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PROFILE

CONTINUING  
THE FAMILY  
TRADITION

# HENRY WILLIAMSON

BY EMILY SHIELDS

Henry Williamson is the first to admit that horse racing “sinks into your DNA after a while.” He would know, as a grandmother on one side of the family and a grandfather on the other side held box seats at Santa Anita and Hollywood Park for years. Then his father, the late Warren Williamson, bred and owned some of the best modern runners in the state. Through it all, the younger Williamson has been there, relishing every moment.

“It’s not that I keep track of stuff like this,” Williamson joked, “but the first time we saw the winner’s circle in California was on Aug. 3, 1972. I was 10 years old.”

Williamson’s father was hooked and began breeding horses locally in California. Warren bred and/or raced the likes of grade 1-winning California-bred millionaire Nashoba’s Key, dual grade 2 winner Foxysox, and the ultra-quick

Cal-bred Tiz Elemental, who won three straight stakes races.

“There were quite a few moments where we were in disbelief of our success,” Henry Williamson said. “A lot of our good ones were Cal-breds, but they were wonderfully bred. It was really a lot of fun, and it exposed all of his grandchildren—my kids—to the sport as well. Now they are into it and following it as well.”

Williamson was quick to give credit to the other players on the team, such as trainer Carla Gaines and the crew at Harris Farms, where many of the family’s best horses were raised. But while horses such as Cal-bred stakes winners Tiz a Blend and Excessive Blend were grabbing the headlines, Williamson himself was mostly working behind the scenes.

“A lot of people don’t know this, but I owned horses with my dad in the 1990s,” he said. “We claimed a horse together named Tiny Boots through trainer Bob Marshall in 1996. We designed silks together for

Williamson and Williamson, the name of our partnership.”

Many star horses then wore those famous red and yellow silks with two stacked Ws.

“We had a great time together and realized how much we enjoyed working together,” Williamson said. “Over the years I assimilated a lot of the responsibilities. People thought the ‘WW’ on the silks was for Warren Williamson, but it was for Williamson and Williamson.”

Warren died in March 2018, leaving behind a California legacy that his son plans to uphold.

“I had been working on our Kentucky-based operation, making sure the babies were coming along,” he said. “I had some horses with friends coming into racing and was part of other syndicates. After Dad passed away, I decided to take it all on.”

The decision wasn’t as simple as it might seem.

“There were a lot of moving pieces,” he said. “But the goal is



Three generations of the Williamson family at Santa Anita: from left, Henry Williamson, his dad Warren Williamson and son Warren Brook Williamson II

COURTESY OF HENRY WILLIAMSON

to try to keep the family together. By that I mean the horses are part of our family, so that's what we're doing. I want to keep the colors flying and be back in the winner's circle in Southern California."

Williamson has two horses on the track in California, both with Gaines. American Heights is a daughter of Triple Crown winner American Pharoah who finished fifth while sprinting in her Nov. 15 debut. Another runner, Lady Crocker, is a Curlin filly out of Foxysox who is named after Williamson's box seat-holding grandmother. Lady Crocker is in the midst of training for her return.

He also has runners around the country, with winners Madame Overserved at Indiana Grand, Kadesh at Churchill Downs, and grade 3-placed stakes winner Visitant running at Keeneland last out.

Having runners is nice, but it is the breeding industry that Williamson is tackling next. Two years ago he acquired the old Valley Creek Farm and is debuting it in 2021 as Arroyo Vista Farm. Miguel "Mike" Jimenez, formerly the manager at Ballena Vista, grew up on this property and will return to manage it later this year.

"He told me it's like coming home," Williamson said.

Broodmares will be moving in between Thanksgiving and the New Year. It is a project that is something of a completed dream for Williamson.

"This is something my dad and I were trying to do many years ago," he said. "I was glad when this place became available, and I've been glad to get it ready for our horses."

Williamson has six broodmares in California and five in Kentucky although some of those are scheduled to move to the Golden State.

The cornerstone of the farm is Texas Ryano, a royally bred chestnut horse by Curlin out of "the best mare we ever had," Blending Element. She was a graded stakes winner in her own right who produced Tiz a Blend, Tiz Elemental, Excessive Blend, Holladay Road, and Texas Ryano, who is named for Williamson's



The Williamsons' homebred Texas Ryano is a lynchpin of the family's new Arroyo Vista Farm venture

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— Henry Williamson

University of Texas graduate son Ryan Lando Williamson.

Texas Ryano earned \$455,045 with five wins, three seconds, and three thirds in 22 starts. He was a grade 2 winner at Del Mar and grade 2-placed at Santa Anita in 2016. He also ran sixth in the Longines Breeders' Cup Turf (G1T) behind Highland Reel.

"He's a physical specimen," Williamson said. "He's got wonderful scope and balance. I honestly think he looks like he could go back to the racetrack now. He retired sound, and we didn't know whether we were going to invest and try to build him as a stallion. But being by Curlin and out of arguably our best mare ever, if there was a time to do it, this was it."

Texas Ryano stood his first season in 2018, with his first yearlings selling this fall.

"Ever since he was foaled in Kentucky, we thought he was something special," Williamson said. "We hope that translates into the breeding shed. He's throwing a lot of the same types of bodies."

With the move to the new farm underway, Williamson has plenty on his plate.

"I've been getting everything restored to where it needs to be," he said. "I plan on being there three to four days a week, and Mike Jimenez will be staying in the house on the grounds. And if anyone else wants their mares and foals to grow up there, I'm hoping we might have a few guests, too." **CTB**