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PROFILE

THIRD-
GENERATION
CALIFORNIA
HORSEMAN

JOHN HAAGSMA

BY EMILY SHIELDS

Odd Henry might have just been a \$2,500 claimer, but the Texas-bred filly is the reason John Haagsma got hooked on racing.

In partnership with Harold Tillema and his father, John D. Haagsma, the younger Haagsma first got involved in the sport as an owner via Odd Henry, who broke her maiden at Los Alamitos July 8, 1995.

“That first win got me hooked,” Haagsma admitted.

Horse racing was not a foreign concept to Haagsma, whose grandfather Dave Haagsma raced Quarter Horses at both Los Alamitos and Fairplex in Pomona. John Sr. took his son to the

races regularly, but nothing matched the thrill of winning as an owner or breeder, a feeling Haagsma started to chase.

He was involved in the California Cup-winning broodmare Theresa’s Pleasure, who had captured the inaugural Juvenile Fillies in 1990. When her breeder/owner, Lester Smith, passed away, Theresa’s Pleasure was offered to Tillema and his partners, who bred and/or raced her offspring, including multiple stakes winners Excessive Theresa and Lesters Boy. A third stakes star, Theresa’s Tizzy, was claimed away from them in her fourth start, but went on to earn \$660,271 with multiple stakes wins, including a grade 3. Theresa’s Pleasure also has foaled a

fourth stakes winner, Theresa’s Year, whom they raced.

Haagsma enjoyed having horses with trainers Rafael Becerra and Brian Koriner before partnering with Wesley Ward, a decision that led to a multitude of success.

Ward bred Frysland, a California-bred daughter of Stravinsky—Symphony-numbernine, by Aloha Prospector, and the Haagsma father and son team bought into her. Frysland was out of a full sister to Unfinished Symph, a four-time graded stakes winner of \$651,145.

“Wesley said he had a really good filly, and asked if we were interested,” Haagsma recalled. “She won a couple of races for us.”

Frysland won two of eight starts with five top three efforts, and was fourth in her lone stakes try at Del Mar. She was retired and for Haagsma and Ward produced the Songandaprayer gelding Hockeythedayman, named after the senior Haagsma, a hay dealer whose longtime nickname was “Hockey.” Hockeythedayman won four of five career starts and was stakes-placed at Gulfstream Park.

Next up came Magoo, a gelding by Bring the Heat out of Frysland. Magoo won eight times and set a track record for four furlongs during the Barretts Race Meet at Fairplex in 2013.

In 2012, Lost Bus was born. A full sister to Magoo, Lost Bus ultimately won five of 16 starts, including the \$201,000 Santa Monica Stakes (G2) at Santa Anita in 2016. After adding the Spring Fever Handicap, the dual



PHOTOS COURTESY OF JOHN HAAGSMA

John Haagsma and trainer Wesley Ward have formed a successful partnership with Cal-breds

stakes winner was named the 2016 California champion older female.

Unfortunately for Haagsma, Lost Bus turned in her best exploits for owner Terry Lovingier, who picked her up out of a claiming race in 2015 for \$32,000.

Then Frysland produced Brandothbartender.

“I sent her to Tribal Rule, and the baby was a decent-looking horse,” Haagsma said. “Wesley had moved back East by then, so I raised the baby and shipped it to him to get ready to run, since he’s really good with babies.”

Regarding the name, Haagsma and friends were on vacation in Parker, Ariz., and enjoying time in the water when they realized there was no one left on the boat to hand over their drinks save for 10-year-old Brando, the son of one of Haagsma’s friends.

“We were having a lot of fun, kicking back in the water in the sun,” Haagsma remembered. “So, the kid was handing us cocktails—it was really funny. That’s where the name Brandothbartender came from.”

When Brandothbartender was fit to race, Ward sent him back to the Golden State.

“Wesley let me run the horse here in California, since he was a Cal-bred, for the breeder awards,” Haagsma said. “But we ended up facing open company first out anyway.”

Under the conditioning of Blake Heap, Brandothbartender broke his maiden going down the hill at Santa Anita Feb. 14, 2016. Jockey Kent Desormeaux was up and noted the gelding had some serious talent. Heap tried to stretch out Brandothbartender,



Haagsma with Frysland, dam of champion older female Lost Bus and multiple stakes winner Brandothbartender

“ Now that (Brandothbartender) is 8 years old, he seems to have caught a little fire again. I sure like the breeders awards.”

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Terry Lovingier, left, presents the trophy for Lost Bus’ Cal-bred older female championship to Haagsma

but sprinting quickly proved to be his favorite game.

Brandothbartender ran very well in allowance company, rarely missing a check, before he was claimed away from Haagsma for \$40,000 in 2017. As with

Theresa’s Tizzy and Lost Bus, Brandothbartender ultimately blossomed into something even better, becoming a multiple stakes winner. So far, he has won two stakes races in 2021 with a career record of eight wins, six seconds, and 15 thirds in 43 starts and earnings of \$668,364.

Haagsma, who followed in his father’s footsteps and deals in hay in Ontario, isn’t sour over many of his best horses being claimed.

“Now that he’s 8 years old, he seems to have caught a little fire again,” he said of Brandothbartender. “I sure like the breeders awards.”

There have been other horses over the years, such as Barbecue Eddie, a grade 1-placed sprinter Haagsma owned in partnership who was ultimately sold to Sheikh Hamdan bin Rashid Al Maktoum for “big money.” There are horses to watch in the future, such as Frysland’s Stay Thirsty yearling filly named Court Snort, and horses already in training with Dan Blacker and Steve Knapp. The pandemic has made things difficult, as Haagsma feels racing is less fun if you can’t be present to watch, but he is hopeful all tracks will be open to fans again soon.

“We’ve had a lot of fun over the years,” Haagsma said. “There’s up and downs with horse racing. There’s bad luck, but there’s really good luck, too.”

Haagsma’s father died last year, and now Haagsma continues to carry the torch for the family as a third-generation California horseman. With broodmares like Theresa’s Pleasure and Frysland, it has certainly been a rewarding experience. **CTB**