

Pieces *of* Art

BY LESLIE DECKARD

Kitty Taylor's Warrendale Sales ranks as one of the top consignors in North America

Ask Kitty Taylor what she likes most about being a consignor in the horse business and she will look you squarely in the eye and say, "To me, a good-looking horse, a correct horse, an athletic horse is like a good piece of art. You just love to look at it, and I love to look at good-looking-horses."

It is with that type of appreciation for the animal that Taylor operates Lexington-based Warrendale Sales, which ranked fourth, tied with Denali Stud, on the list of consignors of 2007 North American graded stakes winners with eight graduates winning black-type races. Of the eight, four were grade I winners, which placed Warrendale third on the list of consignors of 2007 grade I stakes winners.

"That was incredible for us because we are not a big consignor," Taylor said. "The smaller consignors say that I am too big, but the bigger consignors know that I am really just small potatoes. So, I tell people that I am not Wal-Mart, but I am Target. Target markets well and puts forth a good product, so that is kind of where we are."

Since Warrendale's creation in 2002, its roll of graduates reads like a who's-who list. Graded stakes winners sold by Warrendale include: Cotton Blossom (gr. I), Crustaceo (PR-I), Hystericalady (gr. I), Kimchi (gr. I), Spanish Market (PR-I), Gayego (gr. II), Songster (gr. II), Teuflesberg (gr. II), Duke of Venice (Eng-III), Old Forester (gr. III), Roshani (gr. III), and Steve's Double (gr. III).

Despite not growing up in a horse family, Taylor always knew she wanted to work with horses. Her father was a career military man, and her family traveled extensively throughout Europe and the United States. She began taking riding lessons at age 12 from a retired cavalry sergeant while her family was stationed at Fort Knox. Within a few years, a hobby her parents thought she would outgrow became her career.

"I remember telling my high school guidance counselor that I wanted to be a rider, and she was thrilled," Taylor said. "She thought I meant a 'writer,' someone who writes books. I told her, 'No, I want to jump jumps with horses and be a three-day eventer and go to the Olympics.' She then looked at me like I had three heads or something."

Taylor's love of horses and riding took her to William Woods College in Missouri, where she obtained a degree in equestrian science. After graduation, she began galloping and breaking young horses in Virginia. "I was young enough at the time to think that was fun," she said. "I learned quickly that Thoroughbreds were a lot different than hunters, and I also learned a lot more about athleticism and legs and day-to-day horsemanship."

She spent four summers with Lee Eaton, getting plenty of hands-on knowledge while working the yearling sale circuit. "I started off with Lee during the time when girls did not show horses, and it was so long ago that we did not wear uniforms," she said. "It was very stratified during that time. It always amuses me when I hear young girls talk about how hard it is in this business. It really isn't. If I can make it, anyone can make it."

After spending several years as a groom/showperson, she



OPPOSITE: ANNE M. EBERHARDT

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became a barn foreman while continuing to ride during the winter months.

"When I was first working the sales, I had not been around yearlings," she said. "I learned more about conformation at the sales than I did when I was galloping. I am always astounded at the amount of people who work with horses all day and don't see offset knees or back at the knees or angles. They don't see how the big picture comes together. You start to learn that at the sales. And then you learn how to stand them up and how best to show them to their advantage."

Taylor's career priorities changed when she had her daughter, Kate Taylor, now a 19-year-old sophomore at the University of Kentucky. Taylor also has a 9-year-old son, Will Roden. "I had Kate and decided that breaking and galloping horses was not the safest way to make a living, so I quit riding and moved to Kentucky," she said.

Upon arriving in the Bluegrass State in 1992, Taylor went to work for Ben Walden at Vinery and became his director of sales. Taylor's first office job lasted eight years. "The toughest part of that job was learning to use the computer," she joked. "I had not typed since college, and it was learning how to work inside versus outside and learning office politics versus barn politics."

After working at Vinery, through the transition of ownership from Walden to George Hofmeister, Taylor partnered with Meg Levy and opened Bluewater Sales. Taylor spent two years at Bluewater with Levy before going out on her own with Warrendale, which takes its name from Taylor's former street address in Georgetown, Ky. The Warrendale logo is a leaf from a Ginkgo tree that lives on Warrendale Avenue. "Going from being an employee to owning your own business was scary," she said. "There is no regular paycheck."

One of her first clients was the husband-and-wife team of Har-



Arkansas Derby victor Gayego was bred by Taylor associates Hargus and Sandra Sexton

gus and Sandra Sexton, breeders of Gayego, among others. "When she left Vinery, my husband told her to open her own company and we would sell with her," Sandra Sexton said. "She knows everybody and can get a horse sold. She starts following our horses in the fall and will follow them all the way until sale time. Kitty knows what she is doing, and she tells it like it is. There is no B.S. coming from her."

In keeping with her reputation of spilling no B.S., Taylor said one of the most difficult things about being a consignor is explaining catalog placement or why a certain horse did not bring a preconceived amount.

"Some people view their horses as their pets and don't understand why their horse brought \$6,500 instead of \$40,000," she said. "You have to explain market variables or X-ray issues or sire issues. It is a very fluid marketplace. People say they understand it,

but they don't always understand. I used to tell myself when I first started and I had to call people and tell them what I thought their horse would sell for, or what their horse sold for, that I was not a doctor having to tell people they had cancer, because it was hard to tell people things like that. But I have gotten better over the years."

Shannon White, manager of Fares Farm, referred to Taylor as one of the most honest and forthright people in the industry. "She will tell you what you need to hear, which isn't necessarily what you want to hear. That is rare in this business."

Taylor surrounds herself with a capable staff, and she is quick to credit staff members Allaire Ryan, Melissa Dailey, and Donna Rion with keeping her office running smoothly. Ryan, the newest member of the team, is the daughter of longtime bloodstock agent Mike Ryan and assists Taylor with looking at horses. Dailey works with the company's advertising and marketing, and Rion, an accountant, keeps the books balanced.

"You don't want to be overextended, you don't want to not

Kitty Taylor

Owner of Warrendale Sales since 2002.

Age: 50

Family: daughter, Kate Taylor, 19, and son, Will Roden, 9; dogs, Charlie and Paisley

Residence: Lexington

Graded stakes horses sold: Cotton Blossom (gr. I), Crustaceo (PR-I), Hystericalady (gr. I), Kimchi (gr. I), Spanish Market (PR-I), Gayego (gr. II), Songster (gr. II), Teuflesberg (gr. II), Duke of Venice (Eng-III), Old Forester (gr. III), Roshani (gr. III), and Steve's Double (gr. III)

Taylor (right) looks over a yearling with Sandra Sexton



have the infrastructure or have the people in place to support the number of horses you have. I am very content with a 150-to-160-member yearling consignment," Taylor said. "I really could not do this without all of my help. They keep this place running and keep me going."

Because she spent time showing horses while she was coming up in the business, Taylor is particular about the way her horses are shown. "I like to watch them (potential buyers) look at a horse," Taylor said. "We let the buyers look at a horse first. My showmen are schooled really hard not to do too much talking. I want them to set that horse up and set it up really well. I want the buyer to observe the horse, look at the horse, watch the horse walk, and keep an eye on how the horse is walking, because that can tell them a lot. Then, after the buyer has had time to look at the horse, my update people will go over and offer updates or answer any questions."

Keeping her consignments on the smaller side as compared with many other operations, Taylor is able to provide personal attention to each of her clients and can easily remember her sale graduates.

She had these comments about Warrendale Sales graduates: Cotton Blossom (Broken Vow—For Dixie, by Dixieland Band) sold for \$210,000 to Cot Campbell's Dogwood Stable at the 2005 Fasig-Tipton Kentucky July yearling sale. "I loved Cotton Blossom as a yearling," she said. "She was so big, beautiful, and athletic. She was an incredible physical animal, but she was not perfect in one leg."

Hystericalady (Distorted Humor—Sacramentada, by Northair) was sold by Warrendale at the 2004 Keeneland September yearling sale and was purchased by Northern California trainer Jerry Hollendorfer for \$125,000. "I loved Hystericalady," Taylor said. "I got to sell her as a yearling. She is just beautiful and a heck of a racehorse."

Teuflesberg (Johannesburg—St. Michele, by Devil's Bag) was originally offered at the 2005 Fasig-Tipton Kentucky July yearling sale. He was then offered without reserve at the 2005 Fasig-Tipton Kentucky October sale, where he was purchased by Green River Farm for \$9,000. "Teuflesberg was interesting because he was a (Fasig-Tipton) July horse and was an RNA," Taylor said. "He was the Halloween horse where the back did not match the front; he was a big-boned horse, but nothing quite fit. His owner told me to sell him without a reserve at the October sale."

Songster (Songandaprayer—Peppy Lapeau, by French Deputy) was purchased by the late Robert Scanlon for \$200,000 at the 2004 Fasig-Tipton Kentucky July yearling sale. "Oh, Songster just jumped out at me from the beginning," Taylor said. "He was this big, beautiful, black horse. He had a presence about him."

Because she does not own or operate a farm, Taylor relies heavily on the work of the farms where her clients board their horses. Some of the farms she uses to prep horses include Fares Farm, Woodstock Farm, Windham Hill Farm, and Briarbrooke Farm.

"You get a good core of people that you know how they prep and what kind of job they do, and you visit them on a regular basis," Taylor said of how she oversees the prepping process. "I don't micromanage the farms where the yearlings are being prepped. They (the farms) are really good at what they do. I will go in there with a fresh pair of eyes and look at all of the horses. I may say, 'This one looks a little underweight, or this one needs the Aqua Pacer,' or something along those lines."

"A lot of the people I sell for are breeders and they have their own operation, so they are not going to want to pay board to send their horses out someplace else," Taylor continued. "Hargus and Sandra Sexton raise some awesome horses. They are old-school. They do it with hay, corn, and oats. I come in there every two to three weeks and more closer to the time of the sale. We look at the yearlings and talk about what we see or where we want to go with a particular horse, such as does this horse need a screw or wire. I e-mail notes to them to reference back."

White said she is most impressed with Taylor's attention to

detail. "She can remember conversations we have had about individual horses without looking at her notes," White said. "She constantly provides updates and suggestions to us. Kitty is a professional. She gets the job done and will work as hard to sell your horse in book six as she will in book one."

Taylor said she prefers not owning a farm and considers it to be a bonus for her operation. "It works really well for me because we focus only on public auction. It is a level playing field as far as we are concerned," she said. "I don't have horses that I own, and I know that a lot of consignors of yearlings and 2-year-olds have pieces or own some of the horses that they are selling. It is human nature to kind of push those horses more so than clients' horses. We are kind of an open, clean slate."

Speaking of operating under a clean slate, Taylor, who is an active member of the Consignors and Commercial Breeders Association, is in favor of disclosure. "I have no problem telling people if a horse has had screws or wires or whatever he has had done," she said.



The Warrendale staff includes Melissa Dailey (left), Allaire Ryan, and Donna Rion (background)

She has the same feelings about ownership disclosure. "I don't have a problem if people ask me who owns a horse," she said. "A lot of times it is a group of people who own the horse. I can say it came off of this farm and that person owns a part of him or her. I encourage all of my clients to use Warrendale, agent, for whoever on the catalog page. But with the technology that is available today, if you have a buyer's guide, you already know who bred the horse, and if it didn't go through an auction previously, then more than likely it is still owned by the breeder. There is so much data out there; if you want to sift through all of it, you can find out what you are looking for."

Concerning the current state of the Thoroughbred marketplace, Taylor said if she could make changes or overhaul it, she would like to see it be perceived as honest. "I would really like to have that honest perception out there," she said. "I think there are a lot of great people in this industry. I like to think I am one of them. I have never been approached for a kickback. Maybe I just don't look approachable, or maybe I look too honest. I would just like to see more positive things said about this industry. There are a lot of good people and good horses out there." □