



Photo by Susie Audibert

Barreling down the front stretch at Montpelier on a misty autumn morning.

Just a family type of thing

T"The fuse has been lit," warns a groom as rider Jason Clayton jigs and jogs a jittery yearling from the stable to the track.

This young horse is more than nervous; he's a bomb waiting to go off, a bundle of tense sinews and tendons, white-eyed and unpredictable. But Jason, clad in hard hat and a flak vest is ready for it, and thankfully the bomb is defused. The yearling settles down and actually seems to enjoy his first-ever workout on a race track.

Welcome to the world of horse race training in Orange County. Under the backdrop of a gorgeous autumn morning, these horses and

riders jog, gallop and breeze through the sun-drenched mist, practically in the shadow of the Montpelier mansion.

But this has nothing to do with the Montpelier Races. These local training barns aim for the big stuff, the Grade One races, like the Belmont Stakes, Saratoga, the Kentucky Derby, even. This is big business with big risks for potential bigger bucks.

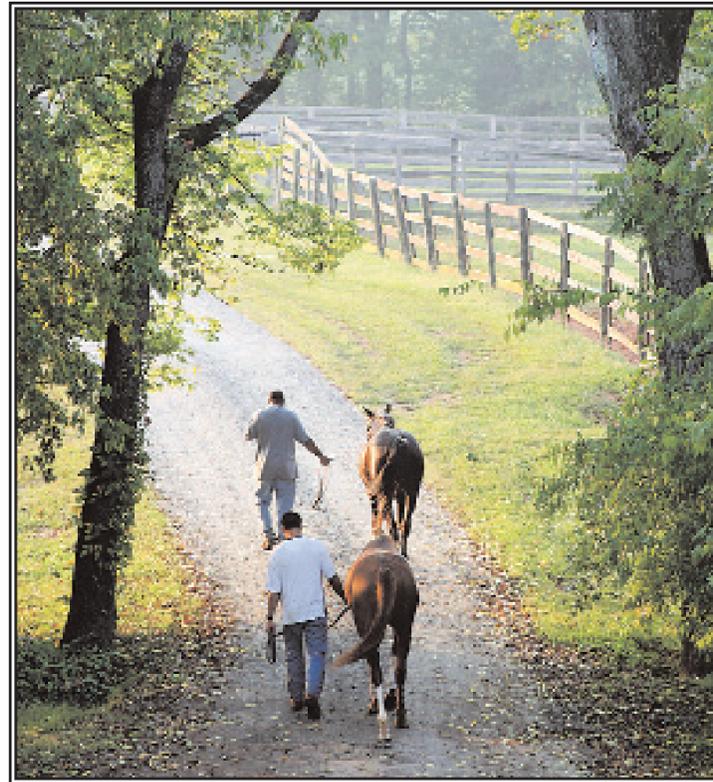
There are three outfits here in Orange County, all located within a mile of each other. H.T. Stables, on the grounds of Montpelier, may have as many as 100 horses in training at one time. On the other side

of Montpelier, a similar enterprise, run by Woodbury Payne, is getting ready for the morning's workout. And just across Route 20, in Montford, things are warming up at Randy Miles Bloodstock.

At H.T. Stables, grooms scurry about, wrapping legs, feeding, watering, bathing, turning out and exercising these young athletes. Robert Jenkins is the third generation of his family to be in the horse business. One of his employees, Thomas Carter, has been working for this family for 35 years; another, Wilbur Cobb, has been here for 26. "It's just a family type of thing," says Robert.

A smaller operation than H.T

Based on blood, bone, a practiced eye and gut instinct, he chooses what he hopes may become successful racehorses. Some do. Some don't.



Above left and right, a horse and rider approach, come even with, and blow by the entrance gate at the flat track at Montpelier. Above center, groomers at H.T. Stables at Montpelier lead prospective race horses to turnout paddocks. Below, Randy Miles feeds a handful of grass to two of his fillies as he listens to feedback from exercise riders Jordan Shaw and Sarah McCord.

Photos by Phil Audibert



My Little League Team

Stables, Randy Miles calls his string of horses "my Little League Team." Whatever you call it, both men are doing what's called 'pin hooking.'

"We go to sales, yearling sales, and we buy them for different clients and then we take them here, we break them," explains Robert Jenkins. "Then we get them going around the race track and everything and then starting in January, we take them all over and we sell them at the two-year-old training sales." That's it in a nutshell.

Randy Miles' "Little League Team," is a string of yearlings that he just bought in Maryland and Kentucky. These budding speedsters are so young they haven't been named yet, much less ridden. He has no guarantee this team will perform. All he knows is who their parents are and what he's seen of them in the few minutes he's had to look them over at the sale. Based on blood, bone, a practiced eye and gut instinct, he chooses what he hopes may become winning racehorses. Some do. Some don't.

There is much to be said for having an eye for it. Robert Jenkins turns to his uncle Dale Jenkins. "He's pretty much taught me everything I know," says the nephew respectfully. "I call him the mastermind. It's amazing really. He can come in here after being gone for four or five days and can point out everything that's

wrong with a horse." When they go to the sales to buy the yearlings, we base it on the looks and the walk. Over the years, my uncle, kind of the way he likes the horse body-wise and leg-wise, he's taught me how to pick them out." Little wonder really. Dale was raised with his two brothers, Rodney and Larry, practically on the back of a horse by their crusty father, the legendary Ennis Jenkins.

There's another factor, over which these men have more control...what they do with this raw talent to develop it. "People respect us for what we do with the young horses," says Randy Miles. "We have a very good name when it comes to breaking the young horses and giving them a start." He even hates to use the word "breaking," preferring instead "developing." He thinks of his beloved Little League Team. "Like kindergarten, but fun, and I'm fortunate to be able to work with these animals every day. It's not like a job."

Randy had a job once...working for a corporation, 40 hours or so a week, suit and tie. Then this admitted party animal and "Goodtime Charley" had an epiphany. "I didn't have any drive to get out of bed," he laments. "I woke up. These people are going to own me. I'm going to wake up one day; I'm gonna be 60 years old and not have a life."

So he became a racehorse "developer," instead. There's a family connection here too. Randy's father dabbled in pin hooking racehorses on the side. "He was making \$15,000-\$20,000 per horse, and that's with two horses. I said, 'Suppose you did it with ten horses,' and he said, 'No I don't want you to get in the business. Once you get into the horses, they own your life.' So I said, 'I disagree. There's something inside of me that says I want to do this.' So I said, 'if you don't want me to do it here, I'm going to Kentucky and do it.'"

And he did. Randy learned a lot, and a year later he was back in Virginia. "I lived like a pauper for six years, and the money I would make I put back into it, and now we're dealing with some of the best horses in the country," he says proudly.

Much of the success of both of these stables stems from loyal clients...people who trust Randy and Robert's eye to find horses that will develop into successful two-year-olds at the sales and on the track. In Randy's case it's people like Ken and Maureen Luke of Eldon Farms in Keswick. For Robert Jenkins it is a stable of loyal clients, nurtured over generations, who trust the Jenkins' eye to make the right purchasing decisions. "We were taught to be always truthful with them," says Robert. "It doesn't get

you anywhere to lie to them."

A typical day at these barns starts long before first light. "We check the legs first and then do the feeding and watering and that type of stuff," outlines Robert. "Then we get ready to train."

In the beginning, Randy Miles will have a groom "drive" a horse around the shed row by calmly walking behind the yearling with long lines, teaching him to turn, stop and walk on peacefully. Once a horse is broke to saddle, the conditioning starts in earnest. "I was an athlete," comments Randy Miles. "I know what it's like to train. I know what it's like to hurt!" He pauses for effect. "So, in dealing with young horses, it's just common sense. Be easy on them. You can train them, but don't put 'em in the ground. Don't bury them."

"Bucked" shins, an ailment similar to shin splints in humans, is the biggest problem. Robert Jenkins says, "We do a lot of hosing, a lot of icing of legs." In bad weather, Robert will have the horses exercised indoors in deep sand. He even has an automatic walker that nudges horses round and round in a circle.

On the track, they will first jog, then leisurely "gallop" the horses around. Once or twice a week, they "breeze," which means going at ¾ speed, "never all out," says Robert.

"I'm fortunate to be able to work with these animals every day. It's not like a job."

--Randy Miles

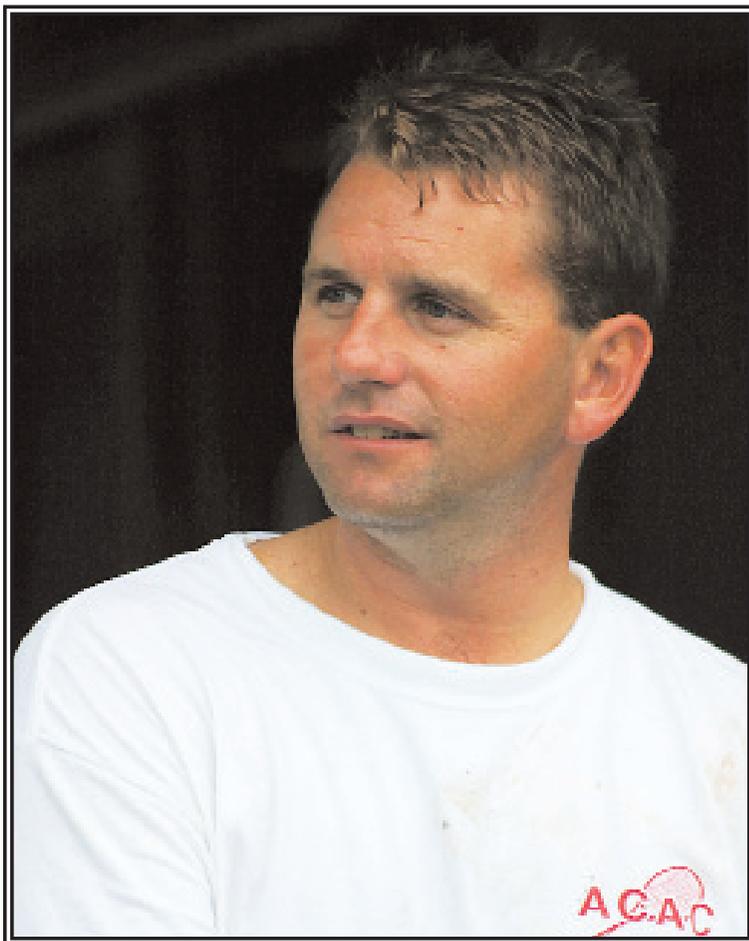
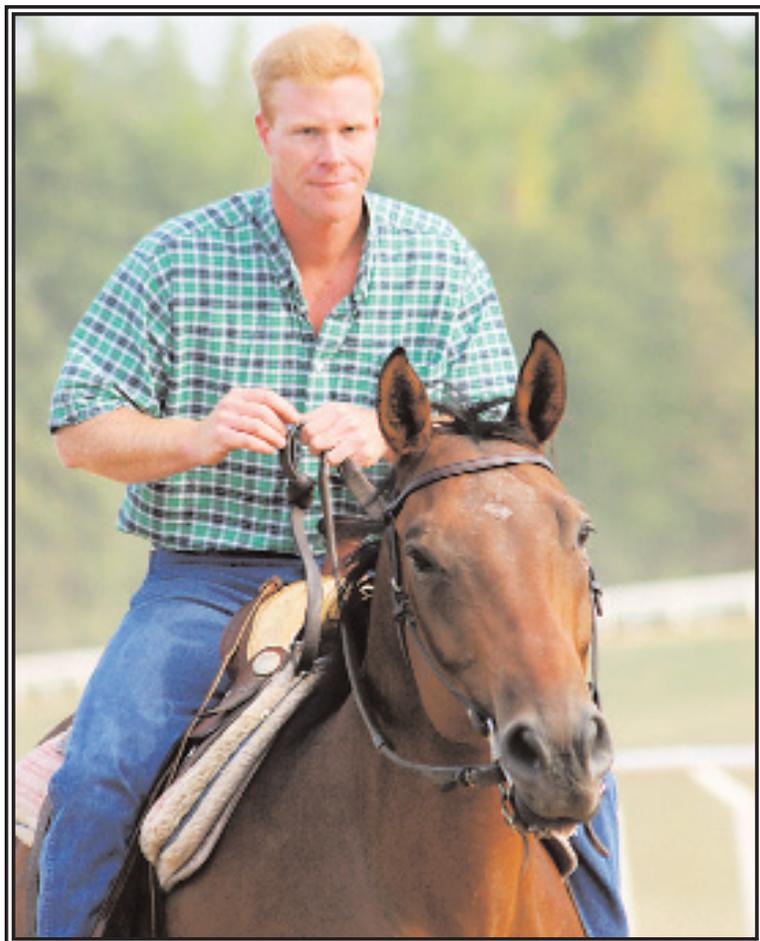


Photo by Susie Audibert
Randy Miles considers himself a race horse "developer," rather than a trainer.



"People can look at them at the track and sense the ability that they have and figure out what they might pay for them...It's based on speed and athleticism."

--Robert Jenkins

Photo by Phil Audibert
Robert Jenkins, aboard a calm experienced horse, often accompanies yearlings out on the track to help settle them down.

Randy is also cautious. "The faster you go, the more nervous you make these horses. The slower you go, the more comfortable they are."

Randy even takes his youngsters on trail rides. "You don't want to ask them to do more because then you start affecting the brain. They're going out there for the rest of their life, training. So you try to introduce the track to them slow. You don't want them to think that every time they go to the track, it's a dreadful place."

The point of all of this conditioning is to prepare them for their big day--sale day. H.T. Stables maintains separate farm and road crews just to get the horses ready to go out to Florida, Kentucky, Maryland, and California. ("They fly really good," asides Robert).

At these sales, the trained two-year-olds are "breezed" at full speed before an audience of buyers with stopwatches and video cameras. It's like a test drive, says Robert. "People can look at them there at the track and sense the ability that they have and figure out what they might pay for them." The idea for Robert and Randy is to buy the yearlings at a medium price in the summer and sell them high the following winter...pin hooking.

Generally, the fastest sell for the most. Robert says buyers nowadays pay less and less attention to the pedigree of the animal and more to the individual performance on sale day. "Here in North America, it's based on speed and athleticism."

The biggest sale is the first...the one in January in Miami, Florida. But Randy

Miles thinks that's too soon...too tough on the young legs, and he won't show there. "The hardest part of the horse's career is when he goes to the sale," says Randy. "You see a lot of horses break down when they go to the two-year-old sale."

And these horses, ones that did not sell or came up with an injury, will likely come back to Orange County to what's known as a "lay-up" barn, where they are treated, given some R and R, and are turned out for as much as three months to, as Robert terms it, "just let them be horses."

Robert and Randy are friendly competitors. "When it comes to breeze day, you want to have the best breeze," says Robert. "That's just normal." But Randy sees it differently. "It's almost like playing golf. Are you playing the guy next to you or are you playing the course? I'm playing the course. I'm presenting my five horses to the nation. He's doing the same thing."

Both have been successful, selling horses in the million-dollar range and having them run in Grade One races. And they often help each other out. "I would do anything in the world for them," Randy nods in the direction of Montpelier. "Robert's a good friend of mine."

Randy turns to look at one of his latest purchases. At the yearling sale, "I watch them walk twice and that's all I get to see. It's all a flash." So this morning, he wants a closer look.

The eager young colts and fillies look expectantly from their stall doors to him. He smiles and with a wave of his hand, says proudly, "That's my Little League Team."