



Extra Care

BY ESTHER MARR

Because many Thoroughbred owners lack the land and resources to board their own horses, there is a need for reliable, high-quality, and reasonably-priced stables to fill that void. On the other side of the coin, many Thoroughbred operations see boarding as a financially integral component to keeping their businesses up and running.

With day rates ranging between \$22-\$45 a day, Thoroughbred boarding operations across the country cover the basic needs of food, water, and shelter, while some of the higher-end farms provide extra perks and an increased level of care to their equine guests.

Meg Buckley, co-owner of Threave Main Farm near Paris, Ky., runs what would be considered a small operation, but she knows what it means to provide

adequate care to the horses that outside boarders place in her care. Growing up on the farm, which was established by her father, Carter Thornton, in 1946, Buckley was taught from the beginning that focusing on the individual and giving top-notch attention to each horse according to its needs are among the most important qualities a boarding facility could offer.

"Some people want large showcase farms with a big name, while others are content with a smaller, lesser-known farm such as ours," she said. "I know that our horses are treated individually and with more attention to detail here than at larger farms. We might not be fancy, but we care for each horse as our own."

In the midst of the tumultuous economic environment facing horsemen around the globe, cost is now a huge factor while

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More than the cost of the day rate should be considered when seeking a boarding operation



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Depending on the weather, most horses are turned out during the day at boarding operations

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Adam Coglianese

AWESOME MARIA
2009 Grade I two-year-old



Trevor Jones

LADY OF THE DESERT
2009 Group I two-year-old



Adam Coglianese

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searching for the right boarding location, but most farm owners would agree that people should still carefully consider their options before choosing an operation to which they will entrust the care of their valuable stock.

"The most important qualities people should look for when choosing a farm to board their horses are trust, honesty, and communication between the farm and themselves," Buckley said. "Horses are a serious investment, and you must have complete faith in the people who raise and sell them for you."

Buckley explained how she owns most of the mares at the 350-acre Threave Main in partnership with her brother, Tim, husband, Mike, and son, Eric.

"My son and I run the day-to-day operation now and are both very hands-on every day of the year with every horse," said Buckley. "Each horse is treated as our own and as an individual. It is a way of life more than a business for us, with a great love for the horse. We like to think of our farm as a boutique rather than a factory. Each field has small groups of horses with lots of acreage per horse."

Threave Main has only a few out-

side clients and doesn't advertise its boarding services, as it feels its product promotes the farm. Its day rate varies for the different types and ages of horses. The farm, which only accepts year-round boarders, charges \$30 per day for individual mares, yearlings, and weanlings. A mare with a foal is \$34 per day, and a sale yearling is \$40 per day for sales prep.

A day in the life of a horse at Threave Main depends on the type of horse, its age, and the time of the year. From January through May, all of the farm's mares and foals are kept up at night and turned out all day, depending on the weather. During most of the year, the farm has five full-time employees, with a night watchman during the foaling season, January through June.

Most mares are fed twice a day (homegrown alfalfa and McCauley pellets), but some of the older mares' foals are fed a third meal at 10 p.m. by the night watchman, depending on whether they need extra feed. Temperatures are taken and feet are picked on every foal in the morning before they are individually led out to their paddocks.

Any medicine that needs to be administered is usually given in the morning and again at night by Buckley or her son. Teasing and vet work for mares to be bred are done in the morning, and mares are cleaned up and vanned to the breeding shed during the breeding season.

When the weather gets nicer, usually in June, the mares and foals are left out most of the time, coming up for a few hours in the morning to eat and rest and be treated for anything needed. Then, they are fed again in the afternoon outside. A sick foal or a mare that needs extra feed is kept inside.

Threave Main's mares are looked at twice a day until a month before they are due to foal, when they are kept in the foaling barn at night.

The farm starts sale prepping yearlings June 1 for the Keeneland September sale. At this time, the yearlings stay out of the sun from 7 a.m. until 7 p.m. to avoid getting sunburned. During the day they are groomed, bathed, and either hand-walked or machine-walked to get them fit for the sale. The yearlings are also given several supplements three months prior to a sale.

As a contrast to Threave Main, one of the largest and most prominent boarding farms in Central Kentucky is Robert N. Clay's Three Chimneys Farm near Midway, which encompasses 2,300 acres and boards between 450-500 horses during high season.

"We have about 225 mares, and whatever those mares produce is the rest of the inventory," said John Hamilton, who handles bloodstock sales at Three Chimneys. The farm also stands 12 stallions, including Kentucky Derby and Preakness (both gr. I) winners Smarty Jones (2004) and Big Brown (2008).

Three Chimneys' daily boarding rate is \$40 per horse. The farm charges a \$375 foaling fee and an extra \$4 a day for foals until they are weaned and occupy their own stalls.

"To put up a mare in Kentucky at a top farm is about \$16,000 a year for vet bills and everything," said Hamilton. "That's a number I tell people, and that varies up or down, depending on their medical needs. If you breed to a \$25,000 stallion, and you pay \$16,000 a year for the resulting foals, then you've got \$4,500 to get to the sale for your yearling, and then you've got commissions at the sale, so \$50,000 is your break-even point. That's a very loose, but pretty good rule of thumb.

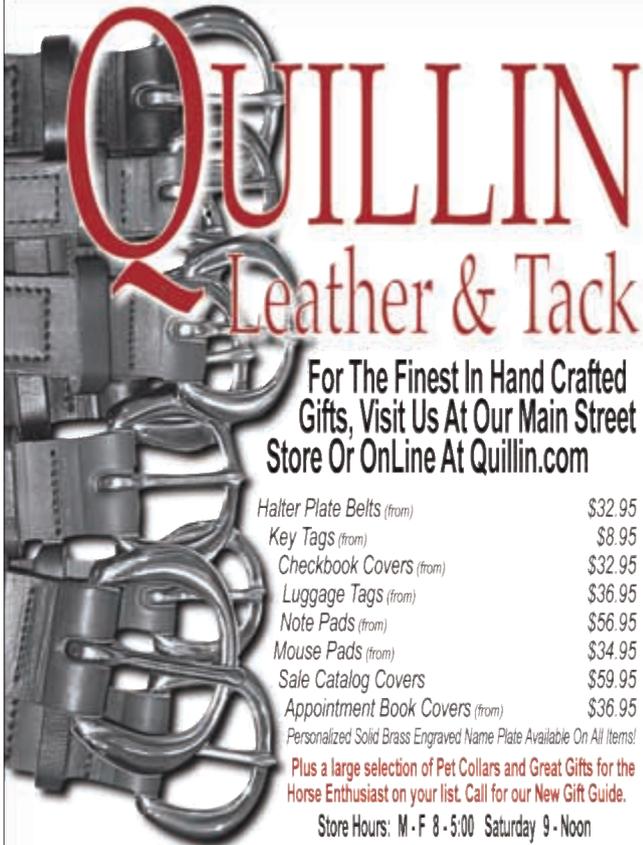
"If a mare is staying (at Three Chimneys) for 12 months, then that price difference is \$3,500 to \$4,000 higher per horse at our place than the cheaper places," Hamilton explained. "If your horse is worth \$25,000, then it's a significant difference. If the horse is worth \$100,000, then that's much more worth what you're paying for.

"(The boarding business) is just like the hotel business...there are little things that are the nuances as to why everybody doesn't



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stay at the Red Roof Inn,” continued Hamilton, adding that Three Chimneys’ daily rate includes much more than just food, water, and shelter.

The higher daily fee is justified by such things as having one groom for every seven mares to provide better care and having approximately eight to 10 acres of land for each mare, for ample room to graze and exercise.

“That’s a big difference,” he explained. “Also, when you look at the pastures of a farm, is there exposed dirt and rock? Or is it perfectly green except where the gate swings open? Do they have a night watchman at all, and if they do, is he watching Jay Leno on TV, or is he driving a golf cart around with a flashlight?” Hamilton added, noting Three Chimneys had the latter.

Three Chimneys also stands out from other farms, Hamilton said, by employing a full-time matings advisor, Anne Peters, who offers her expertise free of charge to all farm clients, as



Boarding operations should provide ample room for grazing and exercise

business, stallion services, or partnership involvement.

At nearly 235 acres, Nathan Fox’s Richland Hills Farm, also near Midway, is considered a mid-sized operation. The farm,

well as an on-site veterinarian, Dr. Jim Moorehead, who provides around-the-clock care for the horses.

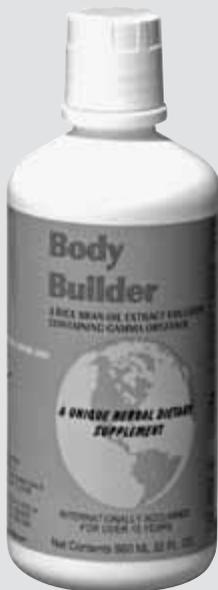
Most importantly, Hamilton said, while Three Chimneys is a large farm, its clients are kept at a manageable number so the staff can maintain a relationship with each individual and stay familiar with the horses in their care.

“You want clients, because you want ebb and flow, but we’re not trying to get bigger, because it gets unwieldy in relationship building,” he said. “Over time, the staff, care, and physical property are what separate the day rates.”

Hamilton said that in spite of the \$40 day rate, Three Chimneys still loses a little bit of money in its boarding business. The farm continues to offer all the aforementioned services, however, as many of their clients invest back into the farm via its consignment

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whose most famous boarder is Pepper's Pride, who holds the modern-day world record for consecutive wins, offers a day rate of \$28 for outside clients.

"That includes everything except veterinarian, farrier, and foaling fees, which are billed separately," said Fox, who added that the boarders at his farm are fed twice a day: once inside and once outside. Richland Hills employs approximately 15 people to help run the boarding side of the operation. In all, the farm boards approximately 70 horses, 50% of which are owned by outside clients.

"(Turn out schedules) depend on the time of year...in the winter, foaling mares and mares under lights are up (in their stalls) all night," said Fox. "During the summer they stay outside most of the time, but every horse is brought up in the morning, fed individually, and then turned back out."

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George Isaacs, who manages Bridlewood Farm near Ocala, Fla., also runs a commercial boarding operation, though not on as large a scale as Three Chimneys. The 960-acre farm has around 50 permanent boarders and 90 of its own horses. Bridlewood em-



Turn out schedules depend on the time of year

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loys 50 people, including maintenance workers, office staff, groomers, and managers.

"We have quite a bit of additional field space and paddock space, and I try and round that out with good clients," said Isaacs, who noted the farm's daily boarding rate is \$24.

"Because of the weather here in Florida being so nice, we leave all our horses out at night, bring them in early in the morning, feed them their meals in the stall, look over them well, groom them accordingly, and then turn them back out between 10 and 11," said Isaacs. "Then they get fed their afternoon meals outside and then stay out. All of our fields have appropriate shade and run-in sheds."

Bridlewood's feed program revolves around 14% protein sweet feed, well formulated with hay supplementation as needed.

While there are varying reasons people choose to board their horses at one farm over another, Isaacs explained that the most prominent factor undoubtedly stems from the reputation an operation has earned.

"Anyone doing business in Florida may be attracted to Bridlewood because of our long-standing reputation in the industry; we've got a fairly high-profile presence here in Florida, and we've got a Web site that we invite people to go to, research our farm, and contact us," said Isaacs, noting that Bridlewood's most well-known client was Satish and Anne Sanan's Padua Stables, which co-campaigned Curlin during his first championship season in 2007.

Added Hamilton: "I think (the reason that people choose particular farms) is 75% comfort zone relationship personally with the two parties. It's like sending your kid to camp or your daughter to a school. It's got to feel right. It's also 25% what people think of the place when they drive in and look at it. I think you have to have some semblance of a reputation of integrity over time." 