



Jane Lyon's top-notch broodmare band includes her first homebred grade 1 winner, Chasing Yesterday, half sister to American Pharoah.





# living her dream

With grace and wit,  
Jane Lyon has fashioned  
Summer Wind Farm  
into the embodiment  
of her girlhood aspirations

Story and photos by Michele MacDonald





She's helped deliver a foal while wearing a cocktail dress, raised wolf hybrid pups as pets, written books and poetry, and experienced breathtaking encounters with lions in the remote wilds of Africa.

At home she can whip up a sumptuous dinner for 10 without ever looking at a recipe, serving everything from lobster and roasts to homemade chicken pot pies and peach cobblers while lighting up her kitchen with the warmth of her laughter.

She loves to kiss her racehorses before they compete, leaving vivid lipstick marks on their muzzles, and she enjoys retelling the joke that her mares and



Lyon makes sure her horses always have plenty of carrots and TLC.

foals are afflicted with "carrot toxicity."

A petite blonde who speaks with the soft accent of her Arkansas roots, Jane Lyon is not the average Kentucky breeder by any measure.

The plotline of her storybook life features the



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self-described daredevil of a young girl, who could outrun the boys at school and scoop the biggest crayfish out of nearby creeks, dedicating herself to making her dreams of raising horses in the Bluegrass come true.

Beginning with the land of Summer Wind Farm in Georgetown, which she and her late husband, business executive Frank Lyon Jr., acquired in 1995, Lyon has succeeded beyond her most unlikely aspirations.

Rising from a start that remarkably included no hands-on knowledge of Thoroughbreds, she has created an eminently distinguished broodmare band that has produced grade 1 winners and a \$2.8 million Keeneland September sale-topper sold to Godolphin.

Today she can drive a golf cart from the state-ly white-columned entrance of her Summer Wind home across 1,000 acres and give carrots to the likes of Littleprincessemma, dam of Triple Crown winner American Pharoah; Holiday Music, half sister to Triple Crown winner Justify; and Eblouissante, half sister to Zenyatta.

Her breeding program has become so accomplished, with graduates such as 2018 champion juvenile male Game Winner, multiple grade 1 winner McKinzie and her own grade 1 winner Chasing Yesterday, that Bob Baffert, who trained all three, praised that Lyon “is keeping my stable going.”

## Determined to succeed

Yet while Lyon’s ascending prowess as a breeder has brought her to this heady peak, the journey has been far from easy.

“What I went through to get there was a lifelong battle — a battle both emotionally and philosophically, in a way, with my husband. He granted me my wish for a farm in the Bluegrass, but he didn’t understand it. He was such a good businessman that breeding these horses didn’t make sense, and, frankly, it doesn’t, a lot of times,” Lyon reflected while cuddling her



Lyon and farm manager Bobby Spalding are regulars at the top sales.



Littleprincessemma, the dam of 2015 Triple Crown winner American Pharoah, is the queen of Summer Wind’s mares. In 2019, she produced the Tapit filly Lasting Tribute.





A veterinarian once joked that Lyon's horses suffer from "carrot toxicity."

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—Jane Lyon

beloved Jack Russell terrier, Mikey.

"I didn't just want to raise horses and sell them — I wanted them raised the very best way I could possibly raise them, and that was a big learning curve. I made a lot of mistakes — and I still make them," she said, noting how her husband could become disenchanted with the expense and inevitable setbacks. "It was frustrating and hard."

For every success story, there

could be dozens of disappointments. As an example, Lyon points to McKinzie's dam, Runway Model.

Winner of the 2004 Darley Alcibiades Stakes and a \$2.7 million purchase at the 2006 Keeneland November sale, Runway Model did not produce any notable runners until McKinzie, a son of Street Sense, was foaled in 2015.

"We bought that mare carrying her first foal, and we just thought the sky's the limit," Lyon recalled. "The first foal was premature and small, and nothing really significant ran for all those years. She was a beautiful mare, she had a good pedigree, she had a wonderful race record. We tried to breed her to the best we could and just nothing happened.

"A lot of people were saying, 'You need to just get rid of her, cull her from your broodmare band.' But I can't do that with my mares," she declared.

Her reward has been the elite achievements of McKinzie, who for owners Mike Pegram, Karl Watson and Paul Weitman was a

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JOE DIORIO



Lyon, pictured at the Keeneland sales, continues to acquire broodmares with impeccable pedigrees. Those mares typically enjoy a home for life at Summer Wind, which its devoted owner maintains as an elegantly tranquil haven for horses and other animals. Lyon pays tribute to special horses in paintings and, in the case of champion Fleet Indian, left, in bronze.

finalist for the Eclipse Award as champion 3-year-old male in 2018 and is a championship contender again in 2019 with career earnings exceeding \$2.29 million. Summer Wind sold McKinzie for \$170,000 at the 2016 Keeneland September sale.

As in other areas of her life, Lyon has been ahead of the pack when it comes to stalwart care for her horses, which is just a natural extension of her abiding love of animals in general.

She does not sell her mares as they age, preferring to pension them, and she has sought out horses she has bred to retire them to her farm after their racing careers.

"I try not to count," she said, laughing, when asked how many horses reside at Summer Wind. "My guess is well over 100 now, counting all of the mares and foals and the geldings I have bought over the years that I found in cheap claimers. I felt a responsibility to them."

That kind of commitment is what led her, wearing a chic dress, to help deliver a foal some years ago, a moment that defines Lyon, whose wardrobe is one of elegant style yet whose priority clearly rests with the well-being of her animals.

"It was the Sunday after the Kentucky Derby, and I was getting ready to go to a cocktail party. I was in a cream-colored silk dress, and when I was about to walk out the door, I got a call that Navarra was



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just about to foal,” Lyon recalled, referring to the full sister of Broodmare of the Year Toussaud.

“I went up to the barn, but it took a lot longer than expected, so I just told everybody else to go on to the party. When the filly was born, she had a very odd cut on her hip. So (former Hagyard Equine Medical Institute internist) Fairfield Bain came out to check on the mare and foal.

“When he got there, I was sitting in the stall, still in my cream dress, which by then was only somewhat cream. He started laughing and said, ‘I always wondered what you wore when you foaled mares.’”

It was also Bain who told Lyon during another visit that he knew there was something wrong with her horses.

“I said, ‘What? What’s wrong?’” Lyon said, repeating a tone of anxious concern in her voice as she related the story. “He said, ‘carrot toxicity.’

“I think I have cornered the market on that ‘disease’ here,” she added, laughing. Refrigerators in her home and the Summer Wind barns typically are bulging with carrots for her horses.

## All creatures

But horses aren’t the only beneficiaries of Lyon’s gentle attention. Nine dogs, including a family triad of German shepherds, live with her at her homes in Kentucky and Arkansas, with even more, a variety of rescues, residing in Summer Wind’s barns.

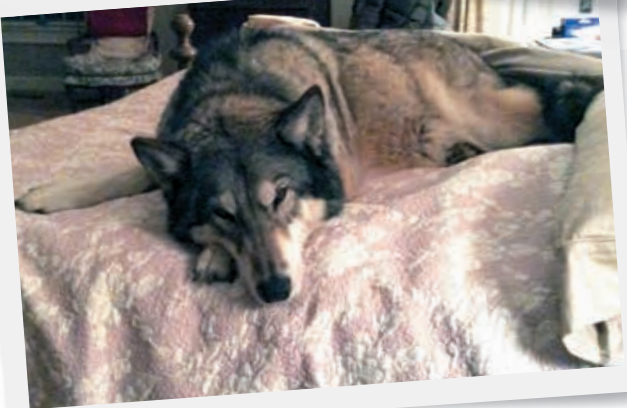
Her fascination with wildlife led her to acquire two wolf hybrids years ago. The

first, a male she named Wolfman Jack, was part Siberian husky and German shepherd.

“He was enough wolf that he was different; he had such a presence about him. He ended up coming here to Kentucky and he went to all my Derby parties. He would hold court on the couch, and peo-



PHOTOS COURTESY OF JANE LYON



Lyon adores her dogs and had a particular fondness for Virginia Woolf, above, a wolf-dog with a mind of her own.

ple could come and pet him. He was a kind, regal animal,” Lyon said.

Inspired by the exotic wolfdog, Lyon decided to get Jack a companion.

“I wanted one that was a little more

wolf — and I got it,” she added with an ironic laugh while recalling the big gray female she named, with a literary salute, Virginia Woolf.

“She was the adventure of a lifetime,” she added. “Like my number of horses, I would not want to calculate the dollar value of the damage that this wolf did in her first four or five years of life. She was terribly destructive, terribly mischievous.

“She ate the interior of a couple of my friends’ cars; she ate the ragtop off a convertible. She pulled an anchor off the back of a pickup truck. She rearranged my furniture. But she was just fascinating.”

Despite her naughtiness and the times she grabbed Lyon in play or warning, including breaking the skin on her hand so deeply that a nasty infection ensued, Virginia became a uniquely special part of her life.

When Lyon’s husband was desperately ill with cancer, Virginia guarded him, protectively stretching her long, lithe body across his bed.

Although Virginia also has passed away, a cherished recording of her soulful howl is the sound still heard today when a call comes into Lyon’s cell phone.

Lyon has spent much of her life raising all sorts of animals. Particularly while her husband served on the Arkansas Game and Fish Commission, she was active in helping rehabilitate orphaned or injured wild animals, a calling her daughter, Karen Bailey, followed as founder of the Kentucky Wildlife Center.

“It made for some interesting experiences in Little Rock. I had a deer in the





Summer Wind's future is embodied in its young stock, including these weanling colts out of Cattoo, left, and Careless Jewel.

backyard, I had a bobcat upstairs. I wasn't your average Junior Leaguer," Lyon recalled.

Her husband's interest in African wildlife led them to several adventures across that continent, and Lyon returned to Botswana last year with friends to experience the majesty of Africa again. Her extensive art collection, ranging from paintings of the smallest birds to depictions of elephants and lions, reflects her soul's attractions.

She also has commissioned portraits of her horses and she has commemorated the stories of two of her horses in words.

Lyon and Bailey wrote two children's books about racehorses they rescued, *Skipingo Home: A Thoroughbred's Second Chance* that focused on the Summer Wind-bred full brother to multiple champion Skip Away, and *Primerica: A Home for the Brave*.



Lyon enjoys a day at the races with family members.

### Investing in the best

When Lyon and her husband launched Summer Wind, she sought the best bloodlines she could obtain with hopes of breeding something approaching the magnificence of Secretariat, whose Triple Crown victory had set her interest in horse racing ablaze years before. Mares acquired included the dams of 1997 and 1998 Hors-

es of the Year Favorite Trick and Skip Away, prior to those horses' most epic triumphs.

"A photographer came out and took a picture, and we had Evil Elaine on one hand and Ingot Way on the other. I remember doing an ad, one of the few we've done, that said 'We're dam proud of you' with Skip Away and Favorite Trick."

Reflecting on those days and the vagaries of breeding and racing, Lyon

laughed. "It was many, many years after that before anyone wanted to take a picture of me or my horses again," she said.

All the while, however, she has continued to upgrade her broodmare band, emphasizing proven producers, and Summer Wind's sale success spiraled upward with a pair of yearling colts selling for more than \$2 million each in 2009.



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In 2014 she fell in love with a chestnut mare whose juvenile son had won a pair of grade 1 races before being sidelined with a minor injury. Lyon paid \$2.1 million for the mare, Littleprincessemma, and the next year, the mare's son, American Pharoah, became the first Triple Crown winner in 37 years.

The historic feat gave Lyon her most fulfilling moments in the sport as she and her family traveled to witness American Pharoah's classic victories at each track. Frank Lyon, who passed away just five months after attending the Belmont Stakes, savored every stride with his wife at his side.

"I think it must have been," Jane Lyon said, when asked if that spring marked an epiphany, a time when her husband, a Harvard Business School graduate who was skeptical about the horse business, came to comprehend what she treasured.

"When Frank passed away, he had not told me what would happen to Summer Wind," she said. "I have to believe that that year was maybe a deciding factor in him allowing me to continue to do this for the rest of my life."

Today Lyon finds continuing happiness in the animals she loves, and she has refocused her breeding program, hiring Bobby Spalding, longtime manager of Godolphin's Stonerside Farm, to oversee Summer Wind. She has funneled her energy into renovating her homes as well as Wingmead, the Arkansas estate acquired by the Lyon fam-

ily in 1976 and later recognized by the National Register of Historic Places.

While she cringes in considering the crushing complications in breeding — citing as a painful example the colic-related death of Game Winner's young dam while the eventual champion was just three months old — she is finding new ways to enjoy her horses through racing.



Lyon plans to race Triple Tap, a half brother to American Pharoah.

She has kept Littleprincessemma's last three foals and achieved her first grade 1 victory as an owner with the mare's Tapit filly Chasing Yesterday, who was named in honor of her husband and who now has joined the Summer Wind broodmare band.

Lyon, who sometimes flies with daughter Ashley and grandchildren Hannah and Henry Jackson to watch her horses run in California or New York, is keeping more fillies for racing than in the past. Included in this group is McKinzie's half sister Map Maker, by Liam's Map, who is the now pensioned Runway Model's last foal, and Lyon is further branching out by racing colts

with stallion potential.

Triple Tap, the full brother to Chasing Yesterday and half brother to American Pharoah who was born in 2018, is among the colts set to race in Summer Wind's tan and green silks emblazoned with the bold rampant lion figure that also adorns the farm's entrance gates.

Meanwhile, Lyon continues to acquire

mares with impeccable pedigrees and produce records, and foaling season is always a time of magic anticipation, as well as some trepidation, at Summer Wind.

"This has been kind of my refuge. Every time there was something bad that occurred, which happens all the time in this business, there were a lot of moments I would think, 'I just don't know if I can keep doing this.'"

"But then there would be another spring and another foal," she mused.

Looking ahead, Lyon intends to make the most of every day with all her animals, "who fill such a gap" and "keep me from being lonely." She has no ambition to become a global leader in the sport, saying "I just want to be proud of what we have done.

"At my age, what I would like to see is a legacy. When people think of Summer Wind, whether it is next year or 20 years or more from now, I hope they will remember how much we cared — and how you can start with a dream and persevere and, lo and behold, to some degree, it can happen." **KM**