

# A Shining Star for Racing

## Bob Nugent

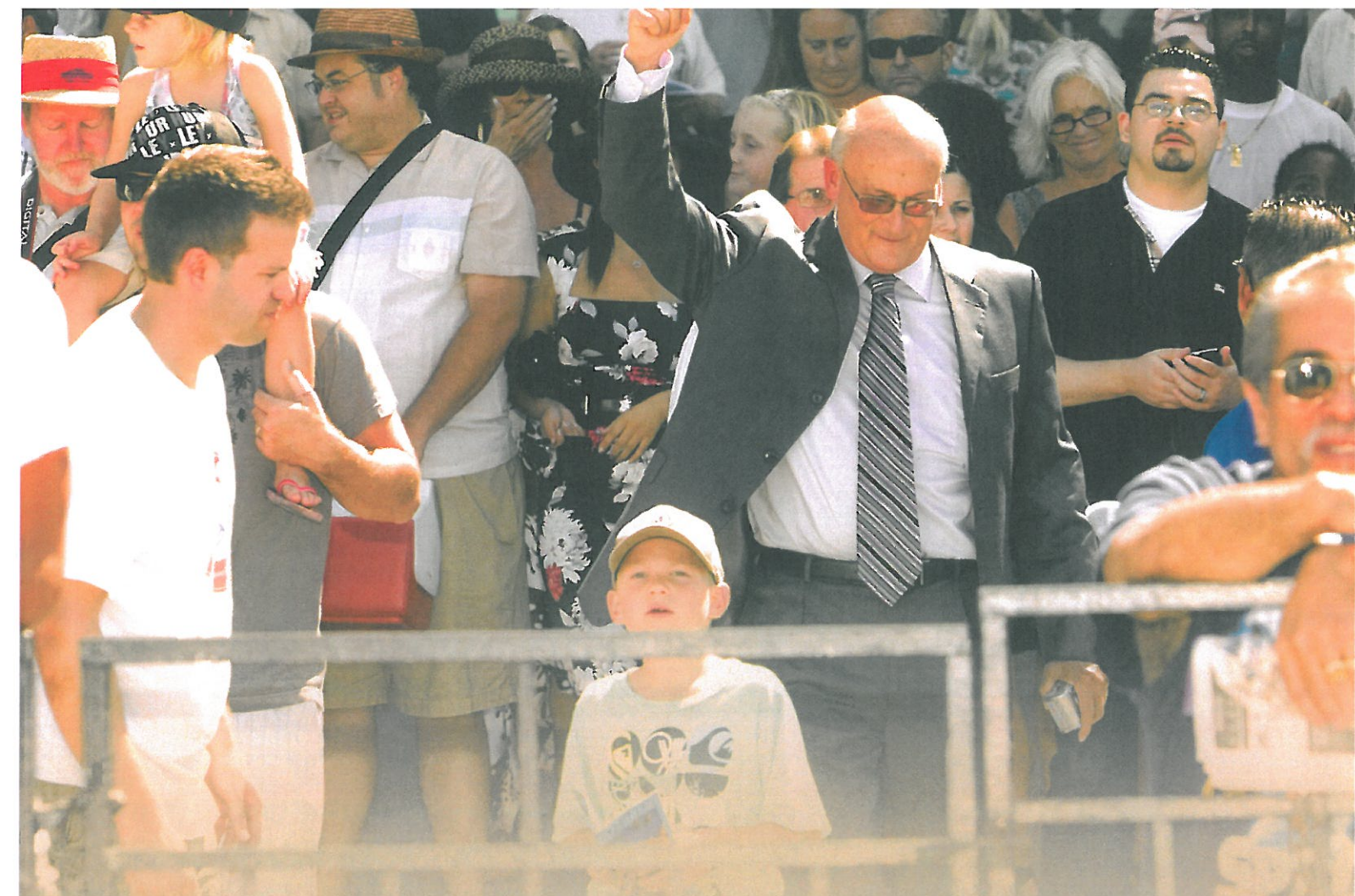
*By Mary Forney*

**W**hat our sport needs are a few more natural ambassadors like racehorse owner Bob Nugent. A lifelong fan, Nugent purchased his first Thoroughbred in 2002. Yet in just seven years he has introduced literally thousands of people to the exciting world of horse racing by sharing his own experiences with them.

For the last two years, the star in Nugent's barn has been a talented gelding by the name of Star Nicholas, winner of the On Trust Handicap at Hollywood Park and, most recently, the Windy Sands







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Handicap at Del Mar. When Star Nicholas won the On Trust Handicap, it looked like a party in the winner's circle. About 80 people showed up to cheer for him – mostly family and friends of Nugent.

Nugent was introduced to the world of horse racing by his boyhood friend, Ron Charles, who is now President and CEO of Santa Anita. The two met at Burbank High School, where they played basketball and baseball and became good buddies – and sometimes sporting rivals.

"I really got involved with the horses when I was about 19 or 20," said Nugent. "I joined the Navy after high school during the Vietnam War, and when I came out of the Navy Ron had his first horses down at Del Mar." Nugent followed and bet on Charles' horses for years before taking the plunge into horse ownership.

"I supported his horses for many years and never really thought about owning horses until one day the opportunity presented itself," said Nugent, who also met other horse owners through Charles, including Pete Cristofi, co-owner of Star Nicholas.

"I was sitting next to Pete Cristofi at Santa Anita one day, and he talked me into going up to Old English Rancho to look at Unusual Heat and some of the babies up there," Nugent recounted. "And I

ended up purchasing 50 percent of a 30-day-old Unusual Heat filly. Pete also convinced me that down the line there would be breeder's incentives if I bought 50 percent of the mare, Vznaga, so I did." Vznaga would become the dam of Star Nicholas.

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"It was a tremendously exciting time," Nugent recalled. "She started drawing the family and my co-workers in. She had a magnetic personality because she was friendly and easy to get along with, and she raced passionately. She came from behind, came from the clouds, and always either got there or got very close. It just got your blood going!" Passionate Heat ran five races as a three-year-old, registering two wins, two seconds, and a third in a stakes race, before suffering a fractured sesamoid.

"It was pretty tragic," said Nugent. "I ended up purchasing Pete's share in her and having surgery done to try and get her back to the races. But the issues with the ligament prevented that." Passionate Heat was retired to Old English Rancho to be bred. As is often the case in the world of horse racing, there was a silver lining to the



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*Nugent with Sammi Wang and his brother Mike Nugent.*

cloud of tragedy. Passionate Heat looks so much like her sire, Unusual Heat, that Madeline Auerbach (owner of Unusual Heat) even noted the striking similarity.

“When Passionate Heat fractured her sesamoid and I had the operation done, Madeline was so appreciative that she gave me a breeding to Unusual Heat with Voznaga,” said Nugent. The result was a colt that is now a two year old named Relentless Heat.

As for Passionate Heat, so far she has produced a foal by Perfect Mandate that is now a yearling and a filly by Unbridled Native that was born April 27. Nugent is looking forward to watching her legacy as a broodmare develop.

Buying 50 percent of Voznaga turned out to be a very good move for Nugent, who now has three of her foals in training – Star Nicholas, Jolley Drive, and Relentless Heat. Nugent currently owns six horses, three in partnerships.

“I was lucky enough that Star Nicholas wasn’t very far behind Passionate Heat,” he said. “So I’ve been able to stay in the game constantly since 2002. But Oak Tree will be the first time I’ll have three at the track at the same time.” Santa Anita would do well to

be prepared for an onslaught of exuberant racing fans when Nugent’s horses run.

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Nugent’s involvement with racing has also had a beneficial effect on his family relationships. His cheering section at the races typically includes his brother and sister, his daughter, Nicole, and his son and racing partner, Robert.

“We are a close and supportive family,” Nugent said. “But the horses have really united everyone. It’s bonded the whole family. It’s just something to get together for, something to talk about, and we all enjoy it – whether it be a stay at Del Mar or a day at Santa Anita and dinner at The Derby.” Nugent even has an 86-year-old aunt in New Jersey who follows Star Nicholas.

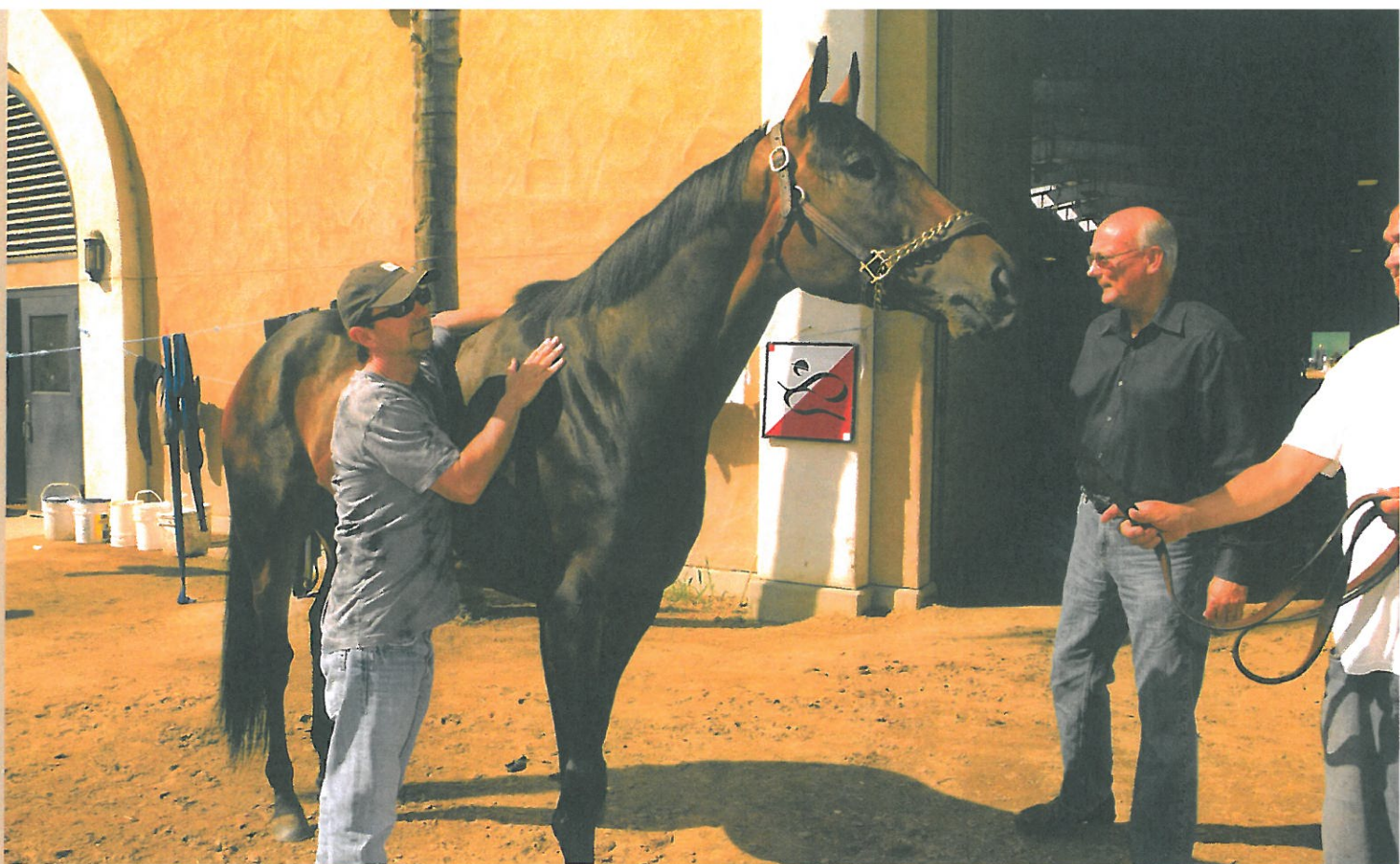
“She actually came out for the Ack Ack Handicap at Hollywood Park, and she’s gotten attached to the horse,” said Nugent. “She follows his races in the *New York Times*, and if a race is early enough and it makes the paper she checks the results the next morning.”

Nugent has also brought countless friends and co-workers to the track. A product distribution manager for St. Jude Medical, Cardiac Division, for 29 years, Nugent has even arranged for company picnics to be held in the Santa Anita infield. The first year there were more than 2,000 people in attendance; last year they had 2,500. Many of those first-time race goers have turned into lifetime fans. Racing has had a major impact on Nugent’s life, as well.

“It has turned into a major hobby for me and a big part of my life,” said Nugent. “It’s almost an everyday routine checking on things having to do with the horses. Before I owned horses I would go to the track on Saturdays and Sundays, do a little studying of the *Racing Form*, and bet the horses.” These days, Nugent is at the track an average of four days a week.

“I make nearly every workout,” he said. “With Passionate Heat, I even made gallops! I enjoy it, and it has replaced a lot of the





responsibilities you have when you are married and have a young family,” explained Nugent, who has been divorced since 1992. “I have the freedom to come to the track, enjoy it, have breakfast, and watch the horses work.”

“I don’t want to be an absentee owner just paying bills and coming out to watch the horse,” added Nugent, whose horses are currently in training at Santa Anita with Peter Eurton. “In all aspects of my life, whatever I’m doing, I want to know as much as I can about it. Peter affords me that opportunity. His door’s always open, and he always returns phone calls within a reasonable amount of time.”

“One thing the horses have done is make me a morning person,” continued Nugent, who lives in Valencia, Calif. “Peter likes to go

early sometimes, so it’s up at 4:30 or 5:00 when he’s working my horses so I can get ready to get to the track in time. Then I go to work after that. But it’s totally worth it. It has given me something to get up and have a passion for.”

“I’m definitely a competitive owner,” Nugent concluded. “The good thing about having played competitive sports is you have to learn how to lose, and you have to know how to be a gracious winner. And I think we are that. We’re appreciative of an in-the-money finish or a good race, and we’ve been fortunate to have two horses that run with conviction. It’s been a tremendous experience.”

*Photos by Benoit*



Coincidentally, Star Nicholas’ name is intertwined with an amazing piece of racing history. The official wristwatch of this year’s Breeders’ Cup World Championship is the Montblanc *Star Nicolas* Rieussec Chronograph. The watch is dedicated to Nicolas Rieussec, a Frenchman who invented the chronograph in 1821. The original chronograph was a wooden case containing a clock movement that drove two rotating dials on the lid. Above them was a fixed index that left a drop of ink on the rotating dials whenever a button was pushed. For the first time ever, the device made it possible to record the exact times set by individual horses at racing events.