



# High on Horse Ownership

Owner Profile: Julie Berta

By Mary Forney

Julie Berta has been a Thoroughbred owner for eight years, yet she has already experienced some of the most incredible highs possible, as the owner of a Grade 1 stakes winner who has run in major races across the country and as far away as Dubai.

In 2006, Berta obtained an interest in Black Seventeen with partners Brian Koriner, Janet Lyons and Wind River Stable. Black Seventeen subsequently

won the Grade 2 Carry Back Stakes at Calder Racecourse and the Grade 1 Vosburgh Stakes at Belmont Park. Her original entry into horse ownership, however, began several years before. Berta bought her first racehorse in 2001, in partnership with her brother, Joe Fernando. But the story of her fascination with horse racing began even earlier. Like so many fans, her introduction to horse racing came by way of a parent who loved the sport. Berta grew up in Daly City, and her father loved to attend the races at Golden Gate Fields and Bay Meadows racetracks.

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"When I was growing up my dad went to the races just about every weekend," Berta recalled. "There were four kids in my family, and my brother and I were the older two – so we got to go with Dad. We'd run

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around, pick the horses by the color of the silks or how they looked, and just enjoy it. It was time we could spend with Dad and see the horses."

When Berta was only 23, her father passed away, and she stopped going to the races for a time. Eventually it would be her brother Joe who would bring her back.

"When Joe sold a business and had a little time on his hands, he thought it would be fun to start a racing syndicate," said Berta. "I thought I'd try it out, and I fell in love with horseracing again." They chose then-Northern California based trainer, Brian Koriner, who has been Berta's only trainer since then. Today, she has about a half dozen horses in training with Koriner in Southern California.

Berta prefers to spread her risk – and maximize her racing enjoyment – by owning horses in partnerships. Her partners include Koriner, Evan Trommer (Wind River Stable), Jim Atwell, and Janet and Billy Lyons.

"In 2003, I went to a sale with Brian at Barretts, where I bought a filly in partnership with Evan Trommer," Berta recalled. "We got lucky with her right off the bat." The filly, Go Ask Daisy, broke her maiden at Hollywood Park, then went on to win the Mid Peninsula Stakes at Bay Meadows in her next start.

"We retired Go Ask Daisy at four, bred her, and she now has three on the ground and is in foal to Heat Seeker," Berta said.

These days, Berta is focusing on breeding – with the goal of building up her racing stable from breeding stock. "The first baby I bred is now three and in training at Hollywood Park," she said. "Her name is Lady Alex."

Berta is looking forward to having much more time to focus on breeding and racing, having recently retired after 18 years as an operations manager for Pacific Growth Equities, where her husband, Peter, is a partner. The couple has two children in college – both at Fordham University in New York.

"Pacific Growth Equities was recently acquired by another company, and I thought it would be a good opportunity – a time of change," she said. "I didn't want to start over with a new company after all that time, and retirement will afford me more opportunities to see my horses!"

In partnership with ERacing.Com and Wind River Stable, Berta also campaigns the good sprinter, Northern Soldier, winner of the Grade 2 Laz Berrarra Stakes at Hollywood Park. Berta recounted, "Definitely one of the best experiences I ever had was when Northern Soldier won the Laz Barrera. He was not one of the favorites (going off at nearly 10 to 1 odds), and it was just the most exciting thing ever watching him come



*Northern Soldier with Chance Rollins wins the Lazaro Berrara at Hollywood Park 5/20/2006.*

down the stretch!"

Reflecting on horse ownership, Berta said, "It takes a lot of patience, and sometimes there are really pleasant surprises; and sometimes there are disappointments. I've definitely had some big disappointments," she said. "Sometimes you get a horse at a sale and it's training great, but for some reason or another doesn't make it to the races. Or," she continued, "I've had a couple of horses break down, and that's heartbreaking. It was shocking the first time; and of course your concern is also with the jockey. I hate to say that it's a part of ownership, but it is. You definitely learn as you go along."

Racing has also provided plenty of good times and great



*Black Seventeen (outside) with Clinton Potts up, beats Fabulous Strike in the Grade I Vosburgh Stakes at Belmont Park 9/27/2008.*

memories for Berta and her family. For instance, when she had a couple of horses running at Saratoga last summer, the kids took the train up to the races. Then there was the time that Go Ask Daisy won her maiden race at Hollywood Park.

“I had never been to Hollywood Park before,” Berta explained. “Go Ask Daisy went off at 11 or 12 to one; and when she won I didn’t know how to get to the winners circle! They had already taken the photo when I got there, and the jockey had dismounted,” she continued. “And I said ‘I came all the way from San Francisco; would you please get back up there?’ And he did.”



Berta’s love for the horses and racing are evident when she talks about her own experiences, and when she encourages others to give ownership a try. “Do it because you love it. Don’t do it because you think you’re going to make a million dollars.” And when asked for her best advice to a newcomer, Berta said:

“Be careful. I’ve only had Brian Koriner train for me. There’s a big trust issue. You’re putting your horses in the hands of someone who you’re hoping does the best for you.” Berta added, “I have never felt that I needed to question any of the decisions made over the years with the horses, and I think any time you have someone who oversees any sort of operation like that, you want to know that you can trust them – and I do.” She added, “When I call, he always answers, or calls me back.”