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Checkmate Thoroughbreds has expanded its stallion operation in recent years to take advantage of California's breed-back rule

## Book Moves

### **CHECKMATE THOROUGHBREDS SEES CONTINUED POTENTIAL IN CALIFORNIA-BASED STALLIONS**

By TRACY GANTZ

**W**HEN ADRIAN GONZALEZ BRINGS HIS 4-year-old son Ryder to horse sales, he's fostering father-son time and beginning to teach Ryder the business. But Adrian has discovered an additional advantage—the cuteness factor.

At the 2022 California Thoroughbred Breeders Association January sale, Ryder helped lead a mare into the sale ring. He accompanied his dad to the CTBA Northern California sale

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# 2022 LEADING SIRES IN CALIFORNIA

For daily updated sire lists visit [BloodHorse.com](http://BloodHorse.com)

Rank	Stallion (Foreign foaled), (YOB,Sire), Where Stands	2022 Stud Fee	Rnrs/ Wnrs	BT SWnrs/ Wns	Rstret SW/ BT SW	(Chief Earner, Earnings)	2022 Earnings	Foals	Cumulative		
									BT SWs	A-E Index	Comp Index
1	Stay Thirsty (08, Bernardini), Lovacres Ranch	\$15,000	178/85	2/3	0/2	(Mind Control, \$360,105)	\$4,154,392	*656	17	1.19	1.29
2	Grazen (06, Benchmark), Tommy Town Thoroughbreds	\$6,000	94/56	7/9	5/7	(Connie Swingle, \$323,564)	\$3,931,278	279	17	1.49	1.06
3	I'll Have Another (09, Flower Alley), Ocean Breeze Ranch	\$10,000	177/88	1/2	0/1	(Win Marvel, \$608,428)	\$3,296,977	435	4	1.03	1.08
4	Clubhouse Ride (08, Candy Ride), Legacy Ranch	\$5,000	66/43	3/7	2/3	(Brickyard Ride, \$274,000)	\$2,517,150	121	5	1.41	0.94
5	Smiling Tiger (07, Hold That Tiger), Harris Farms	\$7,500	104/48	1/1	0/1	(Taming the Tigress, \$167,412)	\$2,509,733	336	9	1.00	0.99
6	Mr. Big (03, Dynaformer), Legacy Ranch	\$4,500	79/41	4/4	4/4	(The Big Wam, \$167,160)	\$2,393,129	180	8	1.28	0.92
7	Square Eddie (06, Smart Strike)	Pnsd	83/34	1/2	1/1	(Self Isolation, \$226,990)	\$2,002,293	282	19	1.41	1.12
8	Vronsky (99, Danzig)	Died	75/43	1/2	1/1	(The Chosen Vron, \$125,000)	\$1,720,962	349	12	1.18	1.02
9	Graydar (09, Unbridled's Song), Milky Way Farm	\$4,000	80/41	0/0	0/0	(Erzulie, \$123,313)	\$1,686,307	*317	7	0.91	1.32
10	Acclamation (06, Unusual Heat), Harris Farms	\$4,000	57/29	2/2	0/2	(Burnin Turf, \$163,380)	\$1,426,016	203	5	1.00	1.15
11	Sir Prancealot (IRE) (10, Tamayuz), Rancho San Miguel	\$15,000	70/37	2/2	0/2	(Sir Busker, \$427,973)	\$1,317,157	*373	11	1.20	0.91
12	Danzing Candy (13, Twirling Candy), Rancho San Miguel	\$5,000	54/21	1/1	1/1	(Moose Mitchell, \$163,000)	\$1,271,086	127	1	0.86	1.05
13	Ministers Wild Cat (00, Deputy Minister), Tommy Town Thoroughbreds	Pnsd	53/32	0/0	0/0	(Minister of Soul, \$104,767)	\$1,147,441	533	21	0.93	0.87
14	Stanford (12, Malibu Moon), Tommy Town Thoroughbreds	\$5,000	65/28	0/0	0/0	(Opening Buzz, \$83,161)	\$1,109,865	114	0	0.68	0.96
15	Jersey Town (06, Speightstown), Daehling Ranch	\$3,000	58/31	1/2	0/1	(Regal Riot, \$131,984)	\$1,082,303	*222	7	1.02	1.03
16	Curlin to Mischief (11, Curlin), Rancho San Miguel	Pnsd	50/22	1/1	0/1	(See Through It, \$82,654)	\$1,039,470	121	3	0.76	0.81
17	Straight Fire (14, Dominus), Legacy Ranch	\$7,500	28/17	3/3	2/3	(Smuggler's Run, \$212,540)	\$1,006,092	45	3	1.25	1.48
18	Misremembered (06, Candy Ride), Barton Thoroughbreds	\$2,500	44/22	2/2	1/2	(I Recall, \$183,750)	\$936,036	182	8	0.94	1.09
19	Richard's Kid (05, Lemon Drop Kid), Rancho San Miguel	\$2,500	36/16	0/0	0/0	(Bandeena, \$90,920)	\$709,376	110	0	0.97	0.88
20	Tom's Tribute (10, Lion Heart), Rancho San Miguel	\$2,000	31/16	1/1	0/1	(Tom's Regret, \$161,105)	\$689,087	78	1	0.62	0.82
21	Tamarando (11, Bertrando), Harris Farms	\$2,500	20/10	3/3	2/3	(Passarando, \$160,830)	\$678,004	43	3	0.70	1.28
22	Majestic Harbor (08, Rockport Harbor), Harris Farms	Died, 2022	23/11	0/0	0/0	(Wire the Cash, \$98,305)	\$657,856	37	1	1.30	0.85
23	Idiot Proof (04, Benchmark), Victory Rose Thoroughbreds	\$3,000	29/15	0/0	0/0	(She's Bulletproof, \$108,200)	\$624,985	137	2	1.02	0.91
24	Dads Caps (10, Discreet Cat), Barton Thoroughbreds	\$10,000	31/15	0/0	0/0	(Dulce Emma, \$107,206)	\$577,202	52	0	0.62	0.86
25	Northern Causeway (08, Giant's Causeway), Rancho San Miguel	\$2,500	46/22	0/0	0/0	(Northern Gem, \$53,800)	\$510,342	116	0	0.39	0.85

\* includes Southern Hemisphere foals



Adrian Gonzalez has found that the farm and horse sales can provide quality family time with wife Erin, son Ryder, and daughter Mackenzie (not pictured)

of yearlings and horses of racing age as well, prompting one consignor to joke to Adrian, “This is really unfair—your kid is too cute and it’s just not fair how you’re using him to sell these horses.”

Gonzalez was ready with a comeback: “If you think he’s cute, wait till I start bringing my daughter—you guys are all in trouble then.”

Gonzalez and his wife, Erin, are par-

ents to Ryder and 2-year-old Mackenzie, and while it’s too soon to know what career path the kids will take, they are both passionate about horses. Ryder is all about speed, according to his father, while Mackenzie likes the young horses.

“She loves the foals,” Gonzalez said. “She has this little toy stethoscope and comes out with the vet and helps listen to the babies. She always pets the foals.

She likes to sit with them and feed them horse cookies.”

In crafting Checkmate Thoroughbreds, Adrian and Erin have also created an ideal family environment. They live on their own farm in Parkfield, Calif.—“population 18,” Adrian says—not far from Paso Robles. It’s good land for horses and wine, located centrally between the Northern and Southern

# 2022 LEADING SIRES IN IDAHO

For daily updated sire lists visit [BloodHorse.com](https://BloodHorse.com)

Rank	Stallion (Foreign foaled), (YOB,Sire), Where Stands	2022 Stud Fee	Rnrs/Wnrs	BT SWnrs/Wns	Rstrct SW/ BT SW	(Chief Earner, Earnings)	Cumulative				
							2022 Earnings	Foals	BT SWs	A-E Index	Comp Index
1	Boos (07, Ghostzapper)	N/A	15/8	0/0	0/0	(Collecting Stars, \$34,487)	\$144,362	39	2	0.46	0.33
2	Miraculous Hand (03, Marquetry)	N/A	1/1	0/0	0/0	(Tw Skipping Stones, \$46,173)	\$46,173	18	0	0.23	0.29
3	Heir Joe (07, Wildcat Heir)	N/A	3/1	0/0	0/0	(Prince Ali, \$11,906)	\$13,431	5	0	0.18	0.35

\* includes Southern Hemisphere foals

California racetracks.

Gonzalez' primary vocation is buying and selling at sales, both for himself and clients. That and the idea of leaving something to pass on to his children have recently expanded his horizons. He has been a major force behind bringing several top stallion prospects to California, and he has also joined the CTBA board of directors as a way to give back to the industry and work for its improvement.

The stallion expansion stems from California's breed-back rule. If a mare in foal to an out-of-state stallion drops her foal in California, that foal can become a registered California-bred, eligible for the state's lucrative incentive program, if the mare is bred back to a California-based stallion.

"That's how the stallion business for us started," Gonzalez said. "We were buying these mares, and we wanted the Kentucky-sired Cal-breeds."

He and several of his clients decided that they wanted their own stallions in California that they could cross with these mares. Not only would that give breeders more options, with the California stallion award program, such stallions could potentially earn even more.

In 2021, for example, 35 California stallions earned more than \$10,000 each from such awards. Nick Alexander's Grazen, number one on that list, landed \$137,215.

Gonzalez started with Danzing Candy, a multiple graded stakes-winning son of Twirling Candy trained by Bob Baffert. Danzing Candy stands at Rancho San Miguel, not far from Gonzalez' farm. With just two crops running, the stallion has already sired I'm Smokin Stakes winner Giver Not a Taker, and he is the state's leading second-crop sire.

From there, Gonzalez and the late Clay Murdock, who managed Rancho



Gonzalez will manage stallion Eight Rings, a grade 1-winning son of Empire Maker, for a partnership

San Miguel, brought in a proven sire, Sir Prancealot. By Tamayuz, the Irish-bred was a group 2 winner in England and already had several stakes winners from his time standing in Europe and Australia. Many California trainers do well importing older horses of racing age from Europe, and Sir Prancealot runners such as Lady Prancealot and Beau Recall were winning graded stakes in the state—promoting the stallion that arrived in California in 2020.

Breeders in California and even from out of state sent mares to Sir Prancealot, who stands at Rancho San Miguel and whose first California foals are yearlings. The stallion's Cal-breeds have been selling well—Sir Prancealots topped the Northern California sale and Washington Thoroughbred Breeders & Owners Association summer yearling and mixed sale. At the Fasig-Tipton California sale of yearlings and horses of racing age, Sir Prancealot was the only stallion

to have two yearlings sell for six-figures.

Checkmate sold the Northern California sale-topper for owner-breeder Jeff Ganje and bred and sold one of the two at the Fasig-Tipton sale.

"He was so well received as a new stallion," Gonzalez said. "He bred an incredible book of mares for his first season. What you're seeing now are those initial yearlings."

Some Sir Prancealots even sold as weanlings, including a filly Checkmate consigned to the 2021 Keeneland November mixed sale. Out of Patti's Regal Song, the dam of Coaching Club American Oaks (G1) winner Maricuja, the filly brought \$60,000.

"It's great to see them popular at multiple venues, coming from different breeders' programs," Gonzalez said. "He's kind of opened the door for some new possibilities."

Sir Prancealot continues to shuttle to Australia, and meanwhile Gonzalez

# 2022 LEADING SIRES IN OREGON

For daily updated sire lists visit [BloodHorse.com](http://BloodHorse.com)

Rank	Stallion (Foreign foaled), (YOB,Sire), Where Stands	2022 Stud Fee	Rnrs/Wnrs	BT SWnrs/Wns	Rstrct SW/BT SW	(Chief Earner, Earnings)	2022 Earnings	Foals	Cumulative		
									BT SWs	A-E Index	Comp Index
1	Harbor the Gold (01, Seeking the Gold)	Died, 2021	62/30	2/3	0/2	(Papa's Golden Boy, \$100,700)	\$942,486	446	27	0.59	0.68
2	Sixthirteen (04, Dixie Union), Bar C Racing Stables	\$1,000	14/9	0/0	0/0	(Classic Leah, \$33,975)	\$166,300	72	0	0.30	0.56
3	Dynamic Impact (11, Tiznow), Bar C Racing Stables	\$1,500	5/2	1/1	0/1	(Miss Dynamic, \$53,575)	\$107,885	13	1	0.66	0.98
4	Giacomo (02, Holy Bull), Oakhurst Thoroughbreds	\$2,500	13/5	0/0	0/0	(General Thayer, \$22,298)	\$90,888	*389	10	0.93	1.03
5	Understatement (05, Distorted Humor)	N/A	7/2	0/0	0/0	(Lafonda, \$18,836)	\$40,624	58	0	0.36	0.46
6	Grindstone (93, Unbridled)	Died, 2022	5/2	0/0	0/0	(Stonus Maximus, \$20,210)	\$30,488	*654	17	0.92	1.38
7	Coastal Storm (99, Storm Cat)	N/A	8/3	0/0	0/0	(Mr Memphis, \$8,150)	\$28,945	175	3	0.91	0.78
8	Slew's Saga (02, Seattle Slew), Oakhurst Thoroughbreds	\$1,000	2/1	0/0	0/0	(Omaha Rutsch, \$16,960)	\$21,900	38	1	0.29	0.66
9	Why Not Be Perfect (07, Whywhywhy), Keizer Equestrian Center	\$750	5/0	0/0	0/0	(Zee Carrot Eagle, \$3,710)	\$9,112	21	0	0.07	0.40
10	Outlash (12, Unbridled's Song)	N/A	1/0	0/0	0/0	(Tudie Lu, \$1,503)	\$1,503	5	0	0.06	0.65
11	Al Faatik (09, Invasor)	N/A	1/0	0/0	0/0	(Twenty Two Deal, \$300)	\$300	4	0	0.01	0.00
12	Man of Faith (06, Essence of Dubai), Whinny Farms Stallion Station	\$750	1/0	0/0	0/0	(Light of Faith, \$240)	\$240	2	0	0.01	0.00

\* includes Southern Hemisphere foals



**While Gonzalez' primary focus is on buying and selling horses at sales, he gives back to the industry as a board member with the California Thoroughbred Breeders Association**

has helped bring more stallions to California, such as Halladay. A son of War Front, Halladay won the 2020 Fourstardave Handicap (GI) at Saratoga Race Course for trainer Todd Pletcher. The stallion stands at John Harris' Harris Farms near Coalinga, Calif., and his first foals will arrive in 2023.

Gonzalez also is managing the partnership bringing Eight

Rings, a son of Empire Maker, to California for 2023. Trained by Baffert and raced by a partnership headed by Coolmore Stud, Eight Rings won the 2019 American Pharoah Stakes (GI). Details are still being worked out as to where Eight Rings will stand in the state.

"We haven't announced his stud fee yet, and I get calls every day asking what's he going to



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# 2022 LEADING SIRES IN WASHINGTON

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Rank	Stallion (Foreign foaled), (YOB,Sire), Where Stands	2022 Stud Fee	Rnrs/ Wnrs	BT SWnrs/ Wns	Rstrct SW/ BT SW	(Chief Earner, Earnings)	Cumulative				
							2022 Earnings	Foals	BT SWs	A-E Index	Comp Index
1	Conveyance (07, Indian Charlie), Blue Ribbon Farm	\$3,000	38/22	2/2	1/2	(Nobody Listens, \$137,368)	\$1,002,925	93	5	1.07	1.17
2	Coast Guard (05, Stormy Atlantic), El Dorado Farms	\$2,000	39/22	1/1	0/1	(Zippin Sevenz, \$62,813)	\$647,744	119	7	0.51	0.53
3	Gallant Son (06, Malabar Gold), West Coast Training Center	\$1,250	19/14	0/0	0/0	(Fast Buck, \$156,324)	\$604,002	34	0	0.77	0.68
4	Abraaj (03, Carson City)	Died, 2019	44/24	1/1	1/1	(Runnin Out of Days, \$55,000)	\$530,495	135	9	0.52	0.63
5	Linchpin (10, Elusive Quality)	N/A	14/8	0/0	0/0	(Linchpin Storm, \$70,911)	\$252,390	56	1	0.41	0.44
6	War Power (06, Pulpit)	N/A	9/5	0/0	0/0	(Pistol Power, \$35,338)	\$124,018	36	1	0.37	0.41
7	Nationhood (02, Cherokee Run)	Died, 2020	13/5	0/0	0/0	(Mojave, \$22,182)	\$108,626	86	3	0.44	0.63
8	¶ Gold Rush Dancer (13, Private Gold)	N/A	9/4	1/1	1/1	(Annette Marie, \$40,862)	\$92,425	16	1	0.38	0.41
9	Parker's Storm Cat (00, Storm Cat)	N/A	9/5	0/0	0/0	(Cats Touch, \$41,520)	\$90,828	*335	4	0.79	0.98
10	Gold Aly (06, Medaglia d'Oro)	N/A	7/5	0/0	0/0	(Franks Fix It, \$18,567)	\$80,796	21	0	0.38	0.52
11	Private Gold (00, Seeking the Gold)	N/A	5/1	0/0	0/0	(Boss Like Beth, \$71,886)	\$78,708	196	4	0.47	0.55
12	Python (10, Empire Maker)	N/A	5/3	0/0	0/0	(Suddenly Misty, \$22,475)	\$42,288	13	0	0.37	0.30
13	Raise the Bluff (03, Pine Bluff)	N/A	3/2	0/0	0/0	(Cody's Choice, \$27,835)	\$40,021	102	1	0.51	0.47
14	Houseofroyalhearts (02, Chester House)	N/A	7/1	0/0	0/0	(Mia Casa, \$7,569)	\$35,724	31	0	0.42	0.42
15	Running Tap (08, Tapit)	N/A	3/1	0/0	0/0	(Reddish, \$23,735)	\$31,872	21	0	0.17	0.43
16	Rallying Cry (04, War Chant)	N/A	6/1	0/0	0/0	(Wheel Rally, \$14,600)	\$29,985	52	0	0.25	0.51
17	Raised a Secret (10, Songandaprayer), El Dorado Farms	\$1,500	7/1	0/0	0/0	(Celinus Blue Bird, \$5,525)	\$17,434	15	0	0.09	0.65
18	Trickey Trevor (99, Demaloot Demashoot)	N/A	2/1	0/0	0/0	(Iknowyourface, \$16,083)	\$17,215	79	0	0.28	0.45
19	Primal Instinct (11, Giant's Causeway)	N/A	1/1	0/0	0/0	(Timberlake Gage, \$15,590)	\$15,590	6	0	0.53	0.35
20	Mr. Rancho Vista (05, Northern Afleet), West Coast Training Center	\$1,000	1/1	0/0	0/0	(Madigan Squeeze, \$14,861)	\$14,861	6	0	0.31	0.21
21	Preachinattthebar (01, Silver Charm)	N/A	3/1	0/0	0/0	(Distortedatthebar, \$10,247)	\$12,451	113	0	0.35	0.52
22	Gotham City (98, Saint Ballado)	Died, 2019	3/0	0/0	0/0	(Gotham Desire, \$6,020)	\$10,504	191	0	0.68	0.79
23	Mystic Wood (04, Forest Wildcat)	N/A	1/0	0/0	0/0	(Mystic Wood Force, \$3,682)	\$3,682	14	0	0.14	0.28
24	Entrapment (04, Gone West)	N/A	1/1	0/0	0/0	(Rebel Roar, \$3,336)	\$3,336	17	0	0.14	0.40
25	Demon Warlock (00, Demons Begone), Roche Farm	\$1,500	1/0	0/0	0/0	(Dance Fighter, \$2,500)	\$2,500	54	4	0.57	0.61

\* includes Southern Hemisphere foals

cost, where's he going to go," Gonzalez said. "That is so exciting, to have the group of people supporting this whole thing with their good mares."

Gonzalez grew up in California and earned a degree in animal science from Cal Poly San Luis Obispo. He has nearly three decades in the business and established Checkmate, named in part because of his father's love of chess, nearly 20 years ago. Thus, he has a good working relationship with the state's breeding farms.

Adrian and Erin maintain a broodmare band of about 25 mares and board a few mares for clients, but they do not stand stallions at their farm.

"The stallion farms have the facilities and the staff to accommodate not only breeding their own mares, but the influx of everybody else's mares," Gonzalez said. "I know that there is a lot of herd health issues that come up with a lot of horses rotating through. So for my own personal mares and my clients' mares, we really like that we don't have a van coming in and out every day. I like to run our place like a private farm."

Checkmate initially consisted of 66 acres, and Gonzalez has bought another 50 acres of adjacent land. He hasn't yet developed the new acreage.

"If anything, it's going to add more space to what we have right now for our yearlings," he said.

Gonzalez is a big proponent of raising horses outside as much as possible, something that can be challenging in some areas of California because of land expenses and dense population. It helps that the weather in Parkfield is pleasant year-round, with little rain, making it even easier to raise horses outside.

"We've planted a bunch of trees so it's really shady," Gonzalez said. "The horses aren't confined to stalls. There are less respiratory issues. They have more room to move and just be a horse. They develop good minds living that way."

Checkmate's business includes sales prep, as Gonzalez sells not only in California, but also in states such as Kentucky and Florida. He has barns to foal out the mares and handle sales prep of young horses, but he doesn't hothouse his yearlings.

"I think we're raising better horses this way," he said. "When you're going to be racing these horses, and down the stretch another horse leans on them, they are not going to back out. They are going to lean right back because that's the way they were raised. They've got some heart to them. They're not afraid of the

pony in the post parade. They're brave and they're tough, and I think it's because they weren't bubble-wrapped—ever."

As upbeat as Gonzalez is, he recognizes that the California industry has many of the problems common to most other regional markets. California's location has made it somewhat of an island, and the lack of a 2-year-old sale has been difficult. Gonzalez will have an opportunity to shape the industry after joining the CTBA board earlier this year.

"I want to bring enthusiasm," Gonzalez said. "I've really tried to make a point of calling everyone I know—every consignor, every breeder—and say, 'Tell me your experiences; What do you love and hate about all of this; What would you like to see changed?' There have been some small things that we were able to change right away, such as updating some things like the repository at the Northern California sale."

Gonzalez has learned from more experienced board members.

"I'm still in the learning phase on the board," he said. "There are so many moving parts to the industry. I would encourage more people to get involved. We're in a really cool state of growth, but also a really challenging time. If we don't do this right, it could go away." 