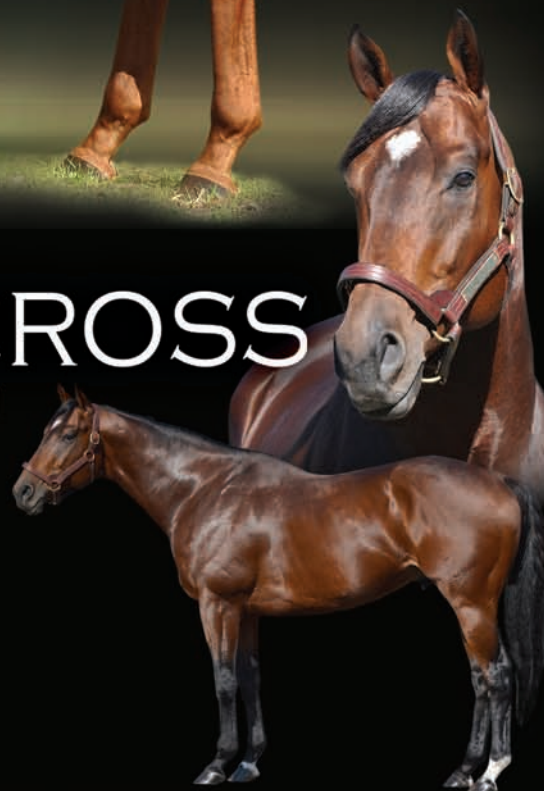
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2017 LEADING SIRES IN FLORIDA


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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				
							2017 Earnings	Foals	Stks Wnrs	A-E Index	Comp Index
1	WILDCAT HEIR (00, Forest Wildcat)	Died, 2015	130/36	1/1	1/1	(Chief Lion, \$51,300)	\$1,025,583	*667	27	1.40	1.39
2	FIRST DUDE (07, Stephen Got Even), Double Diamond Farm	\$10,000	70/18	0/0	0/0	(Skye Diamonds, \$88,920)	\$613,600	239	3	1.26	1.32
3	HIGH COTTON (03, Dixie Union), Ocala Stud	\$4,000	85/21	2/2	0/2	(R Angel Katelyn, \$70,000)	\$543,327	*367	10	0.97	1.27
4	ADIOS CHARLIE (08, Indian Charlie), Ocala Stud	\$2,500	42/11	0/0	0/0	(Mo Cash, \$53,284)	\$394,900	98	2	1.32	1.37
5	WITH DISTINCTION (01, Storm Cat)	N/A	57/17	0/0	0/0	(Too Clever by Half, \$33,230)	\$342,270	*488	11	1.10	1.20
6	GONE ASTRAY (06, Dixie Union), Northwest Stud	\$5,000	53/13	0/0	0/0	(Three Rules, \$39,600)	\$280,005	*158	4	1.01	1.18
7	IN SUMMATION (03, Put It Back), Ocala Stud	\$2,500	46/9	0/0	0/0	(Final Forum, \$40,400)	\$230,551	216	5	0.98	1.39
8	TWO STEP SALSA (05, Petionville), Get Away Farm	\$7,500	44/9	0/0	0/0	(Elizabeth Aurora, \$28,950)	\$189,061	205	4	1.10	1.04
9	BIG DRAMA (06, Montbrook), Stonewall's Prestige Stallions	\$7,500	38/7	0/0	0/0	(R Kinley Doll, \$36,828)	\$187,052	123	2	1.05	1.36
10	EXCLUSIVE QUALITY (03, Elusive Quality)	N/A	45/10	0/0	0/0	(Dreaming of Neno, \$36,000)	\$172,774	295	7	1.00	1.10
11	OVERDRIVEN (09, Tale of the Cat), Ocala Stud	\$2,500	18/7	0/0	0/0	(Earth Mystery, \$19,808)	\$150,934	80	0	0.64	1.16
12	GREATNESS (99, Mr. Prospector), Stonewall's Prestige Stallions	\$3,500	30/8	0/0	0/0	(Lucky Greatness, \$25,620)	\$120,689	*255	7	1.30	1.01
13	FLASHSTORM (04, Storm Cat), Northwest Stud	\$2,500	24/7	0/0	0/0	(Cinderella El Crome, \$39,440)	\$115,507	75	2	0.93	1.01
14	AWESOME OF COURSE (00, Awesome Again), Ocala Stud	\$5,000	43/6	0/0	0/0	(Awesome Banner, \$26,775)	\$105,878	198	10	1.73	1.39
15	BIONDETTI (08, Bernardini), Woodford Thoroughbreds	\$4,000	27/4	0/0	0/0	(Bella's Legacy, \$19,200)	\$101,170	81	0	0.55	1.57
16	CROWN OF THORNS (05, Repent), Woodford Thoroughbreds	\$2,000	12/5	0/0	0/0	(Major Key, \$25,000)	\$94,299	42	1	0.76	1.18
17	J P'S GUSTO (08, Successful Appeal), Bridlewood Farm	\$2,000	12/5	0/0	0/0	(White Smoke, \$33,450)	\$93,126	51	0	0.96	1.11
18	MONTBROOK (90, Buckaroo)	Died	17/3	0/0	0/0	(Such Spirit, \$24,800)	\$76,495	*895	47	1.46	1.50
19	TELLING (04, A.P. Indy), Stonewall's Prestige Stallions	\$5,000	14/4	0/0	0/0	(Hotty Toddy, \$19,600)	\$69,850	37	0	0.54	1.32
20	WAGON LIMIT (94, Conquistador Cielo), Bridlewood Farm	\$2,000	7/1	0/0	0/0	(Delta Bluesman, \$30,500)	\$60,830	195	7	1.33	1.10
21	HELLO BROADWAY (06, Broken Vow)	N/A	8/3	0/0	0/0	(U and Tequila, \$26,575)	\$60,357	22	1	0.88	0.84
22	HEAR NO EVIL (00, Carson City), Ocala Stud	\$2,500	12/3	0/0	0/0	(Joyful Noise, \$16,800)	\$54,008	113	7	1.69	1.53
23	SILVER TREE (00, Hennessy), Vegso Racing Stable	\$2,500	14/3	0/0	0/0	(Exclusive Lake, \$14,400)	\$52,659	44	1	0.77	1.09
24	FIELD COMMISSION (05, Service Stripe), Solera Farm	\$2,500	13/0	0/0	0/0	(I Am I Will, \$15,720)	\$50,535	61	0	0.53	1.00
25	BURNING ROMA (98, Rubiano), Stonewall's Prestige Stallions	\$2,500	11/3	0/0	0/0	(Leonides Da Roma, \$11,740)	\$48,715	*180	5	0.99	1.14
26	IQBAAL (06, Medaglia d'Oro)	N/A	5/3	0/0	0/0	(Animal Quiet, \$23,210)	\$38,080	20	0	0.81	1.28
27	BACKTALK (07, Smarty Jones), Bridlewood Farm	\$3,000	13/1	0/0	0/0	(Nick the Cardshark, \$15,000)	\$36,639	46	0	0.72	0.84
28	FACTUM (08, Storm Cat)	N/A	13/3	0/0	0/0	(Phil'sfirstfactum, \$12,755)	\$36,476	72	0	0.54	1.43
29	DARK KESTREL (03, Stormy Atlantic)	N/A	1/1	0/0	0/0	(Buckeye Bullet, \$33,240)	\$33,240	20	1	1.69	1.40
30	MACH RIDE (03, Pentelicus), Bridlewood Farm	\$2,000	3/2	0/0	0/0	(Mach My Day, \$17,300)	\$31,400	16	1	1.06	1.04
31	OUR CELEBRATION (08, Stormy Atlantic), Stonebridge Farm	\$2,500	3/2	0/0	0/0	(Tanyas Pride, \$19,200)	\$29,065	8	0	0.52	0.00
32	GARY D (07, Successful Appeal)	N/A	3/2	0/0	0/0	(Fergielicious, \$16,057)	\$26,692	9	0	0.99	0.78
33	BOASTFUL (98, Cozzene)	N/A	5/2	0/0	0/0	(Determinator, \$12,745)	\$26,387	42	0	0.57	0.87
34	VINEYARD HAVEN (06, Lido Palace)	N/A	8/1	0/0	0/0	(Vintners Special, \$13,560)	\$25,625	34	0	0.52	0.85
35	ROCK HAMPTON (04, Storm Cat)	N/A	11/0	0/0	0/0	(Stone Heart, \$6,440)	\$24,133	51	0	0.64	1.06
36	INDIAN EXPRESS (00, Indian Charlie)	N/A	4/1	0/0	0/0	(Indian Nate, \$15,620)	\$21,810	39	1	0.85	0.69
37	THE GREEN MONKEY (04, Forestry)	N/A	6/1	0/0	0/0	(Peace of Green Rvf, \$10,972)	\$18,062	42	4	1.11	0.93
38	UNITED STATES (06, A.P. Indy)	N/A	14/1	0/0	0/0	(Aunt Diana, \$7,320)	\$16,328	48	1	0.67	1.12
39	CAUSEWAY'S KIN (06, Giant's Causeway)	N/A	3/0	0/0	0/0	(Causeway Cutie, \$9,800)	\$13,880	9	0	0.82	0.81
40	SEÑOR SWINGER (00, El Prado)	N/A	10/0	0/0	0/0	(Hoof Hoof Away, \$4,157)	\$13,692	90	0	0.43	0.98

tained are half sisters to champions Tepin, Beholder, Songbird, and Honor Code—the latter of whom was a North American weanling record \$3 million purchase at the 2014 Keeneland November breeding stock sale; a full sibling to champion Un-

tapable; and the dams of grade 1 winners Rock Fall and Constitution.

As the chairman of Liberty Media Corp.—whose holdings include the satellite radio concern Sirius XM—John Malone knows the value of aligning him-

self with properties with a history of producing intended quality. With Jolie's Halo, Forbidden Apple, Southern Image, and Stormy Atlantic all being products of Bridlewood's illustrious past, the framework for success lay waiting for the right representative to continue the legacy.

"Before I spent one dollar of (the Malones') money, I wanted to make sure that I really knew what they wanted," said Isaacs, who has held the position of Bridlewood general manager since 1996. "And, basically, Mr. Malone embraced my business plan of a serious five-year capitalization plan of not only a pretty strong maintenance infrastructure but also the capital infrastructure of buying enough horses to put us on the path of being a relevant breeder. That was a pretty significant budget we came up with.

"Obviously, building a breeding program—building a world-class breeding



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POSEIDON'S WARRIOR

Speightstown / Poised to Pounce, By Smarten

BEAU CHOIX

Elusive Quality / Belle Cherie, By Belong to Me

RIDE ON CURLIN

Curlin / Magical Ride, By Storm Cat

BRETHREN

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Dancing Secretary, a half sister to Munnings, with her Palace Malice colt

2017 FLORIDA SIRES BY WINNERS

Sire	.Rnrs.	Wnrs
Wildcat Heir	130	36
High Cotton	85	21
First Dude	70	18
With Distinction	57	17
Gone Astray	53	13
Adios Charlie	42	11
Exclusive Quality	45	10
In Summation	46	9
Two Step Salsa	44	9
Greatness	30	8
Big Drama	38	7
Flashstorm	24	7
Overdriven	18	7
Awesome of Course	43	6
Crown of Thorns	12	5
J P's Gusto	12	5
Biondetti	27	4
Telling	14	4
Montbrook	17	3
Silver Tree	14	3
Factum	13	3
Hear No Evil	12	3
Burning Roma	11	3
Hello Broadway	8	3
Iqbaal	5	3
Boastful	5	2
Gary D	3	2
Mach Ride	3	2
Our Celebration	3	2

program—is a long-term proposition. Needless to say the Malones' capital has made it a lot easier to expedite things. Their goals are realistic in the sense that anything they do, they want to be associated with quality over quantity, and they want to be associated with good people and good management."

There is no greater guardian of the Bridlewood story than Isaacs himself. Having first joined the farm as stallion manager in 1989, the Kentucky native has become an adopted son of the Florida Thoroughbred industry, having witnessed the corrections and contractions that have taken their toll on even the largest operations.

In the aftermath of Appleton's death, Isaacs was charged with selling off his former owner's stock in phases, a bittersweet process that took about five years but also helped fund the property until it was officially put on the market. Hence, when the Malones committed to purchasing Bridlewood, there was a fresh slate to work with and a host of outward improvements to be made in order to get the physical property

to match the standard of the bloodstock it would house.

New training barns were put in, and the seven-eighths training track was literally taken down to its base and refurbished with a fresh surface. Add to that a turf training track, an all-weather uphill gallop, and the presence of farm trainer Jonathan Thomas, and Bridlewood can safely lay claim to being an all-encompassing facility worthy of the high-end clients to whom it caters.

"Very quickly, we've had some very good graduates come off the farm—(grade 1 winners) Carina Mia, Gun Runner, (multiple graded stakes winner) Destin," Isaacs said. "The old Bridlewood was basically three or four different revenue components. We had board revenue, which now is made up of predominantly training board revenue along with revenue from our other boarding clients on the farm, which is broodmare client revenue. Then we have sales revenue from selling yearlings and 2-year-olds, which will continue in the future, and then

we have stallion revenue."

Leslie Malone's equine love affair has been a particularly deep-rooted one as a longtime equestrian and supporter of the U.S. Olympic Dressage Team. The emotional and financial commitment the Malones collectively have made to Bridlewood is amplified by the fact that the industry climate in Florida has made it increasingly challenging for its stud farms to remain sustainable entities.

With contraction has come the reality that Bridlewood's history of standing top regional stallions will be tested. To that end it has shown a willingness to get creative in helping its four current

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 2013 are excluded), and have runners in North America. Listed below are all available statistics for the Northern Hemisphere through February 26, 2017. 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 per starter in 2016 is \$22,141 or 45% of the 2016 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 17%; Singapore by 65%. 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.

stallions succeed, with second-year sire Chitu being the first stallion introduced to the Florida breeding market through the “Share The Upside” program, which offers breeders the opportunity to earn a free lifetime breeding right after paying the stud fee and producing two live foals in the first two years.

“I think it’s fair to say the Florida market has contracted a lot,” Isaacs stated. “And as an FTOBA board member, I sincerely hope over time things will return to normalcy once again, and we can have a vibrant racing product here in Florida that in turn will help revitalize the Florida breeding industry. But right now I’d have to say it’s a fairly tough environment in which to try and stand stallions and breed Florida offspring and try and sell them at the local sales successfully.

“The reason we chose to take a quality over quantity approach is because our goal is to breed an outstanding Thoroughbred athlete and, through the breeder perspective, we would always probably try to keep the extremely well-bred fillies to race ourselves and add back to our broodmare band.”

That’s not to say stallion prospects are not still part of the Bridlewood business plan. And one such potential candidate is already emerging in a way that could give the Malones a taste of the pinnacle experience for any owner/breeder.

Lost in the deserving hype around McCracken’s track record-setting win in the Feb. 11 Sam F. Davis Stakes (G3) at Tampa Bay Downs was the runner-up effort put forth by regally bred Tapwrit, a handsome son of leading sire Tapit co-owned by Bridlewood, Eclipse Thoroughbred Partners, and Robert LaPenta.

Purchased for \$1.2 million at the 2015 Fasig-Tipton Saratoga select yearling sale, Tapwrit popped onto Bridlewood’s radar when Isaacs and the Malones weren’t quite finding the filly prospects that fit their bill at the auction. When Eclipse Thoroughbred’s president Aron Wellman asked Isaacs if they all would be interested in partnering on the obvious standout colt, there was little hesitation in the agreement. With a start in the March 11 Lambholm South Tampa Bay Derby (G2) now on tap for the gray runner, there could be

some serious inroads in the march toward a potential start in the Kentucky Derby Presented by Yum! Brands (G1).

“It presented an opportunity. And one thing Mr. Malone believes in is being supportive of our training clients, whom we view as business partners,” Isaacs said. “(Eclipse Thoroughbred Partners) is sending a significant amount of business to us to help train and in this case, it ended



“

The Malones want to be associated with quality over quantity.”

—GEORGE ISAACS

up being a three-way partnership with Eclipse and Robert LaPenta.

“Like I said before, it’s very challenging to start at zero and come out with a grade 1-type horse immediately. But we’ve been very blessed very quickly with some very nice foals and some very nice yearlings, and the training side of our operation has gone beyond our best expectations.”

The Malones’ quest for quality is not one they wish to contain, both in terms of geography and ambition.

By late 2013 it had come to Isaacs’ attention that historic Ballylinch Stud in County Kilkenny, Ireland, was seeking a buyer. With the Malones already having business investments in Ireland and an appreciation for the country’s rich Thoroughbred history, it didn’t take a lot of convincing on Isaacs’ end to sell his boss on the notion it would be a dazzling addition to their portfolio, something the Malones made official when they purchased Ballylinch in December 2014.

When Isaacs traveled to Ireland to scope out the Ballylinch grounds first-hand, he saw what he called “one queen after another” in regard to the broodmares pulled out before him and was equally awed by the farm’s rising stallions like Lope de Vega, Lawman, and Dream Ahead. He also found a kindred spirit in Ballylinch managing director John O’Connor who, like Isaacs, was charged with finding a new stewardship for the farm after its owner passed.

“It’s basically almost a carbon copy story of my career,” Isaacs said of O’Connor’s journey. “He basically started the same year as manager of Ballylinch as I did here, his owner passed away the same year mine did, and he was kind of left in the same situation of trying to find new ownership for the farm. When you saw the farm, you saw the assets, and you saw John O’Connor as the guy you knew was the driver of the business. As I told Mr. Malone, this was a no-brainer.”

There are 23 carefully selected broodmares set to foal at Bridlewood this season. But even exceptional quality will flounder if not housed in the right environment. And the one the Malones and Isaacs have created for Bridlewood’s future is one they hope will yield quick results.

“With the mandate of us raising good horses and trying to make Bridlewood a sustainable enterprise, I would say we’re well on our way, and it’s just a matter of time before that occurs organically,” said Isaacs. “I’d say five years from now, we’ll be breeding grade 1 winners; we’ll be breeding the kind of animals that the industry will take note of and know that Bridlewood is a relevant breeder both nationally and internationally. That is certainly the goal.” **BH**