

# STANDING FIRM

Stonehaven Steadings finds success through proven principles

BY RON MITCHELL  
PHOTOS BY ANNE M. EBERHARDT

**W**HILE UNCERTAINTIES abound in 2020 ahead of the yearling sales season, consignor Stonehaven Steadings hopes that with a strong group of horses this year it can build on its 2019 success.

Last year represented a watershed moment for the Central Kentucky nursery that sent 31 horses through the ring at Keeneland in September and Fasig-Tipton Kentucky in October, with 22 sold for gross receipts of \$4,464,000—good for an average price of \$202,909.

Topping the group were two yearlings that each brought \$700,000 at the Keeneland September yearling sale: A daughter of Quality Road was purchased by Don Adam's Courtlandt Farm, and an Into Mischief colt went to Sheikh Hamdan's Shadwell Estate.

With 25 head entered in this year's Keeneland sale, the farm's management acknowledges it will be hard to replicate last year's success, although the consignment is the best Stonehaven Steadings has brought to market, according to its team.

"This year we have the best group of foals produced off the farm so far, and



The O'Mearas, Aidan and Leah, at the entrance of Stonehaven Steadings with their children, from left, Charlotte, Aidan Jr., and Julia; at right, farm manager Colby Marks



we're excited to see where that leads us," said Aidan O'Meara, director of bloodstock and client development.

He added that the marketing uncertainties resulting from COVID-19 could impact this year's results.

"We had a great year last year, and obviously we're not expecting to duplicate that with the current environment. To duplicate that in a regular year would have been tough enough. On paper it's probably our strongest group in Books 1 through 4. We're going out there with a positive outlook and with our 'A' game on. We'll see what happens."

Included in Book 1 and Book 2 offerings are yearlings by leading sires such as American Pharoah, Quality Road, Ghostzapper, and Candy Ride.

Hip 145 is an American Pharoah half sister to Big City Momma, the Quality Road filly out of stakes-placed Easy Living that was one of the \$700,000 yearlings last September.

"I thought this filly was even a nicer type physically from day one," O'Meara said in comparing the American Pharoah filly with her pricey half sister. "We've also got a beautiful Quality Road colt out of Wasted Tears (Hip 10) that we have in partnership, and we have a really nice Ghostzapper colt (Hip



Farm crew hand-walking yearlings at Stonehaven Steadings; the 22 yearlings they sold last year averaged \$202,909

26) in the first book. And then we've got a quintet in Book 2 that is hands down the strongest Book 2 group we've had. We've got two lovely Candy Ride colts (Hips 875 and 957). One is a homebred and one is a half brother to Blue Chipper, who was a Korean superstar last year. We've got a beautiful Gun Runner filly (Hip 1002) and a Street Sense colt (Hip 1137) in there as well. Probably our best physical going out there is the Mastery colt (Hip 1021). He's built like a 2-year-old already. So he's a serious specimen. We're delighted to take those out there."

O'Meara, the former stallion manager at Hill 'n' Dale Farms, and his wife, Leah, handle much of the day-to-day operations of Stonehaven Steadings, along with farm manager Colby Marks. Constituting about 250 acres located in Woodford County, Stonehaven Stead-

**“We are a family-owned farm driven by a love of the horse and a passion for success. Horse racing is about winning...winning horses, winning races, winning relationships, and winning outcomes.”**

— FROM THE FARM'S WEBSITE

ings is owned by Chiquita and Jeff Reddoch, the parents of Leah O'Meara, who are hands-on and involved in most of the decision-making.

The Reddochs' entrée into Thorough-

bred breeding began organically, starting with their daughter's decision to attend Midway University because of her passion for horses.

"I was just interested in horses. That was my passion at the time. So I came up here for that," Leah recalls.

The Reddochs found a connection as both Chiquita and Marks, then manager of Bruce Hundley's Saxony Farm, are from Eunice, La.

"Small worlds, you know," Leah said. "They were leaving me up here, a college-age kid. And right down the road was this farm, and so they just wanted a place for me to be able to call home away from home. Nancy and Colby opened their doors and welcomed us, and we got to meet everybody. So it was the first farm we came on to. Nancy and Colby would feed me while I was in school."

As Leah's parents became more knowledgeable of the Thoroughbred industry, and with advice from Marks, they bought their first mares in 2005 and took a keen interest in the Woodford County area where a portion of Saxony was located. An iconic nursery under Hundley's ownership, Saxony was the birthplace or early home of champions Fly So Free and Arazi as well as English champions Zilzal and Ajdal.

When Hundley, who died in 2009, decided in 2008 to sell a portion of his farm, the Reddochs jumped at the opportunity. The farm's name derives from a town in Scotland named Stonehaven that Chiquita Reddoch discovered while there with her husband, who had an office in Scotland. It was Chiquita's favorite place there, since it had a beach with smooth glass pebbles. Steadings is a stable in England.

"In knowing Bruce and in conversations with him about the farm, they learned about the Woodford County section of Saxony where four champions were raised," recalled Leah. "And so my father really took to that. I had met Aidan at this point, and I was going to call this my home."

The Reddochs also were attracted to regulations in Woodford County that protect horse farms and liked that other farms in the vicinity included such successful operations as WinStar, Lane's End, Three Chimneys, and Ston-

estreet. It all fell into place."

Aidan O'Meara said the area in which Stonehaven Steadings is located is one of several spots in Central Kentucky—along with Bourbon County



Stonehaven Steadings bred 2012 champion 2-year-old male Shanghai Bobby ...



... and raised 2014 Champagne Stakes winner Daredevil

and the Old Frankfort Pike corridor—that have a proven record for producing top-quality runners.

"It's a phenomenal area to raise a horse," he said. "What we think makes the land so special is the natural springs that run through it."

Under Marks' management, Stonehaven Steadings achieved quick success, with one of the first mares it bought producing eventual 2-year-old male champion Shanghai Bobby. The

son of Harlan's Holiday was produced from Steelin', a daughter of Orientate bought for \$155,000 at the 2009 Keeneland November breeding stock sale with Shanghai Bobby in utero. Purchased by Starlight for \$105,000 as a yearling, Shanghai Bobby was trained by Todd Pletcher on behalf of Starlight Racing and the Coolmore connections of Susan Magnier, Michael Tabor, and Derrick Smith to championship honors in 2012. That same year Stonehaven Steadings was honored as Kentucky Thoroughbred Owners and Breeders Association outstanding breeder. That accomplishment, along with the success of 2014 Champagne Stakes (G1) winner and sire Daredevil, who was raised on the farm, helped raise Stonehaven Steadings' profile.

Stonehaven Steadings has built on that foundation and now boasts 19% stakes winners or stakes-placed runners from horses

bred and sold.

"I feel that having Shanghai Bobby and Daredevil come along a couple of years later, coupled with having maintained a high percentage of stakes winners and stakes horses—not just consigned by us but horses that we actually

bred ourselves—solidified confidence in us. That and we bought a nice farm with good land and had the program in place to be successful,” said Leah. “And I think that that’s helped buyers take notice of us and to come back. We’re not just a fly-by-night farm trying to do something. We’re actually making a little headway out there. And I think it’s brought a little respect. Respect is what put us on the map so to speak.”

In planning matings for the farm’s 23 mares, the Stonehaven Steadings team focuses on quality and proven sires with a mix of young stallions deemed to have the best chances of success in the breeding shed.

“So the key we feel is to have proven sires, especially for younger mares, giving them their best opportunity straight out of the gate,” Leah said. “So whether it be Medaglia d’Oro or Hard Spun or Street Sense, across the board we try to breed to those proven sires. Every year there have been more and more exciting new prospects, so we try to choose a couple of those for some of our mares who have already proven themselves. Once we’ve decided on the stallions, we put that list next to the mares’ list and try to think about conformation and pedigrees from those choices.”

“You have to have horses of that caliber to give you a shot out there,” Aidan said.

He added that unproven sires on which the farm has taken a chance include Triple Crown winners American Pharoah and Justify.

“You have to have something proven or something that people really think a lot of. You have a very limited window of opportunity to get to that caliber or runners off the racetrack. Triple Crown winners are not coming around every year, so you’ve got to make the most of the opportunity. We’re aware that they’re not guaranteed long-term success by just winning the Triple Crown, but it certainly puts you in another sphere than the regular stallion.”



The O’Mearas attribute their success to the work ethic of Marks and their employees

In addition to breeding and selling, Stonehaven Steadings recently has expanded to bring in others to invest in broodmare and racing partnerships, and has dabbled in the 2-year-old sales market through other consignors. It also offers consultation and mating services, but because of the limited size of the farm, it only has a couple of horses for other clients.

“We’re trying to spread it out a little bit, having a little bit of return at different times of the year,” Leah said. “We try to do a few other things so that we don’t have to rely on a good September to keep us afloat. We’re currently putting together a broodmare partnership for a higher end, to breed them and sell their babies, that kind of thing.”

“You don’t want to have all your eggs in one basket especially when you get a scenario like this year where you’ve got the whole COVID-19 deal, and everything’s up in the air and you kind of wonder what’s going to happen when your main income for the year is focused around one thing,” Aidan said. “So it’s good to spread it around.”

While the primary focus is on success as breeders and consignors, the O’Mearas advance a principled approach to their operation that emphasizes core values when it comes to horses and people.

If asked to define the mission of Stonehaven Steadings, the O’Mearas would likely cite the following passage on the farm’s website:

“We are a family-owned farm driven by a love of the horse and a passion for success. Horse racing is about winning ... winning horses, winning races, winning relationships, and winning outcomes. We are constantly in pursuit of the best practices, implemented by the best people, so as to maximize our likelihood of reaching a desired outcome.”

About 45 acres of the farm has been set aside for retirees, and Leah recently was nominated to serve on the board of the Thoroughbred Charities of America.

“We’re big believers here in the Thoroughbred aftercare side of things,” Aidan said. “We don’t tend to cull any mares for the most part. We have 30 acres dedicated to our retirees, and



Brushing and grooming are part of the sale-prep process

we’re currently in the process of developing another 15. For a lot of the horses we race, we try to find them good homes or bring them back to the farm. Luzianna Man, who was a nice little stakes winner for us a few years back is here, and Leah rides him every night. We’ve had some go to the Secretariat Center.”

The O’Mearas attribute some of Stonehaven Steadings’ success not only to the land but also to the work ethic of Marks and the other employees.

“We have six employees, and as people in the business know it’s a very tight labor market out there, and we’re very fortunate to have the guys we have here,” Aidan said. “We try and foster a

kind of family-style relationship. It is not an employer-employee deal. We try to foster a good work environment, and I’m out there every day beside them, doing whatever needs to be done. Guys feed off that kind of management style as well.”

“For the small team that they are, they get a lot done,” Leah said.

The O’Mearas are the parents of three young children—Aidan Jr., Charlotte, and Julia—with the two girls old enough at ages 3 and 5, respectively, to begin spending time on the farm with their father.

“Horses save lives. That’s what brought me around and gave me focus and drive. We like to foster the love of the horse that we have,” Leah said.

She added that the work ethic from farm life will help form a foundation for the youngsters later in life even if they don’t follow their parents into the business.

“They don’t necessarily have to take up the horse business in the long term, but they’re starting to get a great foundation and work ethic,” Aidan said. **BH**



The O’Mearas have a strong group of yearlings for 2020; at right, Street Sense—Rigorously colt that is cataloged in Keeneland’s Book 2

