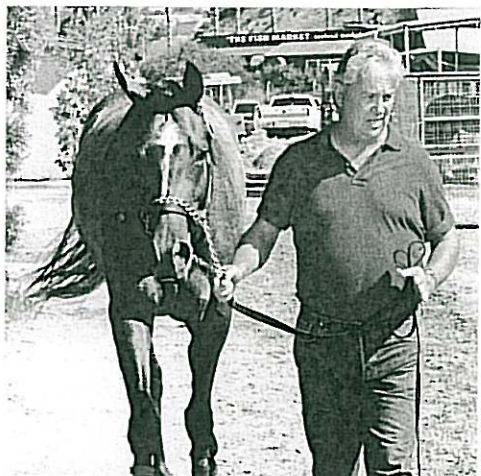


OWNER PROFILE



RON KING

BLUEPRINT FOR SUCCESS

BY CRAIG HARZMANN

Take a stroll by trainer Darrell Vienna's stable around sunrise, and you'll find owner Ron King on the toe ring, cooling out some young steed fresh from a morning gallop. What's so peculiar about that, you ask?

Nothing, really, except for the fact that King recently tossed aside his job as operations manager for the Robinson/May Cerritos outlet to chase his dreams of owning and training racehorses. He's already halfway there. While spending his days learning the skills of the trade working for Vienna, King reserves his nights for watching his own athletes compete, as he currently owns four Thoroughbreds with his 88-year-young mother, Ora May.

And the combination has gotten off to a flying start. Lightning struck twice for the fledgling owners in August, as two of their campaigners triumphed within an eight-day span at Los Alamitos.

Their maiden victory came when It'sonlymoneyhoney scored on August 24. They were right back in the winner's circle the following Sunday when their claim, Rare Point duplicated the feat. Though the horses won only lower-level claiming events, for King, it might as well have been the Breeders' Cup.

"We're having fun," he said. "When we won with It'sonlymoneyhoney, I'll

bet 30 people, complete strangers, came up and congratulated (my mom)." Besides their two winners, Ron and Ora May also have Highland Mist, whom they co-own with two others, and Its Worth It, two juveniles nearing the start of their racing careers.

King has actually been around horses for several years. Riding and investing in hunter/jumper competitors, and scouting the races for new recruits eventually brought him into the owners' ranks. With a vast knowledge of business plus a passion for all things equine, King, 49, has developed a detailed plan of action for pursuing his goals.

"I wanted to get into the racing industry because we were bringing in horses off the track for prospects," he said. "The plan was to buy a thoroughbred and start racing at Los Al, just to see what it's like and get a feel for it. I think claiming a horse for \$5,000 is fun. It's a low risk."

But King was in no hurry. His managerial background told him to proceed tentatively, and he spent countless hours attending seminars, workshops, and tours in order to enhance his knowl-

edge. He strongly recommends that all newcomers to the sport do the same.

"They really shouldn't jump into it," he advised. "They should do six months to a year of research. Go to seminars, breeding facilities, auctions, and read as much as you can. Take advantage of TOC and the Southern California Owner Recruitment (SCOR)'s programs. You've got to get an advisory group. The TOC is a wonderful organization to get involved with. Learning about the business has been one of the best experiences I've had."

"If you go in thinking it's only a training bill and that's it, you are going to be very surprised," he added. "It's an expensive sport. You have got to get a mission statement together and then make a decision on financing the horse. Start out with a budget and find a trainer that will work with you."

King's hands-on approach to ownership is definitely unique, and he has no intention of leaving the backstretch to add to his 26 years of retail experience. He has specific designs on a steady climb up the Thoroughbred ladder.

"I'm doing a lot of observations, looking at how trainers handle their barns. It's fun to come out here early and be with the horses." For Ron King, it's a lifestyle.

Craig Harzmann is a free-lance turf writer. 🐾