



Young Florida-based consignors follow in family footsteps

Apples do not fall far from the tree, particularly when those trees are planted firmly in the fertile ground of Ocala's successful pinhooking and training traditions.

The OBS spring sale of two-year-olds in training marks the debut consignment of two Floridians whose last names immediately are familiar to most in the industry. Alexandra de Meric, daughter of Nick and Jacqui de Meric, and Brandon Rice, son of Bryan and Holley Rice, are selling their first juveniles together at this year's OBS spring sale.



Cynthia McFarland photo

DE MERIC AND RICE

With longtime, respected consignors and pinhookers as parents, Rice, 26, and de Meric, 24, literally have grown up in the Thoroughbred business.

Learning to pick out exceptional individuals is one of a pinhooker's greatest challenges. Both Rice and

de Meric have watched their parents closely over the years and have taken this lesson to heart.

"My family has always focused on finding the individual," Rice said. "If you have a horse that has extraordinary talents, he'll take care of himself, whether that's at the sales or the races. That's the whole key. You can work your fingers to the bones, but unless you know the difference between an extraordinary athlete and the average pony, you're just working."

De Meric noted that one of the most important things she has learned from watching her family's business is integrity.

"You're only as good as your word," she said. "At the end of the day, it's more important to have a reputation for being honest and truthful than to sell a few big horses and get deals done."

Personally as well as professionally, Rice and de Meric are a couple.

"We've known each other since I was 15," de Meric said with a smile. "He 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 two years ago and have been together ever since."

Those two years spent traveling around the world were a learning experience. 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 finance degree. After college, he spent two years with the Darley Flying Start program.

De Meric left high school at 16—with her parents' blessing—and home-schooled herself to complete her studies. During that time, she traveled and worked sales in England, Ireland, France, and Japan as well as Florida, Kentucky, New York, and California.

Upon returning home, de Meric took her father up on his offer of a house of her own if she graduated college. She went on to earn a degree in business management from the University of Tampa. "Dad's a smart man," de Meric said. "He totally bribed me to go to school and I'm so grateful I did."

Both Rice and de Meric are glad to have earned their college degrees but even more thrilled to be devoted to the horse business full time.

"This April sale is our debut with the two horses we own together," Rice said. "We've both owned horses and sold them through our family's consignments, but this is our first time owning, training, and selling ourselves."

"We put together everything we had to buy these horses. Whatever proceeds we make from this sale, we'll reinvest in yearlings this summer."

Their OBS spring consignment includes a Daring filly (Hip #898),

scheduled to sell at the end of today's session, and a colt by Limehouse (Hip #920), scheduled to go through the ring early on Thursday.

"The Limehouse colt is receiving all the correct lookers," Rice said. "The filly holds her own and had a :10.20 breeze, but we got lucky with the Limehouse as Uptowncharlybrown, who is the same cross as our colt, has been running very well."

The Limehouse colt worked a quarter-mile in :20.80. Although de Meric and Rice hired riders for the breeze shows, they typically gallop their own horses.

Currently accepting yearlings for training, the two consider the spring sale their "coming out party" as their business will focus on two-year-olds, preparing them for either the races or the juvenile sales.

—Cynthia McFarland

City Zip colt brings second-highest price

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Bloodstock agent Mike Shannon went to \$190,000 for a City Zip colt from the consignment of Ricky Leppala, agent. Out of the Touch Gold mare Stylish Manner, a half sister to graded stakes winner Kiss the Devil, the bay colt tied for the fastest one-furlong drill at the second under-tack show, covering the distance in :09.80.

Shannon said he bought the colt for Mike McCarty and the horse will be shipped to trainer Steve Asmussen.

Through two days, OBS reported 405 horses as sold for \$11,020,100, up 5.4% from \$10,452,800 in total sales through two days last year. Average is up 9.1% at \$27,210, and median is up 33.3% at \$20,000.

Ciaran Dunne, agent, purchased a \$160,000 colt by With Distinction, by Storm Cat. Tony Bowling's All In Sales consigned the bay colt, who worked a quarter-mile in :21.

California-based trainer Greg Gilchrist went to \$160,000 on behalf of Blinkers On Racing Stable for a filly by Congrats out of the unraced Forestry mare Roger's Sue. Consigned by Ocala Stud, the bay filly worked a quarter-mile in :20.80.

Blinkers On Racing Stable also took home High Test, a colt by Wildcat Heir from the consignment of Brent and Crystal Fernung's Journeyman Bloodstock, agent, for \$160,000. The chestnut colt out of the Distorted Humor mare Twisted Truth worked two furlongs in :20.80.

"I think it's a better-looking group today than yesterday, and I think the prices are starting to reflect that," Gilchrist said, referring to the improved second session.

The third session begins at 10:30 a.m. EDT today.

—Cynthia McFarland

Kentucky Derby contenders' graded stakes earnings

Horse	Graded earnings	Horse	Graded earnings
1. Lookin At Lucky	\$1,480,000	16. Discreetly Mine	\$340,000
2. Noble's Promise*	738,000	17. Dean's Kitten	326,475
3. Rule	645,000	18. Interactif *	307,950
4. Sidney's Candy	630,000	19. Awesome Act	285,000
5. Line of David	600,000	20. Paddy O'Prado	250,950
5. Eskendereya	600,000	21. Homeboykris	250,500
7. Mission Impazible	485,934	22. Jackson Bend	230,000
8. Ice Box	457,500	23. Backtalk	225,916
9. Stately Victor	451,112	24. Aikenite	221,750
10. Endorsement	400,000	25. Make Music for Me	218,750
11. Conveyance	386,000	26. Exhi *	180,358
12. American Lion	378,000	27. A Little Warm	180,000
13. Dublin	373,208	27. Setsuko	180,000
14. Super Saver	363,832	29. Pleasant Prince	166,250
15. Devil May Care*	363,000	30. Tempted to Tapit	156,000

*Questionable for Kentucky Derby

Note: Three-year-olds listed in graded stakes earnings table are still on the Derby trail, based on the most up-to-date information available.