

SOUTHWEST



Triple Threat

Richard Owens and his Triple AAA Ranch may have a Triple Crown threat in Uh Oh Bango

BY TOM LAMARRA

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The travel arrangements were made. The horse was ready to go. Unfortunately, the weather didn't cooperate. Snow in Louisiana?

So Richard Owens ended up watching the \$750,000 Boyd Gaming's Delta Jackpot Stakes (gr. III) from the warm confines of his Arizona home the evening of Dec. 4. He certainly got his money's worth when his homebred 2-year-old Uh Oh Bango just missed by a neck to victorious Rule on a track made sloppy by snow and rain.

"My daughter and I were going to go, but I looked at the dang weather forecast and decided not to go," Owens said. "But I was very impressed with the horse."

Owens, who owns and operates Triple AAA Ranch in Glendale, Ariz., has been breeding Thoroughbreds for about 30 years. He has had a slew of multiple stakes winners over the years, and some were very good as juveniles. But Uh Oh Bango may be the best at this stage of his career.

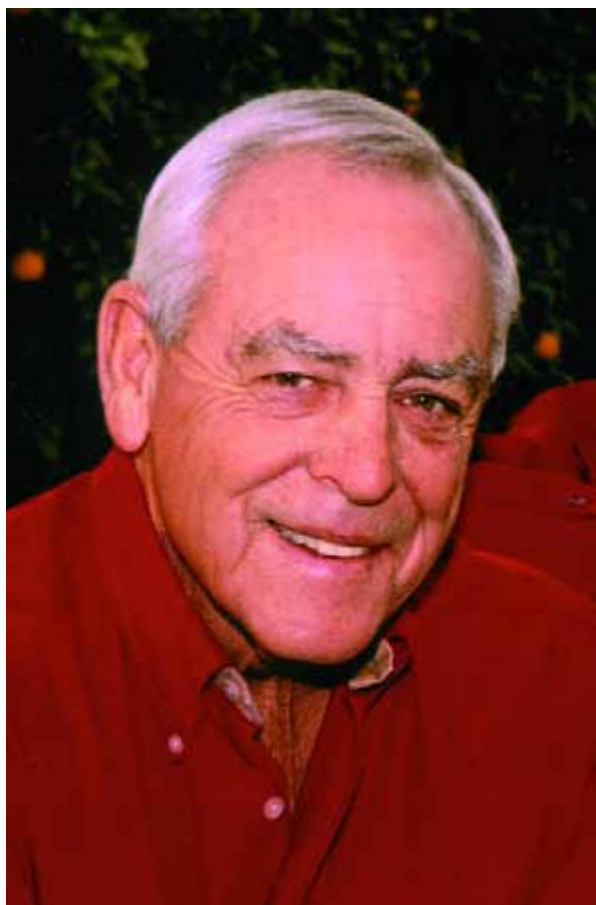
"At this time as a 2-year-old, he's probably the best I've ever raised," Owens said of the ridgling by Top Hit out of the French Deputy mare French Debutante. "We've won a

lot of futurities and things like that, but he looks like he can run on the national stage."

Uh Oh Bango, with two wins and three seconds in five starts for earnings of \$227,652, is in training with Owens' son, Kory, at Turf Paradise in Phoenix. His first couple of starts in 2010 will tell his connections whether he's Triple Crown trail material. One positive sign was a solid second-place finish in the grade III Iroquois Stakes at Churchill Downs Nov. 1.

Uh Oh Bango is all Arizona. His sire and dam call Triple AAA Ranch home, and he is named for trainer George Bango, who died in Phoenix in 2008. Bango was Owens' good friend and golfing buddy who also raced horses at Minnesota's Canterbury Park, where announcer Paul Allen coined the phrase, "Uh oh, Bango."

Like Bango, Owens, 72, has long been involved in Arizona racing. His family owned Turf Paradise for



Richard Owens has been breeding Thoroughbreds for 30 years

COURTESY RICHARD OWENS

about 12 years before selling it in 1990. His brother, Herb, served as track president.

Owens, who was on the board of directors, said the group spent about \$15 million on renovations, including adding a turf course and repairing the barn area.

"I believe people that have racetracks need to be involved in the sport," Owens said. "You can't just buy a racetrack; you have to love it, or you shouldn't get into it. The board members were all involved (in the operation), and people really had a good time. The racetrack itself, of course, never made us any real money."

After that, Owens got involved in horsemen's issues and currently serves on the board of directors of the Arizona Horsemen's Benevolent and Protective Association. But the one thing that has remained constant the past 40 years or so has been breeding and racing Thoroughbreds.

Richard and Herb Owens began claiming mares and visiting auctions in the late 1960s, and in 1979 had their first stakes winner, Maurita. Richard Owens then decided to start the farm.

Triple AAA Ranch originated in another Phoenix-area location as Triple AAA Ranch East when it shared property with a cattle operation that became known as Triple AAA Ranch West. The cattle were branded "AAA," thus the name, which carried over when Owens moved to his current location 30 years ago.

The "new" Triple AAA Ranch began with about 160 acres at a time when the city of Phoenix was relatively small, and the surrounding area largely rural desert. That's not the case now.

Triple AAA Ranch is down to less than 80 acres and is surrounded by development. It stands out as an oasis off Thunderbird Road west of Phoenix. There are a hospital, a school, strip malls, and residential properties—and in a neat little package that includes a shaded driveway, the horses grazing in the fields at the farm.

"We planted all the trees—we did everything here," Owens said of the ranch. "I can remember when you had to go way down the street to find a grocery store. They took some property to make a flood-control area, so now we've got about 75 acres."

There are 30-50 head on the farm depending on the time of year. Owens also owns a farm in Idaho, where horses are weaned and raised before they are shipped to Arizona to be broken.

Owens calls Crafty Drone his "foundation sire." Triple AAA Ranch also stood Society Max, and currently has two stallions, Top Hit and Rocky Bar, who have had success.

Rocky Bar sired the filly Carlsbad, an Arizona-bred champion who was euthanized in December. Bred and owned by Phoenix-area resident Dennis Weir, Carlsbad won multiple stakes in Arizona before

shipping to California, where she won the grade II Hollywood Oaks and grade III Rancho Bernardo Handicap and Santa Paula Stakes.

The walls of the office at Triple AAA Ranch are full of photos of stakes winners. Among them are Faro (by Crafty Drone), a six-time stakes winner, including the grade III Coors/Phoenix Gold Cup; To the Post (out of a mare by Crafty Drone), who won seven stakes in the Midwest and Southwest; five-time stakes winner Fool the Experts (also by Crafty Drone); Ayanna (by California sire In Excess), winner of the Moccasin Stakes at Hollywood Park and the Christmas Futurity at Turf Paradise;

Top Hit (by Twining), who took the grade III Oklahoma Derby and two other stakes; and Ez Dreamer, a five-time stakes winner who has finished second or third in nine other stakes.

Top sprinter Ez Dreamer (by In Excess), a half-brother to Uh Oh Bango, most recently won the Cactus Wren Stakes for Arizona-breds at Turf Paradise Dec. 19, and in October ran lights-out to be a close third in the grade III Phoenix Stakes at Keeneland.

Owens has had his share of phone calls from parties interested in horses, and Uh Oh Bango is no exception. He bristles, however, when prospective buyers tell

Mighty Acres 2010 Roster

AIR COMMANDER 2010 Fee: \$2,000
Point Given – Santaria, by Star de Naskra

- Santa Anita Grade 2 Stakes Winner on Synthetics
- First or Second in 5 of 9 starts, \$248,680
- Half-brother to G2SW & top freshman sire **MEDALLIST**



RA RA SUPERSTAR 2010 Fee: \$1,500
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- First 2YOs race in 2010
- Family of Leading Sire **AWESOME AGAIN** (by **DEPUTY MINISTER**)



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Storm Cat – Tomisue's Delight, by A.P. Indy

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- Keeneland track record setter
- O/A G1SW **TOMISUE'S DELIGHT**, full-sister to Horse of the Year **MINESHAFT**



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2009 Leading Sires in Oklahoma

State sire lists updated daily online.
Go to <http://breeding.bloodhorse.com/sirelists.asp>

For stallions that stand, will stand, or stood (deceased) in Oklahoma (exported stallions are excluded), and have runners in North America. Listed below are all available statistics for the Northern Hemisphere through December 31, 2009. As supplied to The Blood-Horse by The Jockey Club Information Systems Inc., earnings exclude monies from Japan and Hong Kong. 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).

Rank	Stallion (Foaling Year, Sire), Farm Standing	2010 Stud Fee	Rnrs/ Wnrs	Stakes Wnrs/ Wns	Rstrct SW/ BT SW	(Chief Earner, Earnings)	2009 Earnings	Cumulative			
								Foals	Stks Wnrs	*A-E Index	*Comp Index
1	TACTICAL CAT (96, Storm Cat), Diamond G Ranch	\$2,000	141/73	3/6	1/3	(Wishful Tomcat, \$181,875)	\$2,241,984	427	23	1.18	1.34
2	SERVICE STRIPE (91, Deputy Minister), Rockin Z Ranch	\$2,000	104/58	1/2	0/1	(Field Commission, \$560,309)	\$1,787,074	311	15	1.30	1.12
3	EVANSVILLE SLEW (92, Slew City Slew), Diamond G Ranch	\$2,000	97/53	4/4	3/4	(Kizzy's Chaos, \$110,840)	\$1,614,816	*386	30	1.20	0.95
4	ARTAX (95, Marquetry), Diamond G Ranch	\$2,000	103/42	1/1	1/1	(Diabolical, \$293,601)	\$1,564,393	374	6	1.07	1.42
5	DIAMOND (95, Mr. Prospector), Oklahoma Equine	N/A	69/31	0/0	0/0	(Movin' Out, \$234,460)	\$1,203,451	230	5	1.21	1.13

*A-E and COMPARABLE INDEX: The lifetime Average-Earnings Index indicates how much purse money the progeny of one sire has earned, on the average, 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. The 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 AEI higher than their mares Comparable Index.



Uh Oh Bango wins the Prairie Meadows Freshman Stakes

him the horses “don’t have the pedigree.” The Triple AAA Ranch numbers, and the performance of the farm’s horses out of state, speak for themselves.

Since 1991 Triple AAA Ranch has bred 57 individual stakes winners. Before that, there were about 30 more.

One of the best known to East Coast racing fans is Coyote Lakes (by Society Max), who was claimed from Owens for \$12,500 in his third career start in 1996. The gelding went on to race another 60 times and became a marathon specialist; he won the grade III Gallant Fox Handicap three times and had a stakes named for him in New York.

“I like the breeding business—raising babies and mating mares,” Owens said. “The racing, I can kind of take it or leave it.”

The Arizona racing industry has its share of difficulties brought on by competition from Indian casinos. Efforts to win approval for gaming machines at race-tracks haven’t gained traction, and with stagnant pari-mutuel business, purses aren’t growing.

“It’s like there’s no racing here today,” Owens said. “They put on a show, but they’re cheap horses. It makes standing a few stallions difficult; you can’t really charge for studs what the fees should be because there’s no way for people to recoup their money.

“A lot of people raising horses have moved to New Mexico because of the slots program. Arizona used to breed more mares than New Mexico, but now New Mexico breeds about four times the number we do.”

Owens said the status quo won’t do.

“If everything stays the same, I think racing will dry up and go away,” he said. “There’s not much difference between Turf Paradise and (Yavapai Downs in) Prescott. I’ve sent a few mares to New Mexico, but at my age, I’m not going to go that far. It’s hard to have a good breeding program in Arizona because you can’t run your horses here.”

Triple AAA Ranch is one of a handful of larger breeding operations in Arizona, though there are many owners with a few

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								Foals	Stks Wnrs	*A-E Index	*Comp Index
1	ROCKY BAR (98, In Excess), Triple AAA Ranch	\$2,000	16/12	6/9	3/6	(Carlsbad, \$373,000)	\$789,916	24	6	2.44	0.78
2	DEPUTY WILD CAT (99, Deputy Minister), Fleming Thoroughbred Farm	\$2,000	42/14	1/2	1/1	(Bim Bam, \$201,295)	\$601,488	64	2	1.09	1.00
3	BENTON CREEK (93, Septieme Ciel), Fleming Thoroughbred Farm	N/A	54/29	2/4	2/2	(Lonesome Creek, \$119,486)	\$541,302	248	15	0.59	0.59
4	GOLDEN GEAR (91, Gulch), Fleming Thoroughbred Farm	Died, 2009	56/31	0/0	0/0	(Fast Gear, \$39,230)	\$504,152	296	11	1.05	1.34
5	TOP HIT (98, Twining), Triple AAA Ranch	\$2,000	18/12	3/3	1/3	(Uh Oh Bango, \$227,652)	\$491,223	26	4	1.44	0.92

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mares.

Though Kory Owens is based at Turf Paradise, he often ships elsewhere to run, particularly in the spring, summer, and fall. He has had his string at Remington Park in Oklahoma and Prairie Meadows Racetrack & Casino in Iowa, and occasionally ships to California.

Richard Owens said trips to California were far more frequent when the major tracks offered dirt racing.

"We don't go there so much since they put in synthetic surfaces," he said. "I think they made such a terrible mistake. They should have put in one, and if they liked it, put in another one."

Regardless of where the horses race, Owens is committed to his Arizona farm. Though he lives on the property, he credits much of the operation's success to his staff, which includes Adolfo Martinez, Roberto Martinez, Juan Martinez, Refugio Escobar, and Cathy Cologna.

Much of the staff lives on the farm, so it gets constant attention.

"I'll be in (the business) probably until



The farm is surrounded by a hospital and school as well as malls and residential developments

I die," Owens said. "The reason I stay in it is probably my crew. I could leave for a year, come back, and the place would look the same."

Owens' older son, Kevin, owns a few racehorses, and his daughter, Erin, chairs the Arizona Racing Commission. His late wife, Lois Ann, was active in the breeding

operation and is honored with the Ann Owens Distaff Handicap at Turf Paradise.

Triple AAA Ranch is recognized nationally on an almost annual basis. The operation has received the Arizona breeder of the year award from the Thoroughbred Owners and Breeders Association 23 times. 

By SEATTLE SLEW's Champion
2YO Son CAPOTE

Aeneas

Capote-Gone to Venus, by Gone West



2010 Fees: Private

Nom. to Breeders' Cup and N. M.-Bred Program and Lineage

- Multiple Graded Stakes-Performing Winner of \$434,485.
- Won or Placed from 6.5-10 furlongs; 100+ Beyer's Six Times.
- Out of a half-sister to the dam of Champion SILVERBULLETDAY (\$3,093,207).
- Powerful family of leading sire ARTS AND LETTERS, etc.
- Outstanding first foals include 2yo Venus Avenue, sprint winner at Zia Park.

BANBURY CROSS

Storm Cat - Mythomania, by Nureyev

- Won/placed in 7 of 8 starts, w/ NTR 5.5F in 1:03½ at Turfway Park.
- Maiden winner in debut by 6 lengths. Multiple allowance winner on synthetic by 8 lengths (6f in 1:09½) and by 3 lengths in new record time of 1:03½ at Turfway. Allowance placed at Keeneland and Churchill.
- Half to 3 stakes horses, including NCR-G3SW INEXPLICABLE.
- Graded stakes family of MEINER LOVE-GI, ADORABLE-GI, etc.

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