

By Claire Novak

**Tom's Tribute has turned into a top contender** on the West Coast, but his path to grade I success led through Keeneland, where the son of Lion Heart first sold for \$60,000 at the 2011 September sale. Bred in Kentucky by sisters Laura and Ouisha McKinney out of the El Prado mare Halloween Fun and consigned by their Stony Point Farm, he was pinhooked to the Ocala Breeders' Sales Company's selected sale of 2-year-olds in training in 2012. There, bloodstock agent Gary Young selected him for owner Marilyn Braly from the Wavertree Stables consignment for a \$310,000 bid.

The striking chestnut was soon bound for the California barn of trainer James Cassidy, for whom he broke his maiden and began to move through his conditions last summer. But he truly blossomed in 2014 when he won the April 6 Thunder Road Stakes at Santa Anita Park, equaling the course record set by two-time Horse of the Year Wise Dan for a mile on turf in 1:31.78. Two races later the 4-year-old runner stepped up for his first grade I victory, the July 20 Eddie Read Stakes at Del Mar, before taking the grade II Del Mar Mile Handicap to make it two in a row.



© BENOIT PHOTO

---

**GREAT NAME, GREAT MAN:** Marilyn Braly named Tom's Tribute after her husband, the late Tom Braly, with whom she campaigned multiple grade I winner Evening Jewel. Evening Jewel took the 2010 Central Bank Ashland Stakes at Keeneland and was second in the Kentucky Oaks. Braly, diagnosed with cancer and given only a few months to live at the beginning of 2010, held on until September — long enough to watch the brilliant filly ace a game Del Mar Oaks victory for her second grade I score. "She kept him alive for a year," Marilyn Braly said.

---

**SPECIAL CONNECTION:** The day Tom's Tribute came in from Florida, "he was higher than a kite coming off the van," Braly said. A few days later, however, the owner stopped by the quiet shedrow to see her runner. "I called him by his name — he was in the back of the stall — and he came right over and put his head on my shoulder," she recalled. "In all the time I've owned horses, the first time I've met them, I've never had a horse do that. We have a connection."

---

**MODEST EXPECTATIONS:** Cassidy heard good things about Tom's Tribute from Young, who called to report finding the runner.

"He worked really good in the preview sale and we'd just sold Evening Jewel and were trying to find another nice horse, so we decided to take a chance," Cassidy said. "He was a very nice-looking horse, very well-proportioned, but, truthfully I didn't have any early expectations other than getting him to break his maiden. We worked our way up through the listed races rather than graded races because he was one who needed the experience."

---

**EDGY SPEEDSTER:** Tom's Tribute has been known to be quite on edge in the post parade and leading up to his races — "he's actually easy to train in the mornings, but in the afternoon he's aggressive and gets himself all worked up," Cassidy said. Hall of Fame jockey Mike Smith and the trainer came up with a strategy, to take the colt back early and close with a late run.

"Getting him out of the early competition has been the key, and aside from one race where he got away with him, it's worked pretty good," Cassidy said. "Mike loves him; he rides him like he owns him, and that's worked out really good — they've done some really good things together."

---

**"THE CARROT LADY":** Braly always brings

carrots to the barn for Tom's Tribute, and the feisty runner has gotten used to receiving the treat upon her arrival. "He thinks she's the carrot lady," Cassidy remarked. "We keep a couple of hay nets up there for him too, to kind of keep him distracted on his days off. He gets all worked up if he doesn't get to go out and train in the mornings."

---

**SMALL STABLE, BIG PASSION:** "My husband and I never owned very many, just two or three at a time," Braly said. "Right now I have two at the track and a baby. My husband wanted me to stay in horses very much. It was always his passion; I enjoyed it, but racing was his thing. Now, I love it — and Jim and Mike have done a fabulous job with this horse."

---

**NEXT UP, THE BIG LEAGUES:** As this issue went to print, the connections were preparing Tom's Tribute for a Nov. 1 Breeders' Cup Mile bid.

"That he has done as well as he has is just amazing to me," Braly said. "Needless to say, I'm thrilled. I don't know if he will win, but I think he will make a very good showing of himself. It will be a very big day for us, and we're already proud of him, regardless." **KM**