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PROFILE

## CAL-BRED TRAINER EXTOLS THE CAL-BRED PROGRAM

# DAVE HOFMANS

BY EMILY SHIELDS

**D**ave Hofmans is quick to point out that not only does he love and support the California-bred racing program, he is a Cal-bred himself.

“I was born and raised right here in Southern California,” the affable trainer said. On top of that, he has a marvelous Golden State runner currently in the barn in Big Fish, and his all-time favorite horse was a Cal-bred, too.

After growing up in the sport as a groom and hot-walker, Hofmans spent time working for trainers Bobby Frankel and Farrell Jones. He got his first win as a trainer in 1974 over the hallowed Santa Anita course and has been winning races there ever since.

In 1986 Hofmans began an association with Georgia Ridder, widow of B.J. “Ben” Ridder; both of the Ridders

were active members of the California breeding and racing community and had resided in nearby Pasadena. Their standout stallion Flying Paster won the Santa Anita and Hollywood Derbies and was the 1978 Cal-bred Horse of the Year. Flying Paster stood in California and sired numerous fleet runners, including Hofmans trainee Past Ages.

After Past Ages won his first two starts, the dark bay gelding placed in a pair of graded stakes events before taking the 1989 California Breeders’ Champion Stakes. Past Ages ultimately lost the honor of being the state’s top juvenile that year to a horse named Individualist, who was running for Golden Eagle Farm. The trainer? Dave Hofmans.

During that 1989 season, Hofmans spent the entire year winning at a 29% clip, and a lot of that was thanks in part to Georgia Ridder.

“There were a few of those good Flying Paster colts I got,” Hofmans said.

While His Legacy wasn’t a son of Flying Paster, he was Hofmans’ favorite horse of all time. The Cal-bred son of Pocketful in Vail – Quella B., by Don B., ran 47 times with 14 wins, 11 seconds, and six thirds, earning \$420,925. His Legacy raced through age 9, and owner Pete Parrella retired him to his Legacy Ranch, where the gelding lived out his life with another talented runner, the Quarter Horse Griswold.

“That was undoubtedly my favorite horse ever; my son (Grant) and I loved that horse,” said Hofmans.

One race Hofmans will never forget is His Legacy’s final start, the 1994 California Cup Starter Handicap. The 9-year-old had already won the race twice and finished second in it once.

“He was coming down the stretch, and took the lead with Paul Atkinson up,” said Hofmans. “I’m crying; I look over and my son is crying—just two tough guys crying our eyes out.”

Hofmans has trained many standout horses—among them, 1996 Breeders’ Cup Classic (G1) shocker Alphabet Soup, owned by Georgia Ridder. Alphabet Soup defeated the great Cigar that day, Cigar finishing third. Hofmans also trained 1997 Belmont Stakes (G1) winner Touch Gold, 2003 Breeders’ Cup Distaff (G1) surprise Adoration, and Awesome Again during his early career. Awesome Again won Canada’s Queen’s Plate in 1997 while in Hofmans’ care.

Adoration also gave



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Dave Hofmans enjoys the Breeders’ Cup Distaff victory of Adoration, whom he trained for Amerman Racing



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Hofmans perhaps his most gratifying victory the year after she won her Breeders' Cup race at 40-1. Three starts later she won the 2004 Santa Margarita Invitational Handicap (G1) at Santa Anita. It validated Adoration's ability, proving that the Breeders' Cup wasn't an anomaly.

"People were saying it was a fluke; the favorite (Sightseek) didn't fire," Hofmans recalled of the Breeders' Cup. "But after winning at Del Mar and running third in her prep at Santa Anita, I looked over the Distaff field and I thought it wasn't that tough. To come back and win another grade 1 a few months later, that was really great."

Hofmans has developed other grade 1 stars, such as 2016 Santa Anita Handicap (G1) hero Melatonin and the brilliant Siphonic, a grade 1 winner at 2 who lost his life too early. Through it all, Cal-breds were Hofmans' bread and butter, including the popular Greg's Gold.

A hulking gray gelding, Greg's Gold (Lake George—Lake Windermere, by Fit to Fight) was a homebred for Bill Boswell. His pedigree suggested he should like both two turns and the grass, which is how he debuted for another barn. Greg's Gold finished a lackluster eighth.

When Greg's Gold was transferred into the Hofmans outfit, the trainer agreed that routing on the grass was probably the answer, but he merely wanted to get a race into the horse. Hofmans ran him at six furlongs on the Del Mar dirt, and at 22-1 Greg's Gold nearly won the race.

"I got fooled," Hofmans said. "He proved to be an exceptionally fast horse, and quite the Cal-bred."

Greg's Gold was stakes-placed and a multiple winner before he took the \$300,000 Bing Crosby Handicap (G1) at Del Mar in 2005. He missed all of 2006 due to tendon trouble but returned as good as ever to add the \$306,000 Pat O'Brien Handicap (G2), \$200,000 Potrero Grande (G2), \$150,000 Tiznow Stakes, and \$107,800 On Trust Handicap to his resume. He was never named the state's champion sprinter, as he had the misfortune to race at the same time as stars Idiot Proof, Thor's Echo, and Bordonaro, but he earned \$1,067,923.

"We took advantage of the Cal-bred program with him, and it wasn't as good back then as it is now," Hofmans said.

Luckily for the trainer, he gets to try again with the program in 2021. The 78-year-old trainer has been given the keys to another Cal-bred gelding, Big Fish. George Krikorian bred the son of Mr. Big – Perched, by Into Mischief, and Pete and Evelyn Parrella purchased him for \$45,000 at the 2019 California Thoroughbred Breeders Association Northern California sale.



Hofmans in the winner's circle following the victory of Cal-bred Melatonin in the 2016 Santa Anita Handicap

In just his third start Big Fish broke his maiden going a mile on the grass at Del Mar. He wheeled right back to add the \$102,500 Del Mar Juvenile Turf Stakes, but a fifth-place effort in the Zuma Beach Stakes knocked him out of Breeders' Cup contention.

Big Fish, running well against open company, switched to the dirt for the \$200,000 California Cup Derby Jan. 16. He won impressively, rallying from second-last in an eight-horse field.

Big Fish has earned \$229,018 with three wins in eight starts.

"He is such a cool horse, so smart," Hofmans said. "He just trains himself and reminds me of Awesome Again that way. You can't make him go faster than he wants, or slower. Those horses are a dream to have because they are so intelligent."

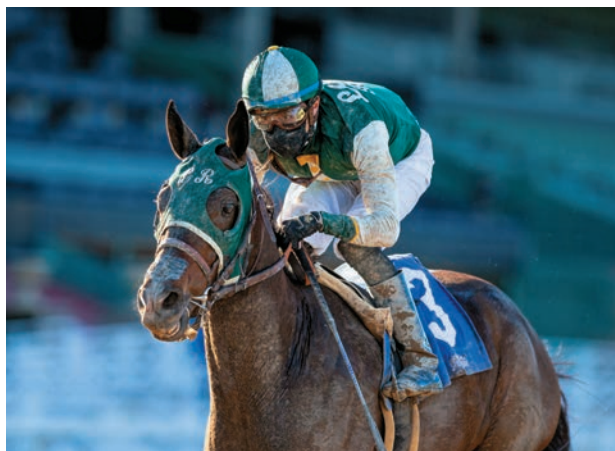
For as long as he continues training, Hofmans will continue to support the Cal-bred program.

"It's a very good program," he said. "It gives people an opportunity to develop a very nice horse that they've bred and

followed. It gives them the chance to run for purse money they normally wouldn't have. I think the program is working and is just going to get better."

Hofmans added that he doesn't have plans to retire anytime soon.

"I'm 78 years old and I love it," he said. "I wouldn't still be getting up at 5 a.m. every day if I didn't enjoy it." **CTB**



Hofmans' latest Cal-bred success is Big Fish, winner of the California Cup Derby for Pete and Evelyn Parrella's Legacy Ranch

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