

SOUTHEAST

Big Beginning

Starting Point Thoroughbreds a hit for Willy North and Stuart Morris

BY CYNTHIA McFARLAND / LOUISE REINAGEL PHOTOS

STARTING POINT THOROUGHBREDS may be a fresh name in the consignor ranks, but the face behind it is hardly new to the game. W.D. “Willy” North has never made a living doing anything but horses, and his experience shows. As a teenager, the Florida native started out grooming Quarter Horses, obtaining his trainer’s license by the time he was 18. Running at tracks in Alabama, Texas, Iowa, and Minnesota, North’s horses won at a high percentage, but purses weren’t strong.

“My mother (Betty Ennis) kept telling me Thoroughbreds were a better way to make a living,” said North, so in the mid-1990s he took his mom’s advice and began pinhooking a few Thoroughbreds.

Mom was right. Within a few years North, now 44, was making a comfortable living buying, training, and selling 2-year-olds and has never looked back.

For part of the ’90s, North worked with Ocala-based pinhooker and consignor Ricky Leppala. It was in partnership with Leppala that North and his father, Darrell Ennis, purchased Delaware Township. As North remembers, “The \$24,000 price tag was kind of expensive for us at the time, so we took on Ricky as a partner. I trained the horse and Ricky sold him in 1998.”

Delaware Township went on to become a multiple graded stakes winner of \$996,950.

One of North’s biggest early scores was a Wild Rush colt out of Freudenau that he bought for \$45,000 and sold for \$1.6 million to bloodstock agent John Ferguson at the 2004 Ocala Breeders’ Sales Co.’s Calder select 2-year-old sale, where North wound up being leading consignor.



W.D. ‘Willy’ North and his wife, Dr. Emily North

North spent \$205,000 buying horses during that sale cycle, which he turned around and sold for \$2.5 million. The following year his \$350,000 in pinhooks sold for \$1.3 million, and included Diabolical, who became a top turf sprinter and graded stakes winner.

North was busy buying, training, and selling, while also

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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)	2017 Earnings	Cumulative			
								Foals	Siks Wnrs	A-E Index	Comp Index
1	WILDCAT HEIR (00, Forest Wildcat)	Died, 2015	149/54	2/2	1/2	(Chief Lion, \$91,300)	\$1,647,069	*671	28	1.40	1.39
2	FIRST DUDE (07, Stephen Got Even), Double Diamond Farm	\$10,000	78/32	1/1	1/1	(Skye Diamonds, \$148,920)	\$1,015,001	241	4	1.27	1.32
3	HIGH COTTON (03, Dixie Union), Ocala Stud	\$4,000	102/31	2/3	0/2	(R Angel Katelyn, \$130,000)	\$989,728	*369	10	0.98	1.27
4	ADIOS CHARLIE (08, Indian Charlie), Ocala Stud	\$2,500	50/17	1/1	1/1	(Mo Cash, \$113,284)	\$732,157	101	3	1.36	1.37
5	WITH DISTINCTION (01, Storm Cat), Hartley/De Renzo Thoroughbreds	\$7,500	68/23	0/0	0/0	(Distinctiv Passion, \$61,260)	\$541,033	*490	11	1.09	1.19
6	GONE ASTRAY (06, Dixie Union), Northwest Stud	\$5,000	64/20	1/1	0/1	(Three Rules, \$106,100)	\$533,210	*162	4	1.01	1.18
7	IN SUMMATION (03, Put It Back), Ocala Stud	\$2,500	59/19	0/0	0/0	(Formal Summation, \$44,200)	\$425,234	217	5	0.97	1.39
8	BIG DRAMA (06, Montbrook), Stonewall's Prestige Stallions	\$5,000	41/15	0/0	0/0	(Smile Big, \$58,000)	\$362,749	127	2	1.05	1.35
9	TWO STEP SALSA (05, Petionville), Get Away Farm	\$7,500	56/18	0/0	0/0	(Elizabeth Aurora, \$29,350)	\$349,634	208	4	1.09	1.02
10	OVERDRIVEN (09, Tale of the Cat), Ocala Stud	\$2,500	27/12	0/0	0/0	(Over Limit, \$39,160)	\$307,554	83	0	1.07	1.15
11	EXCLUSIVE QUALITY (03, Elusive Quality)	N/A	49/14	0/0	0/0	(Dreaming of Neno, \$44,800)	\$250,578	296	7	0.99	1.10
12	GREATNESS (99, Mr. Prospector), Stonewall's Prestige Stallions	\$3,500	32/12	0/0	0/0	(Ashleys Magens Bay, \$27,140)	\$229,038	*255	7	1.30	1.01
13	BIONDETTI (08, Bernardini), Woodford Thoroughbreds	\$4,000	30/10	0/0	0/0	(Biondetti Song, \$22,970)	\$215,932	83	0	0.59	1.55
14	FLASHSTORM (04, Storm Cat), Northwest Stud	\$2,500	27/13	0/0	0/0	(Cinderela El Crome, \$51,040)	\$185,449	75	3	0.94	1.00
15	J P'S GUSTO (08, Successful Appeal), Bridlewood Farm	\$2,000	16/9	0/0	0/0	(White Smoke, \$41,850)	\$174,781	53	0	0.98	1.11
16	AWESOME OF COURSE (00, Awesome Again), Ocala Stud	\$5,000	50/8	0/0	0/0	(Awesome Banner, \$28,775)	\$168,084	198	10	1.70	0.88
17	BACKTALK (07, Smarty Jones), Bridlewood Farm	\$3,000	17/8	0/0	0/0	(Nick the Cardshark, \$37,000)	\$145,119	46	0	0.79	1.32
18	MONTBROOK (90, Buckaroo)	Died	19/5	0/0	0/0	(Schivarelli, \$38,278)	\$144,124	*895	47	1.46	1.49
19	CROWN OF THORNS (05, Repent), Woodford Thoroughbreds	\$2,000	14/5	0/0	0/0	(I'malreedythere, \$29,416)	\$120,851	43	1	0.76	1.17
20	FIELD COMMISSION (05, Service Stripe), Solera Farm	\$2,500	15/3	0/0	0/0	(Ten Hut, \$22,230)	\$103,915	62	0	0.57	0.99
21	TELLING (04, A.P. Indy), Stonewall's Prestige Stallions	\$5,000	17/5	0/0	0/0	(Hotty Toddy, \$22,300)	\$92,253	37	0	0.53	1.32
22	BURNING ROMA (98, Rubiano), Stonewall's Prestige Stallions	\$2,500	14/8	0/0	0/0	(Twass Nero, \$21,090)	\$92,206	*180	5	0.99	1.14
23	HELLO BROADWAY (06, Broken Vow)	N/A	8/3	0/0	0/0	(U and Tequila, \$43,275)	\$89,477	22	1	0.89	0.83
24	WAGON LIMIT (94, Conquistador Cielo), Bridlewood Farm	\$2,000	8/2	0/0	0/0	(Delta Bluesman, \$40,500)	\$82,430	195	7	1.33	1.10
25	HEAR NO EVIL (00, Carson City), Ocala Stud	\$2,500	15/4	0/0	0/0	(Joyful Noise, \$20,140)	\$81,612	113	7	1.68	1.52
26	SILVER TREE (00, Hennessy), Vegso Racing Stable	\$2,500	16/4	0/0	0/0	(Exclusive Lake, \$14,400)	\$75,567	44	1	0.76	1.09
27	FACTUM (08, Storm Cat)	N/A	15/5	0/0	0/0	(Phil'sfirstfactum, \$14,025)	\$66,049	73	0	0.54	1.43
28	BOASTFUL (98, Cozzene)	N/A	8/3	0/0	0/0	(Determinator, \$29,012)	\$59,582	42	0	0.57	0.87
29	DARK KESTREL (03, Stormy Atlantic)	N/A	1/1	0/0	0/0	(Buckeye Bullet, \$55,320)	\$55,320	20	1	1.71	1.40
30	ROCK HAMPTON (04, Storm Cat)	N/A	15/2	0/0	0/0	(Stone Heart, \$28,640)	\$54,716	51	0	0.64	1.07

consigning as W.D. North when in January 2006 he started dating his future wife, Emily Ann Mercer, a small animal veterinarian. Their twin boys, Wyatt and Wylie, were born in 2009. With two babies at home, going to sales around the country suddenly became much more complex.

"Emily had her career as a vet, and I decided to be an everyday dad," said North. "I stopped going to sales, but I didn't stop pinhooking or training. I just trained them here and shipped them to agents to sell, mainly Eddie Woods."

North's plan was successful. Among the

top horses sold during this period were I Spent It, bought for \$65,000 as a yearling and sold for \$600,000; and Danon Legend, a \$90,000 yearling purchase who sold for \$385,000.

Kim Lloyd, general manager of Barretts Sales, vividly remembers coming to Ocala to recruit horses for the 2012 Barretts select 2-year-olds sale and driving into North's farm. There, in the first paddock, was a stunning black colt Lloyd instinctively knew would appeal to Japanese buyers. He told North he wanted the colt for his sale. That was Danon Legend, who was purchased by Narvick International for Danox Co. from the Eddie Woods consignment. Now 6, the son of Macho Uno is a grade 1 winner of more than \$3 million.

Meanwhile, the Norths' two boys were getting a little older and Emily's plans of buying the practice where she'd worked for a decade fell through. The couple decided to take some of the money North had saved for pinhooking and start their own small animal veterinary clinic.

"We opened Midtown Animal Clinic of Ocala on June 1, 2016. Our goal was to have an affordable small animal clinic for the everyday person, and it's going spectacularly," said North,



North, with Starting Point partner Stuart Morris, right, and Barretts' Kim Lloyd

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- Texas Mile Stakes - Gr. 3
- Californian Stakes - Gr. 2
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- Strub Stakes - Gr. 2
- San Fernando Stakes - Gr. 2

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who works as practice manager.

About the same time, Emily's parents, Mark and Ann Mercer, retired to Ocala. With the grandparents now able to help pick up the boys from school and Ann working at the clinic, North once again had the opportunity to consign his own horses. But he wanted to do so at another level. Thus, Starting Point Thoroughbreds was born.

"You can't do things the way you did before; this business is always changing, and you have to change with it," said North. "If I'm going to a sale now, it's because I think I could have the best horse."

North asked respected Kentucky-based agent Stuart Morris to come on board as director of sales. The collaboration made sense as the two men had already worked together for several years, buying short yearlings to pinhook either as yearlings or 2-year-olds. (Among these was their Flatter colt who topped last year's OBS August yearling sale for \$210,000.)

"Stuart has been in the horse business forever, selling yearlings where conformation and walk is so important," said North. "I'm looking at them like a trainer, asking, 'Are they fast enough?' It's a good mix having a yearling agent and a 2-year-old agent combined. Both of us are at every sale for the buying and selling process.

"We're a public agency, meaning we sell horses for anybody, but we're very selective about the horses we buy and our training process," noted North. "Our philosophy is buying the kind of horses we would love to race ourselves if we were racing—horses with really nice pedigrees and a great walk. Our training approach is less aggressive in that we want them to work well, but we're not looking to have the fastest work of the sale. We're not looking to squeeze every fifth of a second out of a horse. For the most part I think the industry has learned the fastest work doesn't necessarily mean the best horse."

North averages spending between



The Midtown Animal Clinic of Ocala opened in June 2016

\$100,000 to \$300,000 on the yearlings he's buying to pinhook, and the last thing he wants to do is be aggressive in trying to make a particular juvenile sale if a horse isn't ready.

"If you have a nice horse, you can go to any sale at any time, so why push? We do everything in our power to produce

a sound horse that can move from our barn to the next guy without time off. The horse won't need three months off after a sale because he's been squeezed dry," explained North, whose emphasis is on putting a solid foundation on each horse. "Our horses live outside until 45 days before the sale; they're not hot-housed in the barn all year."

Added Morris, "We're not selling 'quick early, go fast' horses. Not that there's anything wrong with that, but our goal is to buy and sell performers who can go two turns, who can go the classic distances. We don't care about going 9.4 seconds at the sale in March as much as we do winning races at Saratoga in August, when it matters. Our goal is to train horses to be grade 1 winners."

Starting Point Thoroughbreds had its first consignment last June at OBS, selling five 2-year-olds. Call that a "soft opening." The "grand opening" came at the Fasig-Tipton Gulfstream sale this March, where the consignment hit two home runs, selling a Pioneer of the Nile colt for \$700,000 and a Bernardini filly for \$425,000.

M.V. Magnier purchased the Pioneer of



The 2017 Barretts sale-topping Malibu Moon colt sold for \$675,000

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 April 9, 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. *Fol 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.

WINNER AT 2 AND 3. BLACK TYPE AT 3 AND 4.



ANTHONY'S CROSS

Indian Charlie - Screening, by Unbridled



GENERATION 2015: **STAMPED**



2015 Colt: **Ourpleasurejet/Anthony's Cross** 2015 Filly: **Future Heiress/Anthony's Cross** 2015 Filly: **Snap Happy/Anthony's Cross**



Anthony's Cross Ranks #25

Leading 2016 First-Crop N.A. Sires of Yearlings
(THOROUGHBRED DAILY NEWS)

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(payable when foal stands and nurses)



Morris: 'He takes good care of his horses and stands behind his product'

the Nile colt out of Katz Me If You Can, which North had purchased as a yearling for \$280,000 at Keeneland September. Live Oak Plantation took home the Bernardini filly, a half sister to graded stakes winner Dancing Solo out of Dancing Alone, who was also a \$280,000 yearling North had bought at the Fasig-Tipton Kentucky October yearling sale.

"Willy North is a very, very good horseman. He was very young when he started in this business. He's always had the ability to identify a really nice horse, and back

when he was getting started, those weren't always the obvious horses," observed Boyd Browning Jr., Fasig-Tipton's president. "He buys a quality horse, and his program is designed to present first-class horses, not only in the sales ring but also horses that will go on to be performers at high levels at the racetrack. Although this March it was the first consignment we saw from Starting Point Thoroughbreds, I'm confident we'll see many more in the future for years to come."

Starting Point Thoroughbreds then headed back to Ocala for the OBS March 2-year-olds in training sale, where it sold a Quality Road colt out of Polyester for \$340,000 to Jay Em Ess Stable. The colt had been a \$200,000 yearling purchase at Keeneland September. Also in the consignment was a Mineshaft colt out of Bonita Meadow, purchased for \$245,000 by V-Leaf Stable. The colt had been a \$25,000 weanling from the 2015 Keeneland November breeding stock sale.

On a roll, Starting Point Thoroughbreds headed for the West Coast and topped the Barretts March 2-year-old sale with a Malibu Moon colt that brought a final bid of \$675,000 from West Point Thoroughbreds and Spendthrift Farm. North had purchased the colt out of Indian Breeze for \$135,000 from the Keeneland September sale.

"Willy is no stranger to our sales; his coming to Barretts has worked out well,"



Starting Point Thoroughbreds tailors its purchases to what the client wants to buy

2017 FLORIDA SIRES BY WINNERS

Sire	Rnrs	Wnrs
Wildcat Heir	149	54
First Dude	78	32
High Cotton	102	31
With Distinction	68	23
Gone Astray	64	20
In Summation	59	19
Two Step Salsa	56	18
Adios Charlie	50	17
Big Drama	41	15
Exclusive Quality	49	14
Flashstorm	27	13
Greatness	32	12
Overdriven	27	12
Biondetti	30	10
J P's Gusto	16	9
Awesome of Course	50	8
Backtalk	17	8
Burning Roma	14	8

noted Lloyd. "He had a sale-topper with Danon Legend sold by Eddie Woods, he's been training Bruno deBerdt's horses, and now he's selling on his own again."

"Starting Point Thoroughbreds is a joint, interactive effort between the agency and our clients/investors," said North. "The client has input. We tailor our purchases to what the client wants to invest in as far as pedigree and gender. If someone likes a particular sire or broodmare sire, we'll try to find them. We never try to push a horse on someone."

"I think we have a unique dynamic going on," remarked Morris, who continues to maintain his own bloodstock agency. "I help find them, Willy trains them, and I help sell them. Two-year-olds are Willy's game, and these are his clients. He takes good care of his horses and stands behind his product. Willy is not trying to reinvent the wheel—just do it a little differently—and so far we've been pretty successful."

"We want everybody happy when we're done: the one we're selling for, the buyer, and the one racing the horse in the end," Morris added. "We want to get some new folks involved, whether it's someone who's never owned a horse before or someone who's already in the business and wants to be part of a new way of buying and selling 2-year-olds." **BH**

Cynthia McFarland is a freelance writer based in Ocala, Fla.