Runnymede Farm Raises to Race for the Advantage

BY NIKKI SHERMAN



NIKKI SHERMAN PHOTOS

The late afternoon sun spread golden light across the pristine rolling hills of Runnymede Farm in Coatesville, Pa. Gathering at the "Training Barn" were owners Greg and his wife Caroline Bentley, as well as Farm Manager Joe Cassidy. Breeding Manager Jim Bergen would join the group later in a light and airy broodmare barn at the precipice of one of the hills.

The barn was fairly empty, save for stakes-placed Loose Ends, who had recently returned home for the winter. The 5-year-old son of Divining Rod was still in racing shape and stood proudly on the side of a lush slope after Cassidy requested that he be led out for photographs.

"We think he has the ability to make the transition into steeplechasing well," Cassidy noted, before adding, "He's the first one back home but the others are coming soon. We like to bring them home, and the great thing is that they can stay in shape. When they go back to the racetrack, they're pretty much ready for four-furlong breezes and our trainers love that."

Runnymede Farm is not just a breeding facility; it also houses a fully-accredited 6-furlong Tapeta training track, an outdoor swimming pond and a Hitchcock pen. Not only does the home team use the facilities, but some of the top horsemen from a variety of disciplines schedule usage, including the United States Equestrian Team, Eventing Team, and steeplechase trainers. Cassidy said that they mixed the length and width of swimming docks from two of the nation's top eventers to create their own "Best of the Best" pond. Every single horse on the grounds of Runnymede Farm has swum in the pond.

Cassidy said that their team believes that this is crucial to the development of their horses. "It teaches them that 'No' is not an answer. We've found that it helps them in so many ways, the most obvious of which is in the starting gate. We also send every horse through our Hitchcock pen. It's great because all the people on the farm line up to watch on those days!"

A Hitchcock pen is a circular wooden chute that includes hedge-shaped jumps. The horses are then "free lunged" around the course. Cassidy admitted that not every horse has shown ability at jumping (or swimming), but that they still learn an immense willingness to try.

Runnymede Farm was purchased by the Bentleys from Diane Wister, whose brother is George Strawbridge Jr., a member of the National Museum of Racing and Hall of Fame's Board of Trustees. Strawbridge races under Augustin Stables and his Derry Meeting Farm–birthplace of Storm Cat–is adjacent to the 440 acres that encompass the Bentley's portion of Runnymede Farm. The original Runnymede Farm was over

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE

Runnymede Farm cont.

2,500 acres. Those two properties, as well as several others, include 1,700 acres of neighboring green space for Pennsylvania's Chester County.

Greg and his four brothers founded an infrastructure engineering software provider called Bentley Systems in 1984. In the 40 years since its inception, the company has become internationally successful, yet continues to hold its headquarters right in Exton, Pa. That success has allowed Greg and Caroline to pursue their love for horses and horse racing. Since there is a well-known Runnymede Farm in Kentucky, the Bentleys decided to race most of their horses under the moniker Runnymoore Racing, LLC.

Over the years, the couple has been blessed with several nationally-recognized racehorses. The three most well known now share a pensioners' paddock at Runnymede Farm. The Bentleys acquired Postulation, who gave them a thrilling victory in the $250,000 American St. Leger-G3 at Arlington Park in 2017. Alwaysmining gave them the thrill of competing in a Triple Crown race after he earned a spot in the 2019 Preakness Stakes following six straight victories, including an eye-opening 11½-length score in the local prep, the $125,000 Federico Tesio Stakes. While Alwaysmining was unsuccessful in the Preakness, he ultimately earned $618,549, including three more wins, of which two were stakes. And perhaps their most exciting win was with Hardest Core, who captured the 2014 Arlington Million-G1 over some of the best turf horses of his generation, including the prior year's Breeders' Cup Turf winner Magician (Ire), defending champion Real Solution, 2013 Canadian Horse of the Year Up With the Birds, and multimillionaire Side Glance (GB).

"After Hardest Core, we thought it was easy," Caroline laughed.

When Hardest Core was sent to the farm between racing seasons, he "babysat" a young filly named Giant Shadow. The daughter of Giant's Causeway had captured three races in a



OWNERS GREG AND CAROLINE BENTLEY

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE

row, including a maiden special weight and allowance at Parx Racing, before a dull stakes debut necessitated a break for the winter. Coming full circle, Giant Shadow is now the dam of Loose Ends. And what was also so special about Loose Ends' stakes-placing in the 2022 Crowd Pleaser Stakes? Well, the winner was also their own homebred, Undercover Kitty. They were officially in the breeding game.

"We came to realize that, even with everyone meaning well, you're never going to know as much about a horse you're buying as the seller does," Greg noted. "But if you breed and raise the horse then you have the advantage. It made sense that breeding to race is really our intended final state here."



Loose Ends

Caroline added, "We bought fillies with an eye for breeding but we were very new at it so we weren't sure what our goals really were, other than to race a horse that we really bred."

A major addition to their team was Bergen, who came with an impressive resume. Bergen had experience in every facet of the Thoroughbred industry: from working for three Hall of Fame trainers, to managing a training center outside Toronto where he also advised some of the top breeding farms in Canada, and assisting trainer Jonathan Sheppard for 17 years. Bergen was even recruited for several years to work at Cambridge Stud in New Zealand based on his strong knowledge of American pedigrees.

When Bergen came to Runnymede Farm, he joined forces with Calvin Smith, who had done all of the foaling since 1980 for Derry Meeting Farm. Bergen said, "We worked so well together. I used to say that Calvin had his hands on more Grade 1 legs than any trainer in the neighborhood. He was there when Storm Cat was foaled and was learning how to foal when Danzig was foaled. He was a mammoth of a man but gentle as a lamb, yet strong as a bull."

Sadly, Smith passed away in June 2023. He left a huge hole in the hearts and operation of Runnymede Farm and this year's foaling season was a difficult one for the employees. Bergen credits their close location to New Bolton Center, as well as one of the hospital's interns who had a strong interest in foaling, as the way the farm was able to successfully process the season.

Meanwhile on the racetrack, Runnymoore Racing was taking flight, with multiple homebred Pennsylvania stakes winners including Stern Chaser, Late Frost, Trevesso, and the exciting juvenile filly Caprice (by Golden Lad).



Jim Bergen

Since purchasing Runnymede Farm, the Bentleys have strived for success in local programs. With the advent of the PA-Bred, PA-Sired program, their team is even more focused on supporting Pennsylvania breeding. Bergen noted that they have a weanling half-brother to Caprice by now-pensioned Pennsylvania sire Warrior's Reward.

The Runnymede team is excited moving into the future. Their new mares include stakes-winning PA-Bred Cinnabunny (in foal to Munnings), multiple stakes-placed homebred In a Spin (by Hard Spun), PA-Bred stakes winner Tappin Josie, and a daughter of Triple Crown winner Justify.

"We would like to take full advantage and be participating in all of the Pennsylvania races and where we're not, we want to fill in the gaps," Greg said. "We want to show what kind of agricultural operation you can have when you have good people with good experience." ■