

THE SOUTHERN HEMISPHERE'S LEADING STUD FARMS



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THE VIEW DOWNUNDER

THE HOUSE RULES

One of the main reasons for the success of the annual Two Year Olds In Training Sale in New Zealand is trainer Michael House who has tailored his operation around the sale.

By Harold Howe

There are many differences between racing in North America and racing in the southern hemisphere not the least being the latter's success in creating a two-year-old in training sale.

Despite the best efforts of the South Florida Sunshine Sale in the U.S. and Standardbred Canada, the concept has not taken root here. Sellers and buyers have simply not bought into the idea.

In contrast New Zealand's Ready To Run Sale, which began in 2001, is firmly entrenched in that country largely due to the efforts of Michael House.

House is not the sale manager. He is the major consignor and has almost single handedly given the auction credibility and along the way earned a reputation as one of the very best pinhookers to come along.

Each February when the Downunder yearling sales are held in New Zealand he is very active buying something in the neighbourhood of a dozen youngsters at a time. In October when the Ready To Run Sale comes along he takes them to market and more often than not turns a tidy profit.

But what really is noteworthy is the number that he has sold that have gone

on to not just race but become among the best horses in the land. Even his harshest critics have grudgingly given him his dues, a trait that does not come easily in the racing fraternity regardless of hemisphere.

The 42 year-old House, who bases his operation just south of Christchurch, is actually an American native. His father was a U.S. naval serviceman who convinced Michael's mother to relocate to Alabama but that did not last and she returned with the then three-year-old Michael to her native New Zealand.

Like so many teenagers of his era in New Zealand he fell into the horse game.

"My first boss told me I would never be any good at it so I set about to prove him wrong. I guess I'm still doing that."

His grandfather was an avid follower and punter of the horses. That combined with an extraordinary amount of media coverage of racing in that country nurtured his enthusiasm for the game.

He worked for three major stables in his younger days including eight years with the storied Roydon Lodge operated by the late Sir Roy Mackenzie. For decades it was a fixture in the southern hemisphere and his time there instilled in House

a powerful work ethic.

"Everything was very labour intensive back then and if you worked there you learned how to do everything on the farm. It was a breeding farm and training operation so there was plenty of work to do and not all of it was easy. But it paid off for the farm in those years and I never forgot it."

Indeed, today some of House's critics candidly say that House has simply outworked his fellow trainers and as one aptly pointed out "he ran us off our feet."

Robert Dunn is an accomplished New Zealand trainer who has produced a number of notable champions and took on the young House as his second trainer. This proved to be a turning point.

"I worked in the morning with Robert's horses and then he allowed me to start working with my own young horses in the afternoon. There was no silver spoon but he gave me the support to do that which was a lot for a young man in his mid 20s," says House.

By 1991 he ventured out on his own and immediately struck gold with a Vance Hanover filly named Vee Mee who would win \$173,000 and be his springboard for

the future.

Now married to Michelle, House grabbed another opportunity when the couple purchased Canterbury Saddlery, the largest tack shop on the south island in 1992. It continues to be a thriving entity today.

Meanwhile the size of his stable had expanded but by the late 1990s the purse money in New Zealand racing began to wane. Without slot machine revenue like Ontario was enjoying at that time, the live handle was simply not sufficient.

In 2001 the idea for a two-year-old in training sale was floated and upon learning of the concept House jumped on board with six homebred horses he had in work. The die was cast.

"I then decided to start buying yearlings with the idea of prepping them for this sale. This coincided with the first crop of yearlings by Christian Cullen and one that I bought was Born Again Christian for \$10,000. I sold him at the Ready To Run Sale for \$80,000," recalls House.

"He went on to win \$177,000 and I

think from that group eight made it to the races and three won \$100,000 or more so I was off to a good start."

The problem with this concept in North America is that there is the perception (whether it be true or not) that the horses being offered are either problem horses or ones of dubious ability simply trained aggressively for the purpose of turning a quick buck.

"We fight that down here too but the results are too good to ignore. There have been some very good horses go through this auction year after year. The results were off a bit this year but that was entirely due to the state of the world economy. Every day the news was worse than the previous day in New Zealand and people just held back," explains House.

As he points out there have been some very good horses pass through the sale and many came from his stable.

Fiery Falcon, arguably the second best four-year-old in New Zealand, is a good example.

"I went to the sales to buy the best Mach Three I could find. That was his first



In addition to buying and training horses, Michael House also has a breeding operation.

crop and I stood the horse for one season for American owner Joe Muscara. Fiery Falcon was my second pick but I really liked him and somehow got him for \$5,000," relates House.

Season's Greetings & Many Thanks



UP FRONT ANNIKA

2,1:55.1-'08 (\$408,081)

\$616,000 Goldsmith Maid winner



TIDEWATER DRAGONFLY

p,2,1:53.3f, 3,1:50.1, 1:49.4s-'08 (\$989,663)

\$405,715 Roses Are Red Final winner

Photos by New Image Media

As another year comes to an end, I would like to send a special thank you all my owners and grooms for a great season.

Our success would not be possible without your support and hard work. Thanks again!

KELLY O'DONNELL

SEASON'S GREETINGS



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"When we got into serious training he was unbelievable and I put him in the sale with a \$200,000 reserve. He was passed in at \$180,000 but after the sale I pieced him out to a group that included the late Sir Roy Mackenzie who I had worked for at Roydon Lodge. Mark Purdon trains him and he has won \$554,000 including \$359,000 last season chasing Auckland Reactor."

And then there was Highview Tommy, last year's New Zealand Two Year Old of the Year.

"He was a ringer for his sire Bettors Delight. I valued him at \$30,000 but had to go to \$40,000 to get him. He trained down sensational too and we sold him for \$200,000. He won \$272,000 last year also for Mark Purdon."

House admits that his timing has been very good in recent years. With the yearling market being depressed around the time the Ready To Run Sale began he was scooping up good prospects relatively inexpensively.

More recently he has been positioned perfectly in the wake of significant tax breaks accorded to the racing industry which has sent horse values soaring.

"It's difficult not to fall in love with horses like Fiery Falcon and Highview Tommy but my business is selling them and I get tremendous satisfaction seeing them go on and do well. Buying and selling horses is not something new but having a plan and developing it is essential. And a big part of that is trying to be as honest as possible. Yes, every horse has to be sold and you want to get as much as you can but that does not prevent you from being honest."

Happy Holidays

Wishing all members in harness racing a safe and joyous 2009.

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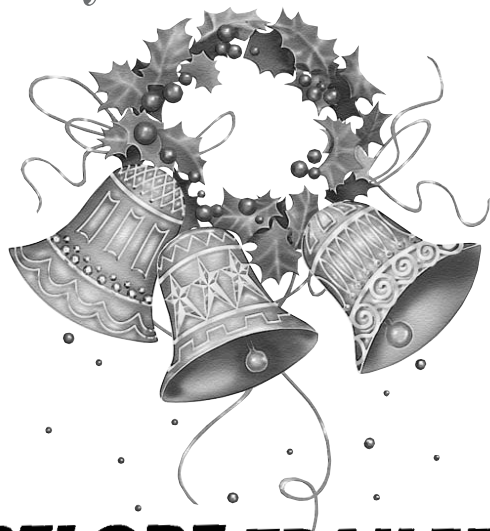
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Merry Christmas To All



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House takes a unique approach to working with his just purchased yearlings.

"North Americans would think I had three heads if they came down here to see what I do. When they come from the sale they are all turned out together. Last year I had \$1.2 million worth of yearlings in the same paddock but that's not for long," says House.

"They get six weeks preparation and are then off for four weeks. By early May they return and hardly miss a day of work between then and October 1. Then they go to auction."

House's base of operations is none other than Roydon Lodge, his former place of employment. Now owned by Keith Gibson, the son-in-law of Sir Roy Mackenzie, the property was leased by House a few years ago. He continues to operate it as a breeding farm as well.

"It's a stallion station and we managed to stand Mach Three for one year on the 400 acre property. It's also home to Sundon, the leading trotting sire in New Zealand for a decade. In total we stand and provide semen for 10 stallions."

Just recently a little bit of Canada came to Roydon Lodge with the addition of Lindsay Colwell DVM formerly of McKee-Pownall Equine Services to the team. Dr. Colwell had formerly practiced at the Millbrook, Ontario operation.

"The mix of breeding operation and developing yearlings is a great fit for us because the focus on each is at different times of the year. I have a great team of 13 people around me and that allows me to focus on the bigger picture and let them handle more of the day-to-day stuff."

Season's Greetings & Holiday Wishes

Best wishes to all for a happy and healthy 2009.

**PAULA WELLWOOD STABLE
& MIKE KEELING STABLE**

Paula, Mike and Devin



MERRY CHRISTMAS

Gail MacDonald & Ronota Baglole
Track Photographers at Charlottetown Driving Park

With the yearling market in North America in a depressed state, House anticipates a similar situation in New Zealand in February.

"I tend to now spend in the \$40,000 range but this situation may allow me to get away more in the \$30,000 bracket. I'm not hung up on pedigree but I do believe I have to buy horses sired by stallions people want," he offers.

"I want to see horses with a good head and an honourable eye. I want the best individuals I can get for the money but don't need that perfect pedigree. Probably I'm a little heavier on Christian Cullen yearlings because of his success."

House is not known for his political correctness. He offers blunt commentary that sometimes is interpreted as arrogance.

"I'm sometimes at odds with the industry. I find it annoying dealing with what you would call traditionalists who have key positions on boards and make decisions which affect my livelihood. There are too many bad business decisions in my opinion and it is very frustrating," he says.

House is a great promoter both in person and via his website mickee.com which also rankles some.

"All that aside I'm in this because I just love horses. The hours can be punishing but when I go to the races like on New Zealand Cup day and see several of the horses I purchased and developed go on and race it is very satisfying. And in this world you should be doing what you like. I'm so lucky that I can say I do." 🐾

One Hill Of A Year!

MUSCLE HILL
2,1:54.3-'08 (\$454,801)

\$500,000 Peter Haughton
Memorial winner



Lisa Photo

As another year comes to an end I would like to thank my entire staff and owners for this wonderful season. A special thank you goes to all my family and friends who supported me this past racing season.

Best of racing in years ahead.

GREG PECK

