



CTBA Member
PROFILE

ROB RIGGIO

BY EMILY SHIELDS

A VIEW
FROM
THE TOP

As a young child, Rob Riggio sat next to his father, Robert, with rapt attention on the television. Channel 56 played the nightly replays from Santa Anita, Hollywood Park, or Del Mar, and the younger Riggio loved every minute.

“I was picking horses by the color,” he recalled.

Ten years ago, the elder Riggio met E.W. “Buddy” Johnston, son of Ellwood B. Johnston owner of one of California’s premier breeding operations, Old English Rancho.

“He bought in on a couple horses,” Riggio said, “and one of them was Norvsky.”

The gelded California-bred son of Vronsky—Fimbrelith, by Flying Paster, became one of the grittiest campaigners in

California. He made 25 starts, winning seven and finishing second eight times, to earn \$616,444. The highlight of his career came when he won the \$150,000 San Gabriel Stakes (G2T) over grade 1 winners Jeranimo and fellow Cal-bred The Usual Q.T.

The younger Riggio had been involved in some smaller partnerships, but four years ago he decided to get back into the game in a bigger way. He reached out to Johnston, who sent him a list of available horses that included future grade 1 winner What a View.

“The original list had seven horses on it,” Riggio recalled. “Five were colts and two were fillies. I didn’t select one colt and one filly from the list, and What a View was one of the horses I did not pick. But another horse that I did have, right after the bill of sale he

fractured his leg and couldn’t race.”

Johnston felt so bad that he put Riggio in on the colt he didn’t select, a son of Vronsky—Oceans N Mountains, by Manila.

“Honestly, he’d done that on a couple other horses, too,” Riggio said. “It’s neat—they’re really good people that way.”

The people in question are Johnston’s wife, Judy; their daughter Mary Hilvers; her husband, Peter; and Mary and Peter’s son, Jonny, who manages the Old English Rancho operations. Buddy died in May 2015, just months before What a View broke his maiden.

Since then, What a View has taken Riggio, the Hilvers family, and later added partners Kyle Rost and Brian Richardson’s Taste of Victory Stables on an emotional ride. Trained initially by Don Warren and then by Kenny Black after Warren’s retirement, What a View broke his maiden against a full field of 11 Cal-bred rivals in his fourth start and won a Santa Anita allowance optional claiming race by ¾ lengths two starts later.

What a View won his final start at 3 against older horses as part of four victories in a row. His first stakes triumph came in the \$251,000 California Cup Turf Classic Stakes, a nine-furlong contest at Santa Anita Jan. 30, 2016. On that day he defeated favored Alert Bay, with both horses starting a step slowly. What a View had to be supplemented to the race to the tune of \$25,000, but the gamble paid off.

He jumped up to grade 1 company, joining the field



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What a View wins the Crystal Water Handicap for Rob Riggio and partners



for the \$400,345 Frank E. Kilroe Mile Stakes (G1T). Under jockey Kent Desormeaux, What a View sailed straight to the lead and ran his five rivals off their feet, scoring by an impressive 3¾ lengths with favored Bolo running second and Brazilian Triple Crown winner Bal a Bali finishing third.

“The best thing about him is that he’s a really nice horse,” Riggio said. “He’s really friendly and loves for you to rub on his neck. That’s what I like about him. You’re happy for him when he wins because you know he’s such a good guy.”

What a View took on another big field in the Thunder Road Stakes (G3T), a \$102,070 contest over a mile. What a View won by a length, this time taking back to midfield early and rallying.

After a mid-season break, What a View returned in October at Keeneland in the \$1 million Shadwell Turf Mile Stakes (G1T). Although he finished eighth in his comeback, he had been beaten only three lengths for the win and finished ahead of the likes of Grand Arch, Tower of Texas, and Triple Threat. The field boasted a who’s-who of the division, including grade 1 winners Miss Temple City, Mondialiste, and future Breeders’ Cup Mile (G1T) winner Tourist.

In 2017 What a View finished second in his defense of both the Kilroe Mile and the Cal Cup, then won the \$100,000 Crystal Water Stakes. He finished off the board in his first two 2018 starts, but that was against graded company following another lengthy layoff. What a View has seven wins and five seconds in 23 starts.

Aside from the stable star, Riggio currently owns nine horses, including a pregnant broodmare at Old English Rancho. Other horses campaigned under his Finish Line Racing moniker include the cleverly named \$107,006-earner Burnaroundtheedges, another Cal-bred son of Vronsky out of the Unusual Heat mare Singed.

Riggio also was partners on the multiple stakes winning Cal-bred

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Acceptance. That son of Vronsky—Allswellthatnswell, by Perfect Mandate, broke his maiden first out at Santa Anita in 2014. He came right back to win the \$196,000 Golden State Juvenile Stakes,

followed by the \$200,000 King Glorious Stakes. Those exploits earned him the honor as California’s champion 2-year-old male of 2014. Acceptance went on to add the \$100,690 California Flag Handicap as a 4-year-old, and earned his connections \$404,803.

With What a View pointing for the 2018 San Francisco Mile (G3T) and Shoemaker Mile (G1T), Riggio awaits the debut of a 2-year-old colt by Acclamation that is in training with Black.

“He’s supposed to be a really good-looking horse,” Riggio said. “And I trust Kenny to take care of my babies.”

As for What a View, he will have a lighter campaign in 2018.

“We’re going to take it easier on him, as he’s getting a little older,” Riggio said of the 7-year-old gelding.

But with four stakes wins and earnings of \$825,361, What a View has proved to be so much more than just a name on a list. **CTB**



Acceptance takes the California Flag Handicap

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