

The Kentucky division of Adena Springs has provided fertile ground for Breeders' Cup winners.



ADENA SPRINGS

# SETTING

## THE STANDARD

Adena Springs outpaces all others as the leading breeder of Breeders' Cup winners

By Michele MacDonald

**CLASSIC.** That single word — spanning meanings from “the highest quality, class, or rank” to “something noteworthy and worth remembering” to, in racing parlance, elite events covering a distance of ground — perfectly epitomizes the goals and achievements of Frank Stronach’s vast Adena Springs breeding operation.

While the Austrian-born billionaire entrepreneur has spent more than half of his 82 years engaged in Thoroughbred racing, Adena Springs has existed for only 26 of them. Thus, the farm’s standing as the leading active breeder of both Breeders’ Cup World Championships winners and earners is perhaps its most impressive credential, as Stronach amassed the mares and planned the matings to produce those top runners in a relatively short period.

In acknowledgment of its accomplishments, Adena Springs has earned eight Eclipse Awards as America’s outstanding breeder, collecting an unprecedented five consecutive trophies in that category from 2004 to 2008.

Thus, it’s no wonder that even before the flowers of spring were fully in bloom this year, the team at Adena Springs’ Kentucky base near Paris already was thinking about social events the farm will host when the Breeders’ Cup comes to Keeneland Race Course for the first time in October.

“We’ve got quite a few Breeders’ Cup trophies and Eclipse Awards out here for people to view,” said general manager Eoin Ryan, a native of Ireland’s County Tipperary. Ryan took the demanding job supervising the farm’s 2,400 acres last fall after a career that included 11 years with global powerhouse Coolmore

## setting the standard

and a stint as manager of John Gunther's Glennwood.

Adena Springs' cavalry of horses is the biggest draw for Breeders' Cup fans and sporting professionals alike, with the stallion roster including four winners of America's richest race, the \$5 million Breeders' Cup Classic: Awesome Again, Ghostzapper, Mucho Macho Man, and Alphabet Soup. Breeders' Cup Juvenile winner Macho Uno and Breeders' Cup Turf runner-up Point of Entry, along with Belmont Stakes winner Touch Gold, also are prominent at the farm, while Adena stands another Breeders' Cup Classic winner, Fort Larned, at its farm in Florida and has Kentucky Derby winner Giacomo in Maryland.

Not only did Stronach breed and race the only father/son Breeders' Cup Classic winners in Awesome Again and Ghostzapper — along with three other Breeders' Cup winners — but planned the mating that produced 2013 Classic winner Mucho Macho Man. Adena sold him in utero with his dam Ponche de Leona, at the 2007 Keeneland November breeding stock sale.

The emphasis on classic performance is no accident. From the beginning of Stronach's investment in racing — which evolved following the acquisition of his first racehorse in 1962 while he had been seeking a riding horse as a leisure pastime — he has insisted on classic families and ability.

"It is the nature of our program. The tagline goes, 'classic bloodlines, classic success,'" said Jack Brothers, who has worked with Stronach since the early 1990s. "I think he always aspires to win at classic distances, and a mile and a quarter has always been the standard for the [Kentucky] Derby and the Breeders' Cup Classic, and I think he was always inclined to breed for that classic distance."

While Stronach keeps busy with The Stronach Group of racetracks he acquired more than a decade ago, including Santa Anita and Gulfstream Park, as well as with his recent dip into Austrian politics and other business interests, he is very much the leader of the Adena Springs horse empire.

In addition to the massive Kentucky and Florida farms, with the latter called Adena Springs South and encompassing about 3,800 acres, Ade-



PHOTOS BY Z



SNIP DICKSTEIN PHOTOS

Adena Springs bred and raced Breeders' Cup Classic winners Ghostzapper (top left) and Awesome Again (left), and stands the 2012 winner Fort Larned (top right) and the 1996 winner Alphabet Soup (above).

na also has a 500-acre farm north of Toronto that was home to Stronach's initial breeding ventures in the 1960s and was originally named Beechwood Farm. Nine stallions, featuring Breeders' Cup Juvenile winner Wilko, stand at what is now called Adena Springs North while four are based at the Florida farm.

Stronach has about 200 broodmares scattered across North America, with a core group of about 60 producers typically providing runners for his racing stables.

"He's unbelievable," Ryan said of Stronach's enthusiasm for overseeing the farms and horses. "I wish I had his energy — now, not to mention when I'm 82."

Stronach continues to make virtually all of the major decisions for Adena Springs, including which mares to buy at auctions and other sale-related moves.

"We'll have looked at some mares prior to his arrival (at a sale) — he'll have given us a list of hip numbers that he likes — and he'll come along after we've scratched off some we don't like physically or for some reason. He takes a look [at the rest] and it's either yes or no; he knows what he likes. He clearly loves the whole excitement of it all," Ryan said.

"Frank is a believer in outcross. He doesn't like to inbreed horses too closely, and he's been very successful in that respect," he added.

At Adena Springs the breeding stock is constantly evaluated and adjusted. The farm acquires dozens of mares to breed to its stallions and then resells many of those individuals annually, while also adding a few to its core group.

In recent years Stronach has reduced his overall number of broodmares sig-

## setting the standard

nificantly from levels less than a decade ago; *The Blood-Horse* reported in 2008 that Adena Springs held a core broodmare band of 300 and annually bought 300 to 400 mares to support its stallions.

However, the farm has stayed active on both sides of the ledger during Keeneland sales. At the past two November breeding stock sales Adena Springs sold 343 horses, mostly mares, for a total of \$16,301,500, with buyers including other prominent breeders such as Spendthrift Farm, Calumet Farm, WinStar Farm, and Ramsey Farm.

At the past two January mixed sales Adena Springs has bought 37 individuals for a total of \$3,034,500.

During this same period Adena Springs celebrated the sixth winner of a Breeders' Cup race bred by the farm when Judy the Beauty won the 2014 DraftKings Filly & Mare Sprint for owner/trainer Wesley Ward. She joined earlier Adena Springs-bred Breeders' Cup winners that include Emirates Airline 2000 Filly & Mare Turf winner Perfect Sting, a member of the Adena broodmare band; and 2007 Distaff winner Ginger Punch, whom Adena sold for \$1.6 million to leading Japanese breeder Katsumi Yoshida.

Only the late Allen Paulson bred as many as six Breeders' Cup winners. While the Phipps family has bred seven Breeders' Cup



Adena Springs bred and raced Distaff winner Ginger Punch (left) and Filly & Mare Turf winner Perfect Sting (right) and bred Filly & Mare Sprint winner Judy the Beauty (center).

winners, they were produced under three different names, with Phipps Stable breeding two winners, Ogden Mills Phipps another two, and the late Ogden Phipps credited with breeding three victors.

Adena Springs has no rival among breeders by Breeders' Cup earnings, with the farm's 32 starters having banked a total of \$9,752,400, almost \$2 million more than the amount earned by second-ranked Juddmonte Farms.

Stronach's stringent standards and his adherence to natural horsemanship are primary reasons cited by Ryan and Brothers for his success.

"He always inspires people around him because his standards are very high. I think it's just a reflection of his personality that he's always looking to perfect the wheel — not reinvent it, just perfect what's there," said Brothers. "Here's a guy who has met with world leaders, and he has business interests all over the globe, but he doesn't miss any of the minute details in the day-to-day operation in the scope of Adena Springs. He's very involved."

"Frank believes, quite simply, that half measures and mediocrity do not lead to success. So we do our best each and every day," Ryan said.

"Part of our philosophy is trying to raise horses as naturally as possible, and I think there is a lot to be said for that — it definitely raises a sounder, better, more durable racehorse," he continued. "And it definitely stamps you further down the road; we're not all about just trying to make a lick in the sales ring. We're about trying to raise the best racehorses that we can, whether we sell or race them ourselves."

Ryan said that philosophy involves keeping horses out in fields and fresh air as much as possible.

The Kentucky farm — opened in 2007 following the sale of Adena Springs' original 640 acres near Versailles, which had been acquired in 1989, to Stonestreet Farm — has eight large barns, including the stallion complex. Ten expansive run-in sheds, which include pens with stalls, are used for maiden and barren mares, which are kept under lights in these shelters for the appropriate daily time in advance of breeding season prior to being turned out

in large fields, Ryan said.

The Adena Springs broodmare band currently includes many high-profile females such as grade I winners Ariege; Collect the Cash; Honey Ryder; Intangaroo; and Romance Is Diane; Canadian champion Ginger Brew; Courting Elaine, a half sister to two-time Horse of the Year Wise Dan and to grade I winner and millionaire Successful Dan; Camargue, a half sister to the dam of champion Royal Delta; and multiple graded stakes winners Buffythecenterfold, Sugar Swirl, and Miss Isella.

Stronach initially created Adena Springs as a mostly private breeding enclave to produce his own runners but has shifted to a more commercial operation, Ryan said.



The Adena Springs stallion complex

Thus, while Stronach continues to keep more than 100 horses in training, many foals bred by Adena Springs eventually are sold.

Of the current horses in training, Ryan pointed to several that, even if they don't make Breeders' Cup headlines, could be noteworthy, including grade II-placed Win-

ning Rhythm, a 5-year-old mare by Giant's Causeway; Shaman Ghost, a 3-year-old Ghostzapper colt who won a Keeneland allowance race in April; Unbridled Juan, a 3-year-old Unbridled's Song colt out of Sugar Swirl who impressively captured a Gulfstream Park maiden race in March; and multiple stakes-winning 3-year-old filly Devine Aida, also by Unbridled's Song.

As a breeder, an owner, and a racetrack operator, as well as an overall industry leader, Stronach uses his resources to support various sectors of the business simultaneously. Ryan said Stronach sent Fort Larned to Florida in order to support racing and breeding in the state.

"We're trying to be a little bit more



Frank Stronach accepts an Eclipse Award as leading breeder.

WE

---

*Move*

---

YOUR FUTURE

**Sallee**  
HORSE VANS

Toll Free: (800) 967-8267 • Local: (859) 255-9406 • [www.salleehorsevans.com](http://www.salleehorsevans.com)  
Experienced Horsemen Drivers • Custom Designed Vans for Optimal Safety  
All Breeds and Disciplines

PARIS  
IS ALWAYS  
A  
GOOD  
IDEA.  
— AUDREY HEPBURN.  
SEE PARIS IN A  
DIFFERENT LIGHT.  
PARISKY.COM  
859-987-6237

setting the standard



ANNE M. EBERHARDT

Adena Springs' general manager Eion Ryan (third from right) said Frank Stronach sets a high standard for excellence.

commercial because it is very difficult to run this entire operation by yourself and race everything. So, that's the reason we've kind of downscaled a little bit," Ryan said. "We've become more selective, trying to base things on quality as opposed to just quantity. But the goal is the same — that has never changed. We're still trying to breed the great horses."

With a more commercial slant Adena Springs may wind up selling more good horses in the future, as it did with recent multiple grade I winners Game On Dude, a gelding by Awesome Again who earned \$6,498,893, and Private Zone, a son of Macho Uno; both were offered as yearlings at Keeneland's September sale and raced for others. But the overall aim of Adena Springs still very much includes providing runners for Stronach.

"We definitely want to try to get back in the winner's circle on Saturday afternoons and try to get some homebred stallions into the stallion barn. That's a particular feat of the Stronachs that the family really enjoys — racing those horses and then having them retire here and siring offspring," Ryan said.

Considering everything Stronach has accomplished with Adena Springs and in the larger world of North American racing, it is difficult to imagine where the sport would be had he not decided to look for that riding horse decades ago.

"He's a great man, and I don't know where our industry would be without him. We get compliments to that effect almost weekly from people within the industry who say they can't thank him enough for what he has done for horse racing," said Ryan.

"The thing about Frank is that he has a vision, he has a dream, and he does everything within his power to achieve that. He ponies up, he puts his money where his mouth is, and he says, 'OK, I'm going to make a go of this; I'll show you.' You can't admire someone enough who does that. We all have our own ideas, but Frank goes out and does it. He leads by example." **KM**