

Garvan Kelly & Nancy Yearsley

An unlikely pair reaches the top.

By Richard Chamberlain

GARVAN KELLY AND NANCY YEARSLEY, AT FIRST GLANCE, WOULD seem to have little in common. Le'see, both travel the world. Both, uh, have names ending in Y. And, ummmm, well, both enjoy a good night's sleep.

Oh yeah, there's the horse thing, too: six Quarter Horse stakes winners and the earners of nearly \$1.5 million that together they have bred – and mostly raced themselves – over the past decade. And that doesn't even count the Thoroughbreds.

Boy

A COLLEGIATE MIDDLEWEIGHT BOXING CHAMPION IN HIS NATIVE Ireland, Kelly left the Emerald Isle in 1957, stepping off the ship in New York City with \$93 in his pocket. The following year, he entered San Jose State University on a boxing scholarship, where he was the light heavyweight on the team that won the NCAA championship three consecutive years.

Kelly liked California so much that he decided to stay. A part-time job delivering furniture led to a career in wholesale furniture and design, which culminated in his helping to develop and expand the Duxiana Concept in the United States. Duxiana is a chain of specialty bedding shops selling the Swedish-made Dux Bed, an ergonomically superior mattress designed to increase circulation while at rest. Kelly now has shops in Southern California, Denver and with Toni Yother in Scottsdale, Arizona.

A fan of steeplechase racing in Ireland, Kelly in 1980 became a fan of Quarter Horse racing when a friend took him to the track in Cypress, California, to watch Viking Copy win the Los Alamitos Derby (now G1).

"I saw these powerful horses and this exciting race, and that was it for me," says Kelly, now 68. "I totally fell in love with the sport." That same year, Kelly bought his first Quarter Horse, the allowance mare Hurry On Now by Easy Six.

"I did not have the capital to compete at the horse sales for the real good horses," he says. "So I figured that I would just try to claim good, honest, hard-knocking mares and try to build my own breeding program that way.

"The game plan has always been to have mares that were competitive and successful on the track, and breed them to young, up-and-coming stallions with good conformation and great race records, out-crossing as much as possible," he says. "We would like to sell more Quarter Horses at sales, but it's difficult to get what they are worth, so we sell more from off the racetrack when they've established their worth."

Kelly claimed and raced a few at Los Alamitos and Bay Meadows until the mid-80s, when he moved his family to

New York. He returned to California in 1991 and soon began purchasing yearlings with Yearsley and Lloyd Yother (whose wife partners with Kelly in the Duxiana store in Scottsdale). Six years later, he bought land at Broken Arrow, Oklahoma, and hired longtime friend Curt Perner to build and manage E. I. R. E. Equine Nursery. (Perner is the former jockey and trainer who rode champion Tonto Bars Hank to win the second All American Futurity; Eire – pronounced *aira* – is the constitutional name of the Republic of Ireland.) The farm now has a state-of-the-art, insulated breeding barn, complete with lab.

"E.I.R.E. Equine Nursery is where we bring up a lot of our horses," Kelly says. "I bought the land raw many years ago – there was nothing on it – and that allowed me to lay the farm the way I wanted to. We have all-natural springs running all over the farm, and we are fortunate in that we get great-quality Bermuda grass."

Also a breeder and owner of Thoroughbreds, Kelly and his Irish-born wife Isidore ("Izzy") were married in 1962. The couple has two sons and two daughters, and 11 grandchildren, and homes in Culver City and Palm Desert, California.

Girl

YEARSLEY, 42, GREW UP IN THE HORSE COUNTRY AROUND Unionville, Pennsylvania, where as a youngster she participated in eventing, dressage, show jumping and fox hunting. She left home to obtain a degree in English from the University of Delaware, but decided a career with horses was more attractive, and soon was galloping horses on East Coast tracks from Delaware and Monmouth parks to Saratoga and Belmont. She also was a successful amateur rider in timber and steeplechase events, and judged shows.

That was followed by a brief stint at *The Thoroughbred Times*, but Yearsley soon was back in the irons galloping. She started selling stallion seasons and shares, and in 1982, partnered with a client to form Equitania Insurance Co. That wasn't enough, so she went back to school, earned her MBA from Vanderbilt University in 1991 and then sold her share of Equitania to form Yearsley Bloodstock Services & Insurance. Yearsley Bloodstock Insurance insures many of the leading racing Quarter Horses on the West Coast and Thoroughbreds in Kentucky, and is currently expanding the market to insure all breeds and disciplines in the industry, including insuring the owners' horse farms. From her offices in Marina Del Rey, California, and Lexington, Kentucky, Yearsley also breeds, races and sells Quarter Horses and Thoroughbreds, and acts as a consignment and

sales agent for clients across the globe, purchasing and bringing to the United States Thoroughbreds such as champion Paranoide and Gold Spring, both sprinters from Argentina, and was co-owner and manager of the deceased Flying Continental (TB). Yearsley also is a correspondent for the insurance broker Lloyd's of London.

Partners

YEARSLEY AND KELLY MET IN 1992, WHEN A MUTUAL FRIEND introduced them at the Keeneland September sale. They now own more than 80 horses in partnership.

"We decided to collect horses together," Yearsley says with a laugh. "Collected a *lot*. It's been really great. In Thoroughbreds, we had Lunar Flight, who won the Barrett's Debutante Stakes, and right now at Santa Anita we've got Free Bird Fly, a really nice 3-year-old by Biancone, a champion miler in Europe. Garvan and I and Lloyd Yother also have Forthelifeofme, who was the first winner by Indian Charlie; she's got a yearling filly by El Corredor, she's in foal to Congaree for a baby due in March and we'll breed her back to Harlan's Holiday. And we've got a bunch of others, too.

"See, it really works well for us," she continues. "Garvan and I complement each other. It's great. I've got more experience and knowledge of Thoroughbreds, he's been in Quarter Horses so much longer and he brings all that to the table."

The table is set. The partners were represented as breeders of their first Quarter Horse stakes winner when Valiantly (racing for Salvador Garcia of Texas) scored in the 2002 Pacific Coast QHRA Breeders' Futurity (G1). A daughter of Corona Cartel, Valiantly is out of Sheeza Lil Val, a stakes-placed winner by champion Dashing Val. Sheeza Lil Val the following year foaled the Heza Fast Man gelding Value The Man, which Kelly and Yearsley raced to their single biggest victory, an upset over champion Higher Fire in the 2005 Los Alamitos Million Futurity (G1).

Last year, Kelly and Yearsley campaigned their homebred Spike It And Fly to the winner's circle after the Southern California Derby (G1) and their second consecutive Cypress Sophomore Handicap, both at Los Alamitos as part of a six-stakes swing at four tracks in three states. In 2005, their homebred Holland Ease gelding Dutch Shultz won the El Primero Del Ano Derby (G2) and gave the partners their first Cypress Sophomore 'Cap, finished third in champion Ocean Runaway's Golden State Million Futurity (G1) and contested world champion DM Chicago's All American Derby (G1). Dutch Schultz is out of the winning Chicks Beduino mare Sky Chicks, who they purchased as a yearling and in 1995 watched as she posted the second-fastest time to the inaugural running of the Los Alamitos Million.

In partnership with Yother, they bred Yother's graded

stakes winner A Faster Streaker by Heza Fast Man. Kelly and Yearsley also bred Corona Magnifico, who won Dixie Downs' White Glove Delivery Futurity in 2004, the year their homebred Rare Form filly Rule The Skies won the Miss Blackhawk Stakes at Prairie Meadows for their first stakes win as owners.

The partners send their Quarter Horses to various trainers, including John Bassett and his son Joe ("Bear"), Paul Jones, Mike Joiner, Charley Hunt and Brandon Parum. On January 12, two of those stables faced off at Los Alamitos in a prep for the February 24 Los Alamitos Winter Championship (G1).

"That's something, too," Yearsley said before the prep race, in which Value The Man finished second and Dutch Schultz fifth. "We've got Value The Man with the Bassetts and Dutch Schultz with Paul, and they're in an handicap together. This is the first time we've ever had two of our horses, with different trainers, racing against each other. It's going to be a lot of fun."

Friends & Fun

"GARVAN AND NANCY, THEY'RE GREAT people," says Sarah Gammill of Lazy E Ranch at Guthrie, Oklahoma. "I've known them for years – they're clients of ours, and foal a lot babies here. They've been doing this for a long time. They're really nice folks. Garvan's wife is just a hoot, a real petite little woman, and I just love her. It's great to see them having the success they've had the past couple of years. I'm really happy for them."

Happy is as happy does.

"Where I grew up, every farmer had a hunter/jumper," Kelly says. "They'd take them to horse shows in the summer, send them over fences in the winter. They're real down-to-earth people. That's what I like about Quarter Horse racing.

I love the horses, I love the speed, and I really love the people. They're like the people I grew up with – good, hard-working, down-home folks. I love it. Whether it's a \$5,000 claimer or a futurity winner, I live for it, I'd die for it."

"This proves that any breeder can win this race and that's what's great about Quarter Horse racing," Yearsley said when Value The Man won the Los Al Million. "It's very rewarding. It's taken us 25 years to get here, but here we are."

Value The Man's big score was in December 2005. At Los Alamitos 12 months later, Spike It And Fly won the Southern California Derby, making Decembers especially sweet.

"I breed for commercial purposes with the Thoroughbreds," Yearsley says. "With the Quarter Horses, I breed to race. I'm having a lot of fun right now."

They both get a good night's rest, also. Kelly made sure that Yearsley has a Dux bed.

"Oh, you bet, you've got to have one," she says. "They're great. Wish I could take it with me when I fly around." ■

Jennifer K. Hancock and Orlando Gutierrez contributed to this story.



Garvan Kelly and Nancy Yearsley race Quarter Horses for fun. Spending time in the winner's circle, such as in this photo with jockey Cody Jensen after their homebred Dutch Schultz won the 2005 El Primero del Ano Derby, makes it all the more enjoyable.

SCOTT MARTINEZ