



PASSION FOR THE LAND

Decades of commitment yield success in a trio of top-producing mares for Hinkle Farms

By Maryjean Wall / Photos by Jonathan Palmer

From brilliant springtime pink to the subtle hues of later months, the flowering trees leading into Hinkle Farms keep time to the seasonal rhythms of the land. For some 50 years the Hinkle family has raised Thoroughbreds on this Bourbon County property, an example of the family's commitment to the land. The barns, the fencing, and, even, new saplings growing in the farm's tree nursery are testament to years of work and planning.

Flowering trees line the entrance to Hinkle Farms.
photo by Bobby Shiflet/Frames On Main

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No planning could have guaranteed a season like this. The dams of 2016 Kentucky Derby winner Nyquist, Central Bank Ashland Stakes winner Weep No More, and grade I winner Divisidero are in residence with new foals by their sides. The story of the Hinkle family coming to own mares of this quality is a tale as long as the half-century that Thoroughbreds and cattle have occupied these present 1,000-plus acres.

The story did not follow a straight trail. Outside business interests periodically diverted the family's focus away from raising horses, so that about 12 years ago, the operation hit a wall. The Hinkles found themselves down to six or seven mares from at least several dozen. "If you've only got six or seven mares, it's hard to breed very many stakes horses. It's a game of numbers," remarked managing partner Tom Hinkle. The family needed to decide if it was content operating at

this level — or if the Hinkles should perhaps leave the horse business.

This was not what the farm's late patriarch, Buckner Hinkle, had envisioned when he acquired his first two broodmares at the 1967 Keeneland sales. He had high goals, for he wanted a viable Thoroughbred operation for his farm and he believed these mares would start him on his way. He deposited the two mares in a former mule barn he had "fixed up" for horses. Unfortunately, the two mares produced nothing of value.

Odd, how mules that had lived in this barn had contributed more to the farm than Hinkle's first two mares. Mules long had been important to this land. Hinkle's father-in-law, Catesby Spears, used mules to pull the machinery that thrashed the Bluegrass seed he raised on the original 600 acres of this farm. Bluegrass seed was at one time big business in Paris. Four bluegrass seed cleaning plants dried and exported the product from Bourbon County, and this family played a major role in the industry.

Spears was a partner in one of these four seed manufacturing enterprises, the Spears-Kiser Co. Hinkle Farms now keeps offices in the warehouse building where Spears-Kiser bagged its product for shipment and sale, after spreading seeds for drying on the concrete floors.

Deep Kentucky roots

The Spears family, as well as Hinkle's ancestral Buckner family, has



Hinkle Farms has refashioned itself as a boutique operation, focusing on quality over quantity. Top, a colt by Curlin is a half brother to Ashland Stakes winner Weep No More.

farmed Bourbon County since Kentucky's earliest years. Jacob Spears "got run out of Pennsylvania," according to Tom, during the Whiskey Rebellion, a farmers' insurrection brought on by a federal tax on spirits enacted in 1791. Spears, on the lam, took his pot stills to the region that became Kentucky in 1792. He made whiskey, farmed, and bred horses.

Once every year — most likely in autumn following the corn harvest and subsequent distilling — he took his whiskey on flatboats down the Licking River to the Ohio River and then to the Mississippi River. He sold the product in New Orleans, where he also ditched the raft he had arrived on. He would buy a horse or two with his profits, enabling him to ride back to Kentucky.

The Buckner side of Hinkle's family arrived in Kentucky after the American Revolution. Over the years a lot of land was passed around and divided among Spears and Buckner descendants.

Buckner Hinkle and his new bride, Sally Spears Hinkle, took up residence on Spears land after they married in 1947. This was the core of what is now Hinkle Farms — and was at one time known as Hidaway Farm. Sally's father had purchased the property in 1926, and it was here he had been growing Bluegrass seed and running cattle. The couple's first job was to restore the main residence that dated to 1812 when the young United States was at war with England.

The original builder was Kinzea Stone, grandfather of the Kinzea Stone who won the 1891 Kentucky Derby with Kingman. The house had been used as a tenant house when the Hinkles took over.

"Until we came here in 1947, there were no improvements, no plumbing or central heating, only a few electric light cords coming down from the ceilings," Sally Hinkle once told the *Lexington Herald-Leader*. One feature of the house is the shutters dating from an era when they might be needed for protection from marauders.

The house was called "Hidaway" because it was hidden from North Middletown Road at the farm's main entrance. Until about a dozen years ago, when the



From left, Buck, Anne Archer, Henry, and Tom are caretaking Hinkle Farms for future generations.

name of the operation changed to Hinkle Farms, the farm continued to be called Hidaway. The name had changed, but the commitment to the land had not.

The problem with the original name was that few could say or spell Hidaway. People would call the farm by every name but the right one. "They always called it Hideaway," Tom said. "And there are other farms called Hiddenaway, Hid-a-way, and you go to horse sales and nobody knows who Hidaway Farm is. We thought the brand would be better if we just used our name."

A different road to success

The Hinkles' story in horses cannot be told without the story of the family's business interests, for the income provided by outside interests enabled the acquisition of more land and horses. The senior Hinkle founded Hinkle Contracting Corp. during World War II, when he foresaw the United States and other nations soon requiring construction of more roads and airport runways. The postwar years played out as he had predicted. Construction of the Interstate highway system began. Hinkle was prepared with his highway construction and aggregates business, with



Buckner Hinkle inspired his sons to respect the land that has roots in Kentucky's early history.

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the company paving roads and building airport runways in Kentucky as well as in Central America. The company also operated rock quarries. Two Hinkle sons, Tom and Henry, held executive positions. Six years ago the Hinkles sold the business to a company based in Denver, Colo.

Despite the slow beginning the senior Hinkle persevered with his horse interests. He had advice and help from friends in Bourbon County, most notably the late Arthur B. “Bull” Hancock Jr. Seth Hancock, a son of Bull Hancock, continued to encourage the Hinkles and “has always been very nice about letting us breed to many of the Claiborne stallions, as well as participate in stallion syndications,” noted Henry Hinkle, Tom’s brother.

Their father “had a real passion for the farm,” Henry said. “He wanted his sons to be interested in the farm, and I think he also thought our horses might spark a little interest in us.” Long before the senior Hinkle died in 1999, Tom and Henry had immersed themselves in the family’s horse business — as well as operating the construction business.

Henry Hinkle was attending University of North Carolina and was a close friend of Ted McClain, a former horse trainer who owns an insurance company in Paris. McClain was early in his racetrack career, working for trainer Lucien Laurin in New



With a trove of high-end mares, Hinkle Farms can count on high-quality consignments to future sales.



Tom’s daughter, Anne Archer Hinkle, is director of bloodstock services for the farm.

York and Florida, when Henry paid him a visit in 1972 at Hialeah Race Course near Miami. Riva Ridge was in the barn and destined to win that year’s Kentucky Derby. Secretariat, age 2, had just joined the team.

“Henry spent two or three nights with Ted in the tack room, and Ted said, ‘I want you to see something,’” Tom recalled. “They went down the shed row and Ted said, ‘this horse just got here.’ And it was Secretariat. [The following

year, 1973, Secretariat won the Triple Crown.]

“Anyway, Henry got very interested, and maybe because my brother was interested, I got interested in it and liked the horses.”

Henry graduated from North Carolina in 1973 and managed the farm for perhaps two years. Then he transitioned into Hinkle Contracting, becoming president in 1982. Tom graduated from Centre College in 1979 and managed the farm until the late 1980s when he, too, joined Hinkle Contracting, eventually becoming an executive vice president.

Their other brother, Buckner (Buck), built a law career in Lexington, practicing with Stites and Harbison. Tom, however, was most involved with the farm, as hands-on manager for the longest period.

“Tom really wore two hats,” said Henry. “He carried the load. He looked after the farm and also a significant portion of the company, as well.”

The most recent family member to take on a role at Hinkle Farms is Tom’s daughter, Anne Archer Hinkle. She joined the farm in 2014 and is director of bloodstock services. Like all the other children of the Hinkle family, Anne Archer shares in the farm ownership.

Finding a niche

Hinkle Farms, then known as Hidaway Farm, was a growing entity in the early 1980s. The family bred its own horses and built up what Tom called “a respectable boarding business” for mares and foals. The operation also consigned to sales. “I think the biggest yearling consignment we had was 41,” said Tom. In 1985 the Hinkles reached their apex, selling a Danzig colt the family bred for \$1 million at the Keeneland July sale.

Then, in 1986, federal income tax laws changed the way horse owners could deduct expenses. Consequently, many got out of

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From left, Hinkle Farms' star mares are Crosswinds, with a Curlin colt; Seeking Gabrielle, with a Flatter colt that is a half brother to Derby winner Nyquist; and Madame Du Lac, with an Orb filly.

horse racing and breeding, altering a landscape that had been on an upward track for more than a dozen years. Auction prices declined. All over Central Kentucky, horse farms went up for sale. Like all other breeders, the Hinkles shouldered some very discouraging years following 1986.

Tom, mainstay of the farm, was transitioning more into the family's construction business by the late 1980s and this also affected the horse operation.

"I wasn't able to give attention to trying to build the boarding and sales side of the business," Tom said. As a result, "I sort of got left in the dust by the Taylor Mades and the Eatons."

The Hinkles might not have competed in numbers, but they did have their successes. From Forty Niner's first crop they bred Tactical Advantage, a graded stakes winner. Additional graded stakes winners they bred have included Ageless and Buy the Barrel. Their most recent successes are Divisidero and Weep No More. The farm's website points out, "Over 10 percent of our graduates are stakes winners."

The Hinkle Farms that re-emerged in the past decade is a completely different operation, described today as a "boutique." The Hinkles continue to send yearlings and mares to the sales. But they are basically out of the boarding business, keeping mares for only one longtime client, Bonner Young. Their focus has changed to fami-

ly-owned horses, like Seeking Gabrielle, dam of Nyquist. Hinkle Farms purchased the mare for \$100,000 at Keeneland's November breeding stock sale in 2013.

However, Hinkle Farms did not breed Nyquist, winner of the 2015 Breeders' Cup Juvenile Stakes at Keeneland. "We bought the mare when Nyquist was a weanling," Tom said. The colt went through the auction immediately preceding his dam. The Hinkles already had the dam, Seeking Gabrielle, on their list to buy. Seeing the weanling, Nyquist, made the family more determined to acquire the mare. "We never owned Nyquist. He was never on this farm," Tom said. "We're the beneficiaries of buying his mother."

On the first weekend in April, Seeking Gabrielle and Madame Du Lac, the dam of Divisidero, stood in stalls opposite the aisle from each other in the foaling barn at Hinkle Farms. Both had foaled March 25: Seeking Gabrielle with a colt by Flatter and Madame Du Lac with a filly by Orb. Crosswinds, the dam of Weep No More, had foaled a Curlin colt on March 22.

The once-rosy cast to the landscape of the breeding business seemed solidly in place again at Hinkle Farms. Nyquist won the Florida Derby that weekend, earning a \$1 million bonus. The following week at Keeneland, Crosswind's daughter, Weep No More, won the Central Bank Ashland. It goes without saying that the offspring of

these two mares will be invaluable consignments at upcoming sales.

"For all the good things you do, this just makes up for all the mistakes you make," Tom said, far too humbly. Turning more serious, he added, "I don't think we have any secrets, but I guess if you stick around long enough, you do finally make some good decisions and have some good fortune. I do think we have learned some things over the years about stallion selection and what works and what doesn't work."

Whatever the changes that have come to Hinkle Farms, the constant has been the land. The farm's tree nursery, where oaks raised from acorns are now saplings, is testament to this family's unchanging and enduring respect for this land. "I won't benefit from these saplings, but maybe Anne Archer's children will," said Tom. The idea, as always, is the permanence of the land through the many generations of this family that have lived on it.

This was the idea Catesby Spears and Buckner Hinkle had for their families. "We want the land to continue to be owned by our family," Tom said. The little saplings in the nursery and the showy trees that line the entrance drive are visible signs of the family's longstanding commitment to this property. Success with horses has been the payoff in the family's long history in Bourbon County. **KM**