

OWNER PROFILE



Determination to “Hang In” Pays Off For JOE MASSENGALE

BY CHRIS LEWIS

Thoroughbred owner Joe Massengale is one of the warmest, most outgoing people you would ever hope to meet at a racetrack. To spend an afternoon with him at Hollywood Park is to witness the genuine high-esteem in which he's held by his many friends and acquaintances. People go out of their way to say hello and shake his hand.

“I'm a very lucky man,” says Joe. “In fact, I'm more than lucky, I am truly blessed for all that I have.”

One thing Joe Massengale has—a fact of which he is most proud—is five grown sons, all of whom are successful in their chosen fields and who have given him six bright, healthy grandchildren. He also has a prosperous landscaping business, built with three of his brothers and now shared with one of his sons, and where, at age 69, he still works two to three days a week.

One of 13 children from a small, rural east Texas town, Massengale's first taste of Thoroughbred racing came on a visit to Southern California while still a high school student. He credits his entry into ownership some 30 years later and his success as an owner to two primary things:

First, he credits his long friendship with Maxine Factor Nazworthy and her husband, trainer Jim Nazworthy. The friendship was struck when Massengale, then an avid horse player, took a job

trimming the couple's backyard trees and confided his dream of becoming an owner. It has endured as a partnership with Maxine that has spanned nearly two decades with a stable known today as Massengale, Massengale Sr. & Sledge.

Second, Joe credits his determination to “hang in.” “I remember when I was a young man in the tree business,” he says. “The only way we knew how to get business was to walk from door to door and knock. One day we knocked on 151 doors. That 151st door was a job, the only one we got all day. I learned then that a man with a weak back, who can't hang in, is in serious trouble no matter what he aspires to do.”

He also has a very promising Cal-bred filly — *Gourmet Girl*. Purchased last year for \$3,500 at the Del Mar sale by Massengale's long-time trainer Pico Perdomo, *Gourmet Girl* has already won nearly \$150,000 for Joe and his partners. Most recently, she rewarded him with a convincing win in the Grade III Bay Meadows Oaks. “She won that race by 15 lengths,” says Joe. “Watching her in the stretch run was just the best feeling I've ever had in my life!”

It was a feeling and a reward Massengale says he had waited a long time for. Not unsuccessful in his 20 years of racing, with good performers including *Joe Mas* and *Promotake*, Joe nevertheless looks all the way back to 1979 to find a win that felt as big. It was by his first Cal-bred filly, *Adam Eyes*. Unraced

at two because of an injury, *Adam Eyes* placed fourth in her first race as a three-year-old. A few weeks later, in her third outing, she broke her maiden at Santa Anita under Willie Shoemaker—by a nose. According to Massengale, he fell down three times getting from his seat to the winners' circle. “Those steps meant nothing to me,” he says, “I thought I could fly!”

When *Gourmet Girl* brought me to the winners' circle this time at Bay Meadows, I didn't fall down, but I confess I cried!”

For those who aspire to become successful Thoroughbred owners, Joe advises, “be prepared to hang in.” He believes the best way to begin as an owner is to find a good trainer. “Someone with a good record, who you can relate to and trust. Then go with that trainer to a sale and buy a good yearling or two-year-old and learn. You can learn an awful lot from bringing a young horse along that you won't learn otherwise,” he says.

Does he encourage others to become owners? “Absolutely,” he says. “Thoroughbred racing is the greatest sport in America. If you're thinking about it, do it. You never will get anything by just thinking about it!”

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