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**PROFILE**

# KOSTA HRONIS

BY EMILY SHIELDS

**Hronis Racing Accelerates Its Cal-Bred Program**

**K**osta Hronis has been to the very top of the game in a short amount of time. He purchased his first racehorse in 2010 and won the 2018 Breeders' Cup Classic (G1) with Accelerate. Now he has a stable full of stakes-winning stars and is turning more of his attention to breeding and acquiring California-breds.

"The Cal-bred program is very attractive," the good-natured owner said. "Being a Cal-bred owner in California is a big plus."

But long before he set about breeding his own mares, Hronis and brother Pete were simply happy kid siblings enjoying the racetrack with their family.

"My grandparents on my mom's side lived in Pasadena, so we had family outings at Santa Anita," he said. "Pete and I fell in love with it. We ended up going down to watch races through high school, then got

a box in our early 30s to go on Saturdays and Sundays when we could get away. I don't know what made me think of it, but one day in 2010 I told Pete we were going to buy a racehorse."

Shortly thereafter, the Hronis brothers were introduced to trainer John Sadler, who carefully brought them along despite their eagerness to jump in. Now Hronis and his wife, Stephanie, travel frequently to Southern California tracks from their home in central California, with Pete joining them as time permits.

"John was very cautious with us," Hronis said. But the magic had already happened. "I don't fish or golf or hunt. This is the first thing I've done that really gave me joy (beyond work and family)."

Of the first few horses they bought in the name of Hronis Racing, the Hronis brothers struck gold with Lady of Shamrock. The daughter of Scat Daddy earned \$950,400 and won four graded stakes on

the grass, including two grade 1 events. She also finished fifth in the 2012 Breeders' Cup Filly and Mare Turf (G1T).

"I have to give her a lot of credit," Hronis said. "It was her success that made us realize we could really do this. Anybody can do this. You don't have to be a multimillionaire. Lady of Shamrock got us to where we felt comfortable about expanding and moving on, so we took the money from her (\$2 million sale at Keeneland November in 2013) and reinvested back in the game."

While Kosta and Pete keep busy with their Hronis Inc. family business of table grapes and citrus, the big horses just kept rolling from there. Lotapa, a \$50,000 claim, was grade 1-placed two starts later and a stakes winner the start after that. She ultimately earned \$1,032,796 and won the \$300,250 Vanity Stakes (G1) and the \$300,250 Clement L. Hirsch Stakes (G1) before running third in the Longines



Kosta, left, and brother Peter established Hronis Racing for the family that includes Kosta's wife, Stephanie



ANNE M. EBERHARDT

Hronis Racing's Accelerate won the 2018 Breeders' Cup Classic and earned an Eclipse Award as champion older male



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One of the present stars of the Hronis Racing Stable, Gift Box, inside, wins the Santa Anita Handicap in a close tussle with McKinzie

Breeders' Cup Distaff (G1). She was sold as a broodmare prospect for \$2.8 million.

Stellar Wind and Hard Aces followed. The former, a daughter of Curlin, earned \$2,903,200 with 10 wins in 17 starts and was the Eclipse Award champion 3-year-old filly of 2015. She was sold for a staggering \$6 million to interests from Coolmore, who raced her once before breeding her to Galileo. Hard Aces earned \$1,272,215 and pulled off a mild upset in the \$501,500 Gold Cup at Santa Anita (G1) in 2015.

Still active on the track are the likes of Catalina Cruiser, Cistron, and Gift Box. Flashy Catalina Cruiser, by Union Rags, has won four of five starts, including a pair of grade 2 races at Del Mar, and is currently training for his 2019 debut. Cistron won the \$200,000 Kona Gold Stakes (G2) on April 20 by 5¼ lengths. And Gift Box, who is one of the best older horses in the country, won the \$600,000 Santa Anita Handicap (G1) by a nose April 6.

They all have big shoes to fill. In January, Hronis Racing retired Accelerate, who earned the stable \$6,692,480. He won six of seven starts last year en route to being named the Eclipse champion older male. Hronis Racing also earned the Eclipse Award as champion owners of 2018.

"No doubt Accelerate was breathtaking," Hronis said, "but it was so nerve-racking too. When you're expected to win, you have to win. There's nothing else. When you go in and you're 5-1, you've got a shot; there's good upside. When you're on the top of the mountain looking down, there's a lot of pressure. But that was the ride of our lifetime."

It wouldn't have happened had Sadler

or his team tried to rush the young Accelerate, who did not race until April of his sophomore season.

"A lot of credit goes to John Sadler and his management skills," Hronis said. "Not



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only as our trainer, but he has also served as our eyes and ears to find horses. To see him take his time and develop Accelerate on his schedule taught us to be patient and not be pushy. It was nice to see our patience all pay off in the long run, and we are so proud of Accelerate as a stallion.

And John has done a great job training us as a family to be good stewards of the sport.”

Hronis also credits bloodstock agent David Ingordo, who “is both brilliant and stays within our budget.”

Hronis Racing currently has Cal-bred Edwards Going Left in training. The 5-year-old gelding has won eight of 19 starts for earnings of \$588,810. He is a multiple grade 1-placed stakes winner by Midnight Lute–Dypsy, by Broken Vow.

“Growing up, Santa Anita was our home track, and it was the place to be,” Hronis said. “Pasadena is our home away from home. We have now started to breed our own mares here in California, and we do claim a lot of Cal-breds.”

Hronis actually still owns his very first winner, the stakes-placed Benchmark mare Caitie's Secret, a Cal-bred. With three winners from three foals to race, she has been bred to Square Eddie this season and joins the rest of the fledgling Hronis broodmare band at Ocean Breeze Ranch. Hronis owns about 10 homebred Cal-breds but notes, “they're all still pretty young. I'm always looking for more good Cal-breds. The program is great; you can run against maidens (against other Cal-breds), and then a first-level allowance too before you have to move to open company. The bonus money involved is great.”

For Hronis, the whole idea is to start a legacy.

“It's called Hronis Racing, not Kosta Hronis Racing,” he said. “I couldn't do it by myself without the support of my brother, wife, and children. I hope it's a legacy for generations.” **CTB**