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On the Right Foot

Debbie Pabst
with Atta Boy Roy

**Pabsts' Blue Ribbon
Farm takes pride in
early training of foals**

BY FRANK ANGST / PHOTOS BY CHERI WICKLUND

BELIEVING ANY LITTLE ADVANTAGE for a horse in the incredibly competitive business of breeding and racing can make a difference down the line, Debbie Pabst invests significant time and energy in early training of foals at Blue Ribbon Farm.

Pabst and husband, Rick Pabst, have been operating Blue Ribbon at its current Buckley, Wash., location since 1973. The 70-acre property offers 13 stalls in two different barns and, depending on your location on the farm, some mesmerizing

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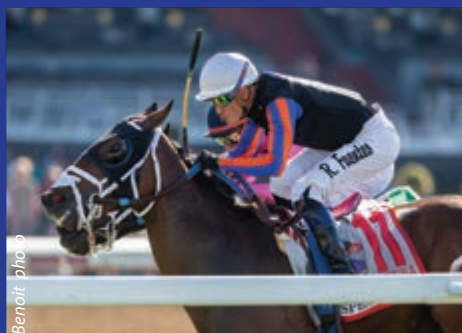
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2019 LEADING SIRES IN CALIFORNIA


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Rank	Stallion (Foreign foaled), (YOB,Sire), Where Stands	2020 Stud Fee	Rnrs/ Wnrs	BT SWnrs/ Wns	Rstret SW/ BT SW	(Chief Earner, Earnings)	Cumulative				
							2019 Earnings	Foals	Stks Wnrs	A-E Index	Comp Index
1	STAY THIRSTY (08, Bernardini), Lovacres Ranch	\$10,000	179/105	4/10	0/4	(Coal Front, \$1,348,000)	\$6,357,416	*462	7	1.31	1.42
2	I'LL HAVE ANOTHER (09, Flower Alley), Ballena Vista Farm	\$6,000	226/108	3/3	0/3	(Another Truth, \$389,203)	\$4,604,351	306	3	0.90	1.12
3	GRAYDAR (09, Unbridled's Song), Milky Way Farm	\$4,000	141/75	3/5	1/3	(Gray Magician, \$791,010)	\$3,986,395	*248	5	0.92	1.44
4	SQUARE EDDIE (06, Smart Strike), Ocean Breeze Ranch	\$25,000	86/43	4/7	1/4	(Eddie Haskell, \$318,104)	\$3,352,766	209	16	1.52	1.13
5	SIR PRANCEALOT (IRE) (10, Tamayuz), Rancho San Miguel	\$15,000	123/54	5/10	0/5	(Beau Recall, \$605,600)	\$2,817,735	226	7	1.22	0.97
6	UNUSUAL HEAT (90, Nureyev)	Died, 2017	77/38	6/7	4/6	(Apache Princess, \$224,662)	\$2,735,444	*828	49	1.87	1.17
7	SMILING TIGER (07, Hold That Tiger), Harris Farms	\$7,500	86/48	4/8	0/4	(Spiced Perfection, \$592,000)	\$2,526,690	163	6	1.15	1.00
8	LUCKY PULPIT (01, Pulpit)	Died, 2017	148/69	1/2	1/1	(Fashionably Fast, \$212,660)	\$2,299,172	*477	11	1.26	1.04
9	GRAZEN (06, Benchmark), Tommy Town Thoroughbreds	\$6,000	46/25	5/9	2/5	(S Y Sky, \$355,620)	\$2,097,253	113	10	1.70	1.06
10	MINISTERS WILD CAT (00, Deputy Minister), Tommy Town Thoroughbreds	\$4,000	104/55	2/2	0/2	(Royal Trump, \$144,671)	\$1,824,822	477	19	0.96	0.90
11	JERSEY TOWN (06, Speightstown), Daehling Ranch	\$3,000	91/52	1/1	0/1	(Shakopee Town, \$124,003)	\$1,717,494	*161	3	0.98	1.15
12	VRONSKY (99, Danzig), Harris Farms	\$4,500	76/46	0/0	0/0	(Poshsky, \$93,516)	\$1,602,832	262	10	1.27	1.07
13	EMPIRE WAY (09, Empire Maker), Heinz & Michelle Steinmann Farms	\$2,500	83/39	1/1	1/1	(Cholula Lips, \$159,250)	\$1,249,383	124	2	0.69	0.91
14	ACCLAMATION (06, Unusual Heat), Harris Farms	\$5,000	53/23	1/2	0/1	(Acclimate, \$329,182)	\$1,089,385	122	3	0.99	1.27
15	SLEW'S TIZNOW (05, Tiznow), Rancho San Miguel	\$3,000	47/28	4/4	1/4	(Summersimage, \$135,176)	\$1,087,263	125	6	0.96	1.03
16	MISREMEMBERED (06, Candy Ride), Barton Thoroughbreds	\$2,500	50/27	3/3	1/3	(Remember Daisy, \$85,770)	\$1,062,089	106	6	0.96	1.30
17	U S RANGER (04, Danzig), Rancho San Miguel	\$2,000	87/44	0/0	0/0	(Swing Thoughts, \$97,754)	\$1,035,551	*384	3	0.65	1.24
18	CLUBHOUSE RIDE (08, Candy Ride), Legacy Ranch	\$3,500	32/23	2/2	1/2	(Warren's Showtime, \$126,271)	\$928,448	59	2	1.07	0.89
19	COIL (08, Point Given)	N/A	48/19	0/0	0/0	(Principe Carlo, \$129,833)	\$901,842	148	0	0.69	1.16
20	DESERT CODE (04, E Dubai), Harris Farms	\$2,000	47/29	1/1	1/1	(Desert Law, \$125,382)	\$803,757	157	4	0.86	1.00
21	CYCLOTRON (00, Grand Slam), Old English Rancho	Private	43/23	0/0	0/0	(Dr Wysong, \$127,343)	\$762,841	148	2	0.99	1.18
22	RICHARD'S KID (05, Lemon Drop Kid), Rancho San Miguel	\$2,500	26/17	0/0	0/0	(Sedamar, \$136,804)	\$702,742	54	0	0.99	1.01
23	COMIC STRIP (95, Red Ransom)	Died, 2017	27/17	0/0	0/0	(Oh My Oh, \$73,914)	\$687,535	359	12	0.84	1.09
24	CHAMP PEGASUS (06, Fusaichi Pegasus), Barton Thoroughbreds	\$2,500	82/32	0/0	0/0	(Wild Bean, \$60,791)	\$675,973	162	0	0.31	1.03
25	EDDINGTON (01, Unbridled), Ballena Vista Farm	\$3,500	46/23	0/0	0/0	(Opus Won, \$111,600)	\$673,259	*455	11	1.15	1.37
26	OLD TOPPER (95, Gilded Time)	Pnsd	23/13	1/3	0/1	(Queen Bee to You, \$293,703)	\$666,298	558	20	0.94	0.82
27	HEATSEEKER (IRE) (03, Giant's Causeway)	Died, 2016	52/25	0/0	0/0	(Heatseeker Baby, \$66,292)	\$622,463	*230	8	0.96	1.21
28	EINSTEIN (BRZ) (02, Spend a Buck)	N/A	31/16	1/1	1/1	(Tap Back, \$182,100)	\$562,792	*194	3	0.66	0.95
29	DECARCHY (97, Distant View)	Died, 2017	51/19	0/0	0/0	(Ostini, \$68,501)	\$545,362	427	13	0.97	0.94
30	INDIAN EVENING (09, Indian Charlie)	N/A	16/7	1/1	1/1	(Sneaking Out, \$223,331)	\$535,747	51	3	1.04	1.08
31	KAFWAIN (00, Cherokee Run), Tommy Town Thoroughbreds	\$2,500	49/18	0/0	0/0	(Starring John Wain, \$55,091)	\$523,163	*649	18	0.98	1.18
32	IDIOT PROOF (04, Benchmark), Victory Rose Thoroughbreds	\$3,000	24/11	1/2	1/1	(Bulletproof One, \$165,400)	\$485,584	86	2	1.18	0.96
33	TANNERSMYMAN (98, Lord Carson), Woodbridge Farm	Private	21/12	0/0	0/0	(El Huerfano, \$139,465)	\$467,708	178	3	0.73	0.70
34	SMART BID (06, Smart Strike), Milky Way Farm	\$3,500	29/11	0/0	0/0	(Kosciuszko, \$102,082)	\$462,287	70	0	0.63	0.99
35	INFORMED (04, Tiznow), Ridgeley Farm	Private	36/14	0/0	0/0	(Sunrise Royale, \$65,242)	\$457,114	111	0	0.50	0.60
36	SURF CAT (02, Sir Cat)	N/A	25/10	0/0	0/0	(Ground Attack, \$108,024)	\$446,742	120	2	0.84	1.15
37	BOLD CHIEFTAIN (03, Chief Seattle), Victory Rose Thoroughbreds	\$3,000	28/16	0/0	0/0	(Our Bold Princess, \$49,171)	\$435,888	72	1	0.81	0.90
38	MARINO MARINI (00, Storm Cat)	N/A	46/19	0/0	0/0	(Candy's Martini, \$44,840)	\$434,710	386	4	0.76	0.92
39	TIZBUD (99, Cee's Tizzy)	Pnsd	35/14	1/1	1/1	(Kitty Boom Boom, \$111,351)	\$411,310	217	7	0.98	0.86
40	SIERRA SUNSET (05, Bertrando)	N/A	40/16	0/0	0/0	(Touched by Autism, \$38,431)	\$407,462	101	1	0.59	0.77



Debbie and Rick Pabst

views of Mount Ranier.

Debbie Pabst said it's an ideal place to raise horses, allowing the farm to provide plenty of paddock time for horses—just occasionally rotating them through the stalls.

"The climate here is a lot like England or Ireland. We grow incredible grass. I think it's a really wonderful place to raise horses," Pabst said. "We try to keep the horses out as much as possible, and we raise our young horses outside. They really benefit from that—the climate is mild, it just doesn't get that cold or get that hot. We don't have those extremes."

The farm features a half-dozen closed-circuit monitors that allow a night watchperson the ability to keep track of multiple mares close to foaling. Blue Ribbon typically breeds about a dozen mares of its own and welcomes about another dozen boarders, four or five who stay at the farm year-round and another group that stays at the farm when they are close to foaling.

When the night watchperson spots a mare about to give birth, she contacts Rick and Debbie. One or both typically assist in the foaling.

"We've been doing this a while. We moved here in 1973 and were just getting acquainted with foaling then—learning how to do it. And we just kept going, kept going, kept going. In the end you get a lot of experience," Debbie Pabst said, recalling the farm launched at a time when, for foaling, many people kept their broodmares at the stallion's farm.

Pabst opposed that approach, believing they could do a better job with the new foals than those stallion farms. Breeders agreed and the farm added clients.

"You could get your mare's foal home and they'd be big enough to ride and wilder than a March hare," Pabst said of the previous approach. "I didn't like that, so we lead the foals from day one. We do all of that stuff."

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Jeff Bonde,
Buyer of \$175,000 American
Pharoah colt



"I'm really happy with the turnout of the buyers. We are really seeing a lot of interest and there are guys who are not just looking around. They want horses."

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2019 LEADING SIRES IN WASHINGTON



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Rank	Stallion (Foreign foaled), (YOB,Sire), Where Stands	2020 Stud Fee	Rnrs/ Wnrs	BT SWnrs/ Wns	Rstrct SW/ BT SW	(Chief Earner, Earnings)	2019 Earnings	Foals	Cumulative		
									Stks Wnrs	A-E Index	Comp Index
1	ATTA BOY ROY (05, Tribunal), Blue Ribbon Farm	\$2,000	45/26	1/1	0/1	(Mr. Jagermeister, \$189,817)	\$640,623	96	2	0.59	0.71
2	COAST GUARD (05, Stormy Atlantic), El Dorado Farms	\$2,000	35/19	3/3	1/3	(Satellite Storm, \$91,542)	\$482,679	61	5	0.57	0.53
3	ABRAAJ (03, Carson City)	Died, 2019	34/14	2/2	0/2	(Capitano Canyon, \$64,013)	\$319,405	81	7	0.61	0.68
4	GOTHAM CITY (98, Saint Ballado), West Coast Training Center	\$1,500	11/10	0/0	0/0	(League of Shadows, \$58,627)	\$198,671	188	0	0.68	0.79
5	PARKER'S STORM CAT (00, Storm Cat)	N/A	27/14	0/0	0/0	(Cross Creek, \$32,946)	\$170,373	*330	4	0.82	1.00
6	NATIONHOOD (02, Cherokee Run), Blue Ribbon Farm	\$1,500	20/8	0/0	0/0	(Time 'n Time Again, \$27,580)	\$164,589	70	2	0.43	0.67
7	HE'S TOPS (93, Seattle Slew)	Died, 2015	12/7	1/3	0/1	(Summerland, \$77,786)	\$162,696	326	9	0.54	0.62
8	PREACHINATHEBAR (01, Silver Charm)	N/A	21/13	0/0	0/0	(Docktarri, \$21,106)	\$156,526	113	0	0.36	0.53
9	WAR POWER (06, Pulpit), Frances Long	Private	17/9	0/0	0/0	(Pistol Power, \$21,534)	\$135,219	35	1	0.31	0.42
10	DEMON WARLOCK (00, Demons Begone), Roche Farm	\$1,500	8/3	1/2	0/1	(Alittlestalk, \$85,976)	\$133,282	53	4	0.55	0.61

The Pabsts' Blue Ribbon Farm (What'll You Have?) uses a hands-on approach and early training to teach foals skills they will soon be expected to perform. That includes bringing foals into the stall every night for their first month or so before turning them out to the paddocks and run-in sheds all day. In the fall, after foals have been weaned, the farm begins training in basic skills.

huge benefits going to sales.”

Teaching young horses how to load in a van is a four-day process, and the farm usually works with foals in groups of five—a session a day for each group. The foals are loaded into the farm's three-horse flat-load trailer. They learn to walk up a ramp and enter the trailer. Pabst thinks that teaching horses when they're foals is

as fast as possible,” Pabst said. “It's just paid off huge, huge dividends. I just don't see why you would wait until the horse is a yearling and have your heart in your mouth and everything. We've done it this way for a long time, and you get great benefits.”

Another point of emphasis at Blue Ribbon is to teach each horse to lead by itself, as opposed to following in a string of horses.

“The first one is leading independently, but the others aren't,” Pabst said of the string approach. “We lead them one at a time because the whole point is to have the horse be independent and able to rely on the person who's leading it. So we never put them in a string.”

Pabst believes this approach pays off as horses move to sales or early training.

“The horses are going to be with people at the track doing all of the things they do. So we've tried to think about what things we can do to make this as easy a job for the next guy as we possibly can,” Pabst said. “These are a couple of things we can do. We benefit from it and so does the next person who owns the horse.

“You want them to be as easy to break as possible—they're individuals—every horse is different. Some are more difficult to work with than others, but you just deal with that. Occasionally, you'll need a horse with a few remedial lessons, but it just pays off.”

One graduate of that early training—the most successful horse bred by Blue Ribbon Farm, in partnership with friend Pa-



Atta Boy Roy won the 2010 Churchill Downs Stakes

“We put our groups of weanlings through a little program where we bring everybody in at night, put them in a stall, separate them out,” Pabst said. “And then at the end of that time, we teach them to load in our trailer and, boy, has that paid

easier, believing it's more stressful for a yearling to learn such a skill—especially just ahead of a sale when the last thing anyone wants is a setback.

“When we load up for the sale the next year, we can just get them into the truck

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 2015 are excluded), and have runners in North America. Listed below are all available statistics for the Northern Hemisphere through December 31, 2019. 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 2018 is \$23,755 or 50% of the 2018 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 15%; Singapore by 66%. Current year stakes winners include all Northern Hemisphere black-type stakes results from all available countries. *Foal counts include Southern Hemisphere. Cumulative stakes winners include 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.



Blue Ribbon Farm, near Buckley, Wash., covers 70 acres

tricia Murphy—is grade 2 winner Atta Boy Roy, who in 2013 returned to the farm to stand. Atta Boy Roy has quickly moved up Washington’s sires list, topping that honor roll in 2018 and 2019.

“It’s pretty wonderful to have him here,” Pabst said. “You go out the door and he’s out there in his field hanging out. It’s really a pleasure to see him every day.”

Atta Boy Roy, a 15-year-old son of Tribunal—Irish Toast, by Synastry, who like many other regional stallions has faced challenges in attracting a large book of mares, has made the most of his limited opportunities. Through his first 98 foals of racing age, Atta Boy Roy boasts multiple stakes winners Mr. Jagermeister and Risque’s Legacy.

Of that group, 65 have made it to the track and 41 have won races, a victory rate of 42.8% of foals and 64.6% of starters (through Feb. 13). He stands for \$2,000 this year at Blue Ribbon. In 2018 he finished 45th on the national third crop sire list with just 32 runners at that point. Pabst takes pride in that win rate and the conformation of Atta Boy Roy’s foals.

“He was himself an incredibly sound horse, especially for a horse who was that fast—to stay together for that long—it’s telling,” Pabst said. “He is a nicely conformed horse. He’s very correct, very sound, and he gets that too. It’s really a nice thing to have.”

That great conformation showed itself from the start. Murphy had the mare, Irish Toast, and partnered with Pabst on

a foal-sharing arrangement. The partnership made sense as stakes-placed Irish Toast had produced four of her first five foals at Blue Ribbon—the exception being The Great Face (by Cahill Road), who would go on to win the 2007 Longacres Mile Handicap (G3).

Irish Toast went to Tribunal on Pabst’s stallion share. That mating produced Atta Boy Roy, and Pabst was optimistic from the start.

“He was a knockout, really good-looking. He’s just one of those horses that knocks your socks off,” Pabst said.

Despite those good looks, Atta Boy Roy only brought \$4,500 at the 2006 Washington Thoroughbred Breeders’ Association summer yearling sale from Roy Schaefer. Pabst notes that Murphy wasn’t able to make the auction, and she sometimes wonders if her partner would have nixed the sale, but she acknowledges that at least Atta Boy Roy found a terrific home for his racing career.

Campaigned by Schaefer’s R.E.V. Racing and trained by Valerie Lund, Atta Boy Roy debuted as a 3-year-old and won in his second start, taking a maiden-optional claiming race at Turf Paradise by 12 lengths. Racing at Canterbury Park in his next start, he posted an 11-length score in an allowance race.

More success followed, as he posted a pair of stakes wins at Emerald Downs in 2009 ahead of a 2010 season where he’d achieve his career apex—a 1½-length score in the Churchill Downs Stakes (G2)

before a huge Kentucky Derby Day crowd.

“He was obviously a favorite when he was here, although we didn’t get a lot of money for him. That was really frustrating because he was a really good—and still is really good—physical individual. It’s just one of those things that happen sometimes,” Pabst said. “Then he went out and covered himself in glory. I kept in touch with Roy Schaefer and Valerie Lund. Then when they decided they were going to retire him, they called me up and we brought him here, which was great.”

Lund will always remember the day she spotted Atta Boy Roy at the sale.

“We had him walk and, honestly, he was the best horse I’d ever looked at,” Lund said. “I went over to Debbie to say, ‘Do me a favor and don’t show this horse to anyone else.’ She laughed at that.”

While she wishes he had had more opportunity, Pabst has been thrilled to see Atta Boy Roy climb to the top of Washington’s sires list. She notes that the farm’s other stallion, multiple stakes winner Nationhood (Cherokee Run—Elhasna, by Danzig) also holds his own when mare numbers are considered.

“I know how difficult it is to retire horses to stud and have them turn out—the truth of it is that most of them do not turn out. So both of these horses have been pretty successful—gotten really sound horses, which is really great,” Pabst said. “I wish The Jockey Club would put a control on the number of mares a stallion can breed. There’s a lot of bad things that have hap-



Blue Ribbon Farm has been the leading breeder in Washington five times from 2011-18

pened (because of large books). It's really not the best thing for the breed and you see it in the sales arena."

Atta Boy Roy's top earning foal in each of the past three years has been Mr. Jagermeister, who was bred by Lund's sister Kristin Boice and is campaigned by Lund, Boice, and a third sister, Leslie Cummings. Through one start in 2020, Mr. Jagermeister, out of the winning Corinthian mare Frangelica, has won half his 20 starts and earned more than a half-million dollars.

"If you took a picture of Mr. Jagermeister and had a picture of Atta Boy Roy at the same age, you'd have a hard time telling them apart," Lund said.

Blue Ribbon Farm, which finished as leading breeder in the state five times from 2011-18, is willing to adjust. After being committed to selling yearlings, the farm has launched racing syndicates to race some foals that fail to reach a fair price at

sale. Besides supplying another option for the farm, the racing syndicates have allowed people to give ownership a try.

"We're trying to mentor (the ownership partners) so that at some point they want to go out on their own. Winning a race is a fun thing!" Pabst said. "We try to win races and try to make as much money with these guys as we can. They don't care if they make any money as long as they win a race, but if you can have it so the horse can pay for himself—it's easier for everyone."

When it comes to breeding decisions, Pabst relies on her wealth of experience.

"When I was younger, I thought, 'I'm a smart person, surely I can just read up about everything.' But it didn't turn out to be quite that easy. It turns out you need experience, too," Pabst said. "You need to see a lot of horses and you need to figure out what a horse should look like. It's really, really important to see lots and lots of stal-

lions and to see their get. I don't go to the fall sales in Kentucky as much as I should, but I know the horses in Washington and the Northwest. I know what those horses look like, what the stallions look like. If you can't do that when there's only 10 horses standing in the state, you're behind.

"You have to take into consideration pedigree and the physical horse as you go along. You learn what things work and what things don't. I usually breed three or four mares out of state, mostly in Kentucky although sometimes I send mares to New York. In fact they have horses who fit for (Washington), pricewise and everything. One of my favorite horses in the universe is (New York-based stallion) Freud."

Lund is amazed when she sees Pabst put that knowledge and experience into action.

"She has always been a good judge of horse flesh," Lund said. "And then she's honest with you, which means a lot to us trainers. She'll tell you the truth about a horse. She's an amazing woman."

Pabst has stayed active with the Washington Thoroughbred Breeders and Owners Association, doing her best to make The Evergreen State's breeding and racing as good as it can be. She's at home in the farm's deep greens of grass and trees and in the shadow of Mount Ranier. Husband Rick is close to one of his passions: boating.

"I love living here. I can't quite imagine moving to Kentucky—I don't like it there that much. That's not my thing. I'd rather visit—a wonderful place to visit," Pabst said. "For what we have here, I think we've always done better than just about any location because I think we have a lot of things on our side." **BH**



Nationhood, a two-time stakes winner at Emerald Downs, stands at Blue Ribbon Farm