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# STEPHANIE WEDGE-BONDE

BY EMILY SHIELDS

**W**hen Stephanie Wedge first met trainer Jeff Bonde in 2013, she didn't know a furlong from a farrier. After marrying Bonde, helping manage her husband's business, and buying racehorses of her own, Wedge-Bonde is now well on her way to mastering the once incomprehensible racing jargon.

A full-time real estate agent from Northern California, Wedge-Bonde was taking in the races at Pleasanton when she met the trainer.

"I thought all horses were Kentucky Derby horses when I first met him," she said. "I was the most novice of novices."

The ambitious Wedge-Bonde decided the best way to learn was to jump in with both feet. She invested in Lady Wedge, a \$16,500 purchase who went on to earn \$34,315.

"When she doubled the

money, I was hooked," Wedge-Bonde said.

Another driving factor was that at the time, Bonde was training a filly named She's a Tiger, one of the leading juveniles of 2013. She's a Tiger won the Del Mar Debutante Stakes (G1) and ran second in the Breeders' Cup Juvenile Fillies (G1) the same year that the Bondes met. Voted the Eclipse champion 2-year-old filly of 2013, she ultimately sold at the Fasig-Tipton Kentucky November sale for \$2.5 million following the conclusion of her racing career.

After the experience with She's a Tiger, Wedge-Bonde began to fall in love with other horses her husband trained.

She especially became attached to Distinctiv Passion, a \$564,855-earning, multiple graded stakes winner. Wedge-Bonde accompanied the horse and his trainer to Dubai for the Al Quoz Sprint Empowered by

IPIC (G1) in 2015.

"That was the first love I had with something I didn't actually own," she said. "When he got claimed, I cried."

Other barn favorites include California-bred Miss Sunset, an \$891,895 earner who was named California's champion older female of 2018, and Sparky Ville. That 3-year-old colt won the \$200,000 San Vicente Stakes (G2) Feb. 10 and is three for eight lifetime with two stakes wins.

Now, Wedge-Bonde admits to "accumulating horses." The best she has had to date is Princess Karen, a daughter of Stay Thirsty-Chitka, by Jade Hunter. An \$82,000 purchase at the Barretts Del Mar paddock sale in 2016, Princess Karen went on to break her maiden in her debut. She ran fourth in the 2017 Santa Ynez Stakes (G2), a \$200,000 race that featured future Eclipse Award winner Unique Bella. She won an allowance optional claimer in March and her first stakes in the \$75,000 Beverly J. Lewis Stakes at Los Alamitos in September.

Under jockey Kent Desormeaux, Princess Karen led nearly every step of the way to defeat a strong field in the Beverly J. Lewis. Faypien, who was second, had placed in a grade 1 at Saratoga in her prior start. Third-place Chalon had won a stakes race at Belmont Park two starts back and went on to be graded stakes-placed at Keeneland.

Princess Karen ran second in the \$100,345 L.A. Woman Stakes (G3), then outran her 87-1 odds to be fifth of 14 in the \$920,000 Breeders' Cup Filly and Mare Sprint (G1) at Del Mar. She raced three more



COURTESY OF STEPHANIE WEDGE-BONDE

Stephanie Wedge-Bonde has become quite the racing enthusiast since marrying trainer Jeff Bonde, right



times before retirement, earning \$176,039 with three wins in 11 starts. Jeff Bonde, Karen Norton, and Edward Brown Jr. owned Princess Karen, who is now in foal to Arrogate and due this spring.

“I had a heck of a journey with her,” Wedge-Bonde said. “She was in a tough class; there were a lot of tough fillies she ran against. It was very exciting for us.”

When she has horses with her husband as trainer, Wedge-Bonde treats him like any other employee.

“I pay him like I’m anyone else,” she said. She used to join him at the racetrack for training every day before sunrise, but now she will “kiss him goodbye and go back to sleep.” She still gets to Clockers’ Corner several times a month and travels between Northern and Southern California regularly.

“I know Highway 5 very well,” she joked.

She frequently stops at Harris Ranch Inn & Restaurant in Coalinga, which happens to be right near Harris Farms, home of her broodmares.

“I’ve gotten into breeding,” Wedge-Bonde said. “I have a horse at Harris who is pregnant. I’m really interested in the industry as a whole.”

Driven by this interest, Wedge-Bonde



COURTESY OF STEPHANIE WEDGE-BONDE

**“I have a horse at Harris [Farms] who is pregnant. I’m really interested in the industry as a whole.”**

— Stephanie Wedge-Bonde

is pursuing other facets of the industry. She is hoping to be elected to the board of directors for the Thoroughbred Owners of California (TOC).

“I feel like I could bring some of my outside experience into the TOC and continue to help it thrive,” she said. “I’m on a board of directors for a museum in Pleasanton, and I’m a commissioner in the city of Pleasanton. So I do have civic experience behind me.”

love it, there’s so much to learn, so much jargon, and slang from the jargon. . .”

But she is learning fast.

“I know I’m new without a barn behind me, or a Breeders’ Cup win, but I love it. So far people are welcoming and very kind and I’m happy to be here. The staff at Santa Anita have been very nice. It’s a nice environment to come into, considering a few years ago I didn’t know what the backside is.” **CTB**



VASSAR PHOTOGRAPHY

Lady Wedge a \$16,500 purchase who more than doubled her sale price with earnings, was the lure that hooked Stephanie Wedge-Bonde in the industry