

Winner's Circle

BREEDER

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Pinnacle Year

BY DEIRDRE B. BILES

Nancy Dillman can sum up 2011 so far in one word: "Marvelous."

During the recent Fasig-Tipton Saratoga select yearling sale, a Bernardini colt that Dillman bred brought \$1.2 million from Sheikh Mohammed's bloodstock manager, John Ferguson. **Consigned by the sales division of Mill Ridge Farm, the handsome bay shared the auction's honor for highest price with Superfection, a Medaglia d'Oro half brother to 2010 Kentucky Derby Presented by Yum! Brands (gr. I) winner Super Saver.**

Breeder of Havre de Grace, \$1.2 million yearling half brother

In addition, Dillman is the breeder of one this year's leading older female runners, Havre de Grace (by Saint Liam). A 4-year-old half sister to the Bernardini colt, Havre de Grace captured the Apple Blossom Handicap (gr. I) for Rick Porter's Fox Hill Farms in April. The \$380,000 graduate of the 2008 Keeneland September yearling sale is a top rival to champion Blind Luck.

"In anything involving Thoroughbreds, there can be a lot of ups and downs," Dillman said. "This year certainly has been the pinnacle for me of the ups."

The Bernardini colt, which is the most expensive horse ever sold at public auction by Dillman, and Havre de Grace are out of Easter Bunnette. A 13-year-old winning daughter of Carson City, she is one of only

three active broodmares owned by Dillman, who stresses quality in her commercial breeding operation.

"I spend a lot of time watching my foals; that's one of my favorite things to do," said Dillman, who lives with her cardiologist husband, Carl, on their 45-acre Stonegate Farm near Anchorage, Ky., which is close to Louisville.

"I had three filly foals the year Havre de Grace was born, and there was no question that she was the leader of her little pack," Dillman remembered. "She was very curious and always very aware of what was going on around her. The Bernardini colt has that same alertness, and it's going to be interesting to watch his racing career."

A native of upstate New York, Dillman grew up riding show horses and after moving on from ponies, she preferred Thoroughbreds as her hunter-jumper mounts. She continued competing in shows as an adult while she worked on

Wall Street as a stock broker for a private hedge fund.

Dillman got involved in the breeding business in the mid-1970s.

"When I got married, my husband didn't want me to be away on weekends at horse shows," Dillman said. "We had friends in upstate New York who raised Thoroughbreds, so he said, 'Why don't you go to the sale and buy yourself some broodmares and stay home?' That's how it all started. I purchased my first mare at a sale in Timonium, Md., and then I wanted to go to Keeneland to buy."

Prior to Havre de Grace and the seven-figure Bernardini colt, Dillman was best known for breeding the European champion Diminuendo. The daughter of Diesis triumphed in the Gold Seal Epsom Oaks (Eng-I), Yorkshire Oaks (Eng-I), and Kildangan Irish Oaks (Ire-I) in 1988.

Dillman sent Diminuendo's dam, Cacti, to Diesis because she was so impressed by Pebbles, who was a champion here and overseas. The 1985 Breeders' Cup Turf (gr. IT) winner was by Diesis' sire, Sharpen Up, and "I fell in love with her," Dillman said.

Besides Diminuendo, Cacti produced the Diesis-sired add-ed-money winner Pricket, who finished second in the 1996 Epsom Oaks. Diesis also sired the Dillman-bred grade II winner Eleusis, who is out of the winner Balancing Act (by Spectacular Bid) and is a half sister to 2002 Suffolk Downs stakes winner Tip the Scale (by Valiant Nature).

But perhaps, even more importantly, Cacti's visits to Diesis at Mill Ridge resulted in Dillman getting to know the Central Kentucky nursery's matriarch, Alice Chandler, and her family. Dillman has been a Mill Ridge client ever since and she has a close relationship to the Mill Ridge-affiliated Nicoma Bloodstock.


Dillman's yearlings are prepared for sales at Mill Ridge. She also sends her mares to the Lexington farm to be foaled and re-bred.

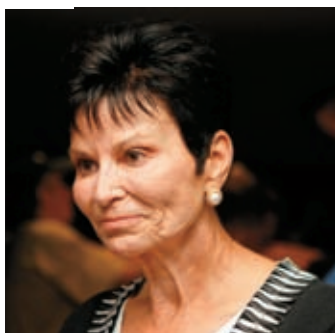
"It's a wonderful business if you have the support of a farm like Mill Ridge," Dillman said. "Everyone works together as a team, and they do a terrific job in terms of guiding you and communicating with you. I love working on the matings for my mares with (Chandler's son) Headley Bell."

And, according to Bell, Mill Ridge's staff enjoys working with Dillman.

"First and foremost, she's someone who loves her horses," he said. "She's always looking to upgrade, and she's done very well being a small breeder with only a few mares. She's a lovely person, she's passionate about the Thoroughbred business, and she's really everything you would want in a friend and a client."

Now that one of Dillman's sale yearlings has brought a seven-figure amount, she has another dream.

"All of my young horses go to market, but I want one of the ones that don't sell to race for me and become my big stakes winner," said Dillman, who plans to shop for another mare at Kentucky's November mixed sale. 



Nancy Dillman