

SOUTHEAST SPOTLIGHT ALEXANDRA DE MERIC AND BRANDON RICE

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Family tradition

Children of prominent Florida horse families get jump-start on own business venture at OBS spring sale

BY CYNTHIA MCFARLAND

IF YOU breed two grass horses, you do not expect a dirt sprint star. Cross a mare that excelled at two turns with a stallion known to sire distance runners, and odds are, you will get a horse that can run a route of ground.

Bloodlines ring true, and not just when it comes to horses. That said, it is no surprise that the team of Alexandra de Meric and Brandon Rice is off to a promising start.

With two sets of parents who are long established as respected and successful pinhookers and trainers, de Meric and Rice have been entrenched in the Thoroughbred business since birth. De Meric, 24, is the daughter of Nick and Jacqui de Meric, and Rice, 26, is the son of Bryan and Holley Rice.

Rice and de Meric grew up in families where a strong work ethic was par for the course. Along the way, they watched their parents closely and learned such valuable lessons as finding exceptional individuals and doing business with integrity.

Since grade school, Rice has worked at his parents' Woodside Ranch, not far from his grandfather Clyde Rice's Indian Prairie Ranch. By age ten, he was helping work the sales and with ranch chores. When most boys his age were sleeping until the last minute, he was galloping sets of training horses before the school bus arrived each morning.

"Mom wanted to be protective even though she saw the value of me learning these lessons early on," Rice said. "She was crying and Dad was laughing when I got bucked off my first horse. In the end, I think my parents were both thankful I started early and got a good foundation underneath me. It's good to feel you 'own' your education and can carry it with you."

From the age of 11, de Meric was

already breaking and sales prep- ping one yearling each year from her parents' group of juveniles.

"I was assigned one investment horse and would work with them from the beginning," de Meric said. "I also rode the pony to and from the track every day in the summer and when I wasn't in school."

Early connection

The two met in their teens when working the sales for their parents' consignments.

"Our parents introduced us at the sales," de Meric said. "Brandon was the first date who came to the house, picked me up, and took me to the movies. We both took off and traveled around the world after high school. We found each other again at the August sale here [in Ocala] two years ago and have been together ever since."

Those two years of traveling around the world were both educational and adventurous. Rice spent two summers at Saratoga Race Course working with Racing Hall of Fame trainer D. Wayne Lukas as an assistant foreman and exercise rider during his time at Florida State University, where he obtained a degree in finance. After college he spent two years with the Darley Flying Start program, studying and working with trainers in Ireland, England, the U.S., Australia, New Zealand, and Dubai. During this time, he worked with Mark Johnston, Todd Pletcher, Michael de Kock, Doug Watson, and Roger James.

De Meric left high school at 16 (with her parents' blessing) and completed her studies by home-schooling herself. During that time, she traveled and worked the sales in England, Ireland, France, and Japan, as well as Florida, Kentucky, New York, and California. De Meric had no intention of attending college until her father made an intriguing offer.

"He told me he'd bought a house in Tampa that would be in my name if I graduated successfully. Dad's a smart man; he totally bribed me to go to school and I'm so grateful I did," said de Meric, whose degree is in business management.

Both Rice and de Meric are glad to have earned their college degrees, but happy to be devoted to the horse business now full time. This past season, Rice was responsible for overseeing the training of Overbrook Farm horses at Scanlon Training Center in Williston, Florida, under David Scanlon.

"The last year I worked for my father, I had the privilege of breaking and training the [Thoroughbred] Legends [Racing Stable] syndicate and Jay Em Ess Stable horses and a mix of [Bob] Baffert and Lukas horses," Rice said. "It was a star-studded group of 50 horses, which included Conveyance and Dublin. I remember breaking both of them and they were among our top five favorites of the group. We're really lucky that we got to work with them. It made the [Kentucky] Derby [Presented by Yum! Brands (G1)] that much more special."

Quick strike

In their debut consignment at the recently concluded Ocala Breeders' Sales Co. spring sale of two-year-olds in training, de Meric and Rice scored a definite home run. From a two-horse consignment, their Limehouse colt ended up as one of the sale's most expensive horses, bringing a final bid of \$200,000 from Bob Feld, agent for Sagamore Farm. Out of the Langfuhr mare Cukee, the bay colt worked a quarter-mile in :20.80. The colt was a \$7,000 purchase at the 2009 Fasig-Tipton Kentucky fall yearling sale.

"Considering the economy the past couple years and him not having a monstrous pedigree, I don't



Cynthia McFarland photo

Alexandra de Meric and Brandon Rice, sellers of a \$200,000 Limehouse colt at OBS spring two-year-olds in training sale, hope to maintain successful start by purchasing four to six yearlings this year to pinhook as well as taking on outside horses to train

think anybody thought he'd bring that price," Rice said. "We had no reservations about the kind of horse he was, and we were fortunate that all the big players felt he was as talented as we knew he was."

Their consignment also included a During filly, a \$5,000 purchase at the Fasig-Tipton Midlantic Eastern fall yearling sale, that sold for \$12,000 to Thor-Bred Stables.

"In a different economy, she could have brought \$20,000 or \$30,000, but we still feel she'll carry our banner well and has an opportunity for success at the right level," Rice said. "It's important to cash out and prepare to invest again for the next season. We hope to become profitable every year, but the only way to survive is to diversify and sometimes cash out at a lower level on some horses."

The couple's plan is to buy four to six yearlings this summer to pinhook, and also to take on some outside horses and train, whether for the sales or the races. They plan to board and train their horses at Woodside Ranch in Ocala.

"Although we hit a big lick with the Limehouse colt and it was exciting, we're not expecting this every year," de Meric said. "We're here to sell a good product, not just an expensive horse."

"The big success will be in 25 years when we can look back and see we were able to string together many other successes and ride the highs and lows," Rice said.

Rice and de Meric are a couple—professionally and personally—and that could not make their families any happier.

"Our parents told us stories of how they had met each other and were all riding between racetracks in the back of a horse van 30 years ago, before we came along," de Meric said. "They love the fact that we're together."

Should Rice and de Meric excel at the pinhooking game just as their parents have, no one can say it was not in their pedigrees. ★

Cynthia McFarland is a freelance writer based in Fairfield, Florida.

FLORIDA

GENERAL SIRE LIST BY 2010 EARNINGS

STALLION, YOB, sire; farm where stands	Current year					Lifetime						
	Stud fee	Strs/Wnrs	SWs/StWins	Leading earner, earnings	Progeny earnings	Crops	Fis	Strs	Winners	SWs	Avg. winning dist.	Per runner
GRAEME HALL , 97, Dehere; Winding Oaks Farm	\$5,000	110/42 (38%)	4/5	Duke of Mischief, \$360,000	\$1,553,287	5	258	180 (70%)	146 (57%)	15	7.12	\$58,386
WILDCAT HEIR , 00, Forest Wildcat; Journeyman Stud	8,000	61/31 (51%)	2/3	Dances With Ashley, 81,000	1,145,507	2	176	79 (45%)	61 (35%)	4	6.01	29,303
FULL MANDATE , 99, A.P. Indy; Hartley/DeRenzo, Walmac South	2,500	111/46 (41%)	2/2	Ron the Greek, 70,500	1,011,046	4	278	190 (68%)	124 (45%)	3	7.37	26,776
CHAPEL ROYAL , 01, Montbrook; Signature Stallions	10,000	102/31 (30%)	1/1	Blyde River Boy, 48,716	881,308	3	333	185 (56%)	115 (35%)	4	6.36	27,564
MONTBROOK , 90, Buckaroo; Ocala Stud Farm	7,500	72/19 (26%)	3/5	Amen Hallelujah, 225,843	802,439	13	692	525 (76%)	388 (56%)	46	6.55	67,482
PUT IT BACK , 98, Honour and Glory; Bridlewood Farm	7,000	88/29 (33%)	2/2	Jessica Is Back, 145,000	784,714	6	367	283 (77%)	221 (60%)	24	6.30	48,570
D'WILDCAT , 98, Forest Wildcat; Vinery Ltd.	10,000	54/28 (52%)	2/3	D' Funnybone, 187,500	696,893	4	164	110 (67%)	81 (49%)	5	6.35	53,953
CONCERTO , 94, Chief's Crown; Ocala Stud Farm	3,500	68/26 (38%)	1/1	Concert Stage, 43,830	598,671	9	352	263 (75%)	216 (61%)	19	7.14	68,211
DOUBLE HONOR , 95, Gone West; Get Away Farm	3,500	71/20 (28%)	1/1	Jet Propulsion, 193,000	591,216	9	471	360 (76%)	275 (58%)	18	6.26	50,512
CONCORDE'S TUNE , 89, Concorde Bound; Ocala Stud Farm	2,500	71/19 (27%)	0/0	Shimmering Tina, 80,570	535,521	13	416	338 (81%)	269 (65%)	22	6.18	59,042
WEST ACRE , 95, Forty Niner; Stonehedge Farm South, Inc.	2,500	32/13 (41%)	1/2	Speak Easy Gal, 226,000	523,211	10	268	177 (66%)	147 (55%)	6	6.49	54,286
CITY PLACE , 00, Storm Cat; Hartley/DeRenzo Thoroughbreds	5,000	32/17 (53%)	1/2	Wall Street Wonder, 101,900	496,434	3	101	52 (51%)	36 (36%)	2	6.12	34,385
CONSOLIDATOR , 02, Storm Cat; Journeyman Stud	5,000	56/17 (30%)	1/1	Decolorator, 45,960	491,377	2	180	79 (44%)	33 (18%)	2	6.58	13,844
BLACK MAMBO , 99, Kingmambo; Dead		53/18 (34%)	0/0	Black Magic Mama, 53,400	450,192	3	138	90 (65%)	48 (35%)	1	6.58	23,221
THREE WONDERS , 97, Storm Cat; Dead		81/22 (27%)	0/0	Threetimesawonder, 46,620	427,454	5	261	196 (75%)	133 (51%)	3	6.97	40,267
ROAR OF THE TIGER , 99, Storm Cat; Hartley/DeRenzo, Walmac South	6,000	61/20 (33%)	1/1	Gator Prowl, 69,700	423,517	3	196	107 (55%)	61 (31%)	2	6.78	19,338
HALO'S IMAGE , 91, Halo; Dead		46/17 (37%)	0/0	Wink At the Girls, 87,370	422,947	10	486	355 (73%)	275 (57%)	16	6.78	58,672
B L'S APPEAL , 97, Valid Appeal; Randolph Thoroughbreds, Inc.	2,500	53/22 (42%)	0/0	Givonna Alyssa, 27,870	416,882	6	159	121 (76%)	91 (57%)	2	6.56	39,378
STRONG HOPE , 00, Grand Slam; Winding Oaks Farm	5,000	60/18 (30%)	0/0	Strate Off Thebloc, 30,000	407,402	3	217	97 (45%)	56 (26%)	1	7.01	17,302
UNTUTTABLE , 96, Unbridled; Stonehedge Farm South, Inc.	2,500	49/13 (27%)	1/1	This Ones for Phil, 110,000	391,699	7	170	138 (81%)	95 (56%)	8	7.25	41,804

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