

## SOUTHEAST



# Pleasant Passion

*Helen and Joe Barbazon hit  
the heights with Presious Passion*

BY JASON SANDLER

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Joe Barbazon admits to having had a bad case of butterflies in his stomach just prior to the \$3-million Emirates Airline Breeders' Cup Turf (gr. IT) last November at Santa Anita Park. The nerves were understandable because Presious Passion, a then 6-year-old gelding he bred with his wife, Helen, was moments away from running the biggest race in the lives of all those involved—the horse, the Barbazons, and owners Patricia and Frank Generazio.

Barbazon's anxiousness gave way to sheer excitement while watching Presious Passion turn in an electrifying performance in the 1½-mile Turf, as the son of Royal Anthem rolled out to his customary huge lead while setting seemingly suicidal fractions, then dug in with tremendous heart as he desperately struggled to hold off defending champion Conduit in the stretch. Though Presious Passion would eventually be tackled just yards from the wire and come up a half-length shy, his runner-up effort was nothing short of sensational.

It didn't take long after the race for Barbazon to digest what had just transpired. And you can bet the moment was not lost upon a man who came from the most humble beginnings.



Joe and Helen Barbazon own Pleasant Acres Farm near Morriston, Fla.

JOE DIORIO

# 2009 Leading Sires in Florida

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

For stallions that stand, will stand, or stood (deceased) in Florida (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	MONTBROOK (90, Buckaroo), Ocala Stud Farm	\$7,500	147/82	7/11	0/7	(Big Drama, \$358,500)	\$3,781,209	675	45	1.59	1.59
2	GRAEME HALL (97, Dehere), Winding Oaks Farm	\$5,000	145/95	4/7	0/4	(Duke of Mischief, \$312,800)	\$3,614,680	*220	12	1.57	1.45
3	CHAPEL ROYAL (01, Montbrook), Signature Stallions	\$10,000	152/78	3/3	2/3	(Advice, \$232,251)	\$2,985,114	252	3	1.06	1.24
4	PUT IT BACK (98, Honour and Glory), Bridlewood Farm	\$7,000	143/82	6/11	1/6	(Jessica Is Back, \$220,385)	\$2,907,875	*320	14	1.60	1.33
5	D'WILDCAT (98, Forest Wildcat), Vinery	\$10,000	93/56	3/4	1/3	(D' Funnybone, \$278,200)	\$2,566,889	142	4	1.74	1.43
6	CONCERTO (94, Chief's Crown), Ocala Stud Farm	\$3,500	114/61	2/3	0/2	(Finallymadeit, \$365,375)	\$2,320,807	*333	19	1.58	1.31
7	THREE WONDERS (97, Storm Cat)	Died, 2008	140/78	1/1	0/1	(Helicopter, \$108,205)	\$2,214,151	228	4	1.10	1.16
8	FULL MANDATE (99, A.P. Indy), Hartley/De Renzo Thoroughbreds	\$5,000	152/73	0/0	0/0	(Kissa Melissa, \$147,750)	\$2,033,653	*245	1	0.79	1.09
9	SWEETSOUTHERNSAINT (95, Saint Ballado), Ocala Stud Farm	\$2,500	99/47	4/8	2/4	(Sweetlalybe, \$380,200)	\$2,019,757	313	11	1.43	1.09
10	DOUBLE HONOR (95, Gone West), Get Away Farm	\$3,500	136/73	2/2	2/2	(All Night Labor, \$122,513)	\$2,009,225	448	18	1.21	1.28

\*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.

"To have a horse run like that in the Breeders' Cup was a dream," Barbazon recalled. "I come from a poor family where we slept on a dirt floor, so to have a horse like this is the thrill of a lifetime. We paid our dues to get to that point, but we also feel truly blessed."

Presious Passion's success was the culmination of decades of hard work by the Barbazons, who own 230-acre Pleasant Acres Farm near Morriston, Fla. A commercial breeding operation with about 180 horses on site, Pleasant Acres was only a modest 10 acres when the Barbazons first bought land in 1983—the year they were married. Piece by piece, horse by horse, and acre by acre, they built it into a success.

"We started with just a couple broodmares," Joe Barbazon recalled. "Every season we'd sell a couple foals out of those mares and buy a little more property. We built all the barns by ourselves. We gradually made improvements, and we started getting more clients.

"It was a lot of hard work. We both worked another job, then went home to

work with our own horses. There were a lot of 16, 18-hour days because we watched our mares through the night when they were foaling. We worked around the clock. It was just the two of us."

The Generazios know as well as anyone else how the Barbazons worked their way up from nothing. They met the couple in the early 1990s after going down to Florida to look for a place to board their horses. Frank Generazio is a longtime horseman who trained for 15 years while based at Monmouth Park. The couple has bred and raced a number of stakes winners during their 35 years in the industry.

"We met Joe and Helen and really liked how they handled their young horses," said Patricia Generazio. "They really had a way with them; Helen would just whistle and they would all come flying toward her. We noticed how well taken care of all of their horses were, and we were very impressed.

"Besides being a wonderful couple—they are always so pleasant—they are very, very hard workers. It was just the two

of them that built all those barns. Helen is just this little thing, but she is all muscle. They are remarkable people."

The Barbazons' work ethic was instilled at an early age. Joe grew up in what he calls "white trash Louisiana"—actually in the small town of Covington, not far from New Orleans. His father, Lester, was a painter but also trained Thoroughbreds on the side to help pay the bills. Still, many times it was barely enough to get by.

"We used to walk a half-mile just to get water," said Barbazon, who would often help his father with the horses. "We would hunt for our food."

After graduating high school in 1970, Barbazon had had enough of Louisiana and "jumped on the first Greyhound bus to Florida." With a love of horses, he moved to Ocala and started working for Gross Point Farm, mucking stalls at first and then working his way up to stallion manager. He did that for about 10 years before saving enough money to buy a small amount of land. In 1981 he went to work at Irish Acres Farm near Ocala, where he met Helen. That's when his luck began to change.

"Behind every good man is a good woman," said Joe.

Helen grew up in Citrus County, Fla., and also came from a modest upbringing.

"We didn't have much. In fact, I bought a car that had a hole in the gas tank for \$500 and drove it to Ocala so I could work with horses."

Helen also landed at Irish Acres in the early 1980s and eventually met Joe, who by that time had worked his way up to the training barn. Together they saved their money, sold Joe's land, and bought about 10 acres—what is now Pleasant Acres.

"We were just so happy to have our own farm and to have something we owned together that we named it Pleasant Acres," Joe said. "We didn't have much else, but we were happy, and we loved working with horses."

The Barbazons began with only a cou-



Presious Passion went wire-to-wire in the Clement L. Hirsch Turf Championship

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SERITA HULT PHOTO



ple of broodmares, but the first one they bought—Sightseeing—turned out to be their lucky charm. Sightseeing, by Sharp Vote, out of the Silent Screen mare Window Card, had only modest success as a racehorse but produced a couple of stakes winners, including Joe's Lad—the first black-type horse the couple bred.

"Sightseeing was our backbone, our foundation," said Joe. "We bought her for \$1,000. We raced her and then bred her. She carried us for a while."

Through the rest of the 1980s the Barbazons continued building their farm while also working for others. They gradually acquired more land and more horses...and more clients.

By the time the 1990s rolled around, the Barbazons were getting by well enough to stop working for others. They concentrated on building Pleasant Acres, turning it into a multi-faceted operation that provides services including sales prep, lay-ups, boarding, and foaling. They even raced horses occasionally. But it wasn't until they met the Generazios that they finally started having lasting success.

"They are our biggest clients and have been for a while," said Helen. "We owe a lot to them."

In 2003 the Generazios, who annually board about 20-25 broodmares and buy two or three yearlings from the Barbazons, were visiting their horses at Pleasant Acres when Patricia spotted a weanling that drew her attention. To her dismay the colt was not one of hers.

"There was a presence about him," recalled Generazio. "He was big and had nice balance. I liked him immediately, but Frank said he was a grass horse based on his breeding and that isn't what we normally buy. But I told him, 'Well, he can be our first really good grass horse.'"

The colt was Presious Passion and shortly thereafter the Generazios purchased the son of Royal Anthem—Princesa's Passion, by Marquetry. He didn't have the looks of a stakes winner during his

first few trips to the track.

"He was a slow developer and kind of reluctant to do some things," Patricia said. "We had him at the track as a 2-year-old, but since he was a grass horse there was no rush, so we laid him up. Frank was training in New York, so we gave him to Mary Hartmann.

"She did a great job with him; was very patient. She's handled his career beautifully."

As a 3-year-old, Presious Passion won his first stakes, the Jersey Derby, and captured a pair of graded events the following season. But it was in 2008, as a 5-year-old, when he really started hitting his stride, scoring three stakes victories that season including the United Nations (gr. IT) at Monmouth, a race he would also win in 2009 in course record time.

"He's by Royal Anthem, who also was good as a 5-year-old," said Joe Barbazon. "I think Royal Anthems get better as they get older.

"The dam is a nice story. We had another client who had her at the races, but she broke badly out of the gate and knocked her hip down. They told him she would never run again so he didn't want her. They were even thinking of putting her down. She's a pretty chestnut mare out of a good stakes mare (Sizzlin Sunshine), so we took her. She hasn't produced much else other than Presious Passion, but he has been enough."

Enough to help the Barbazons win a special honor in 2008—the Needles Award for the Outstanding Small Breeder in Florida. The award, given annually to a state breeder, was based on the Barbazons having a scintillating 25 wins from just 16 starters and earnings of more than \$1 million. That same year Presious Passion was selected as the state's champion turf horse by the FTBOA, and in 2009 he not only repeated as the turf champion, but won top older male and is the favorite for Florida-bred Horse of the Year. Joe was elected to the FTBOA board of directors in 2008, a position he still holds.

Presious Passion, a 2009 Eclipse Award finalist for turf male and winner of 13 of 43 starts and more than \$2.5 million, is gearing up for a 7-year-old campaign and is being pointed toward a trip to Dubai for the \$5-million Dubai Sheema Classic (UAE-I) March 27.

The Barbazons have bred several other stakes winners besides Presious Passion. Included in that group are Bet the Sights, who is another stakes winner out of Sightseeing; Fleet Valid, a two-time stakes winner out of the 13-year-old mare Di's Song; and Becky's Exchange, a filly owned by the Generazios out of the mare Expect Becky. Fleet Valid and Becky's Exchange earned black type at Monmouth in 2009. Joe has also co-bred stakes winners Kidd Cat and Maddie's Promise.

Currently, the Barbazons have a band of about 70 broodmares at Pleasant Acres, 20 of which are their own, as well as foals and yearlings. Most of the yearlings are sold privately to clients with whom they have developed relationships over the past 27 years. One of those clients is Mike Maniscalco, managing partner of Waterford Stables.

"We've been doing business with the Barbazons for about 10 years," said Maniscalco. "They are the greatest people; just honest-to-goodness nice people. They have our broodmares, our rehab horses, we buy from them, and they even took care of (grade I winner) In Summation, who just entered stud. They are people you can trust.

"When I first got into this business years ago, I called Joe. He gave me great advice about a lot of things."

Through a love of horses, many hours of hard work, and honest business practices, the Barbazons have turned Pleasant Acres into a success. It's the fulfillment of a dream they have shared for nearly 30 years.

"We feel very blessed to be in the situation we are in," Joe said. "There are ups and downs in this business, but there is no reason to bitch and complain about every little thing. Overall, life has been great to us." ■

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