

# SUCCESS STORIES



**RICK**

**PORTER**

**PAUL & HIDDEN**

**POMPA BROOK**

**DAVID**

**HANLEY**

**CARRIE**

**BROGDEN**

**GEORGE & LORI**

**HALL**

At the 2007 Keeneland April Two-Year-Olds in Training Sale, a lot of people looked at a particular youngster by Boundary and, apparently, didn't like what they saw. There's no other way to explain how the colt who would go on to be named Big Brown was bought for just \$190,000. A lot of people thought they saw something rather ordinary. Paul Pompa Jr. and his advisors looked at the same horse and saw something exceptional.

"This sounds like a cliché when you're talking about a Derby horse, but he was an athletic horse, a beautiful moving horse," said Dan Hall, a partner in Hidden Brook Farm, which advises Pompa and was instrumental in the purchase of Big Brown. "With him, it wasn't a matter of going out of your way to buy a pedigree. It may not be by a sire that's the flavor of the month at that particular time. The key is that they are athletic, which he was. He had a great mind, and all the parts came together."

Hidden Brook liked the colt and so did Pompa's veterinarian, Dr. Michael Chovanes. The rest was up to Pompa. He wasn't a hard sell. Earlier that

year, he had claimed a horse named Snake River Canyon for \$62,500 out of a maiden race and was rewarded with a win at the \$75,000 level seven weeks later. He thought that colt had a lot of potential and was disappointed when the horse was claimed away from him. That the 2-year-old in the Keeneland sale happened to be a half-brother to Snake River Canyon was, to him, a big plus.

The result was the purchase of Big

Backseat Rhythm, This Ones For Phil and Franny Freud. He has also had some major successes in his pinhooking ventures, most notably with Desert Party. Pompa bought the son of Street Cry for \$425,000 at the 2007 Keeneland September sale and then turned around and sold him for \$2.1 million at the 2008 Fasig-Tipton 2-year-old sale the following February.

As was the case with Big Brown,

## PAUL & HIDDEN POMPA BROOK

Brown for a relative pittance, a smart move on the owner's part and the result of a team effort. If there's a secret to Pompa's success, it's that he's smart enough to surround himself with smart people. There has perhaps been no smarter alliance than Pompa's partnership with Hidden Brook.

"You have to be focused all the time and you have to find people to advise you who really care about you

versus people that just want to make money off of you," Pompa said. "You to have to have a trusting relationship with people, and that only comes with time."

Pompa, the president of a trucking company based in Brooklyn and an owner since 2000, may be best known for his ownership of Big Brown, but there's a lot more to his story. In full or in partnerships, he has owned several other top horses, like stakes winners D'Funnybone,

Hidden Brook Farm was one of the guiding forces behind the decision to buy Desert Party as a yearling.

If two heads are better than one, then five heads must be the stuff of genius. That was the general idea when Hall, Jack Brothers, Sergio de Sousa, Mark Roberts and Dan Vella came together in 2002 and formed Hidden Brook Farm. All five had years of experience, much of it with the Adena Springs operation, and solid reputations in the Thoroughbred business. They had always done well working for other people and decided their combined knowledge could form an unbeatable and profitable team that did a lot of things and tried to do all of them well. Hidden Brook boards mares, preps horses for the sales, consigns horses, advises clients at the sales, raises foals, breeds and races.

"There are the five of us and we each bring different things to the table, and that's been part of the key to our success, being able to branch out in a lot of different directions," Hall said. "We're not just a boarding operation, we're not just a sales consignor; our business isn't based strictly on private transactions and it isn't based strictly on purchasing and public sales. But we tend to bring all of that together."

"You don't have one person with them. You have several people who



Pompa and Edgar Prado accept the trophy after D'Funnybone's Saratoga Special win.

have a wealth of experience and a wealth of knowledge,” Pompa said of the Hidden Brook team. “By the time they come to me, I have a lot of knowledge behind the advice I’m given. You get a general consensus so far as what they present to you when it comes to breeding, yearlings, 2-year-olds, what sales we should buy at. It really works.”

Hidden Brook opened as a modestly sized farm with 180 developed acres that concentrated on boarding mares. Among the first horses to take up residence at the Paris, Kentucky, farm was the broodmare Pretty Discreet, who was in foal at the time to Forestry. The foal turned out to be Discreet Cat, an electrifying maiden winner at Saratoga who was sold by owner Joyce Robsham to Godolphin Racing. After two starts in Dubai, Discreet Cat returned to the U.S. and won the Grade I Cigar Mile at Aqueduct in 2006.

Pretty Discreet has also produced Discreetly Mine, who was foaled and raised at Hidden Brook before he won the Grade II Risen Star Stakes earlier this year at the Fair Grounds. Hidden Brook also raised Grade I winner Dixie Chatter and Grade II winners Awesome Maria and Amen Hallelujah.

Boarding mares and raising horses is only so lucrative, no matter how good you are at it. With that in mind, the Hidden Brook team was soon branching out, looking for new ventures and new clients, like Pompa.

Musket Man, recently second by a nose in the Grade I Carter, is a Hidden Brook product. He was bred by de Sousa in partnership with Jim Nelson. At the sales, they do more than advise buyers. Hidden Brook is now fully immersed in the consignment side of the sales. By 2007, it ranked No. 8 in the world in total sales. Occasionally, Hidden Brook will get into the racing side of the business. The star of their racing ventures has been Knights Templar. Hidden Brook bought the filly at the 2005 Keeneland September Sale for \$80,000,



**After Big Brown broke his maiden, Paul Pompa sold 75 percent of the colt to IEAH Stables in a deal that put the colt’s value at \$3 million.**

raced her in a partnership and collected the 2007 Canadian Juvenile Filly Championship after she won two stakes that year at Woodbine.

“That’s what I enjoy the most, racing the horses,” de Sousa said. “That’s what we do; we raise these horses to become good race horses. There’s nothing like the feeling of seeing your horse win in your colors. The

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**When it comes to raising and foaling horses, there are no secrets to Hidden Brook’s success. It’s more a matter of making sure every need of a young, growing horse is taken care of and no detail is overlooked.**

**- Sergio de Sousa**

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first horse we bred that raced in our colors is a horse called Maccarib Pass. He won a \$40,000 maiden claimer at Gulfstream. The feeling wouldn’t

have been any different had he won the Breeders’ Cup.”

De Sousa is the hands-on guy. He runs the farm, deals with the needs of the clients’ horses and gets his hands dirty. Hall is the businessman. He has a background in accounting and his primary role is to help grow the business. He’s always recruiting new clients and looking for more horses to sell. Brothers specializes in arranging matings and has years of experience in bloodstock. He was a long-time bloodstock advisor to Frank Stronach and still does work for Adena Springs. He’s also the people guy, the type that knows just about everyone in the business and is well-liked, important assets in any growing business.

Vella and Roberts are not involved in the day-to-day operation of the business and neither lives in Kentucky. Vella is a trainer based at Woodbine and Roberts is the farm manger of Adena Springs South in Florida.

The Hidden Brook staff includes Mike Recio, who has worked at Taylor Made and Mill Ridge Farm. He handles bloodstock services and client relations. Alan Fahey is Hidden Brook’s broodmare manager. They complete a team that was built with

the idea of bringing in people with a wealth of knowledge and experience in a wide variety of areas.

But simply knowing what you're doing isn't enough. The Hidden Brook team knows that they can only prosper if their clients are happy and their clients can only be happy if the Hidden Brook team is always straightforward with them. The cornerstone of the Hidden Brook philosophy is integrity, something that is sometimes in short supply in the businesses they deal in.

"That's something that is very important to us," Hall said. "That's a commonality you will find with the five of us, and that's why we were close friends before we became business partners. Our relationships were built on honesty and integrity and that's the way it's always been. It has been our approach from Day One. Does it hurt us going in the door with somebody? Maybe? Possibly? That's the kind of thing that people will appreciate down the road after you've been with them for a while. That's the way our business plan was built and it will not change. Eventually people see the value in that."

Hidden Brook has reinvested its profits back into its business. From a physical standpoint, the farm has expanded significantly since it opened some eight years ago and now consists of about 600 acres. Brothers, de Sousa and Hall are always thinking about what they are going to do next and in which direction to take the business. Their books tell them that their work at the sales, whether as consignors or advising buyers, has been the most profitable part of their business, so that is an area that will remain a priority. But Hidden Brook has never been about any one thing, and that doesn't figure to change.

As for Pompa, he currently campaigns about 40 horses and is active at the sales as both a buyer and a seller. That is another part of his strategy. He doesn't want to focus solely on any one area, believing that's an unnecessary risk because any one part of his operation could always have an



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off year.

"You have to be diversified," he said. "I still claim horses on occasion. I'll buy horses privately. I buy yearlings and 2-year-olds in training and I breed."

He's also always looking to sell, even when he develops a star, which was the case with Big Brown. After Big Brown broke his maiden in a 2-year-old grass race at Saratoga, Pompa sold 75 percent of the colt to IEAH Stables in a deal that put the colt's value at \$3 million. Big Brown went on to win the Florida Derby, the Kentucky Derby, the Preakness, the Haskell and the Monmouth Stakes before retiring with career earnings of \$3,614,500. Big Brown is currently standing at stud at Three Chimneys, which acquired his breeding rights just before the Preakness in a deal NBC reported

was worth \$50 million.

"You can't be afraid to sell good horses because in any business the only time you can make real money is when you're selling," Pompa said. "It's the same in the trucking business, the clothing business, the restaurant business. A lot of people don't want to sell because they're afraid that the horse might do better for the next guy. But if a guy pays \$400,000 for a horse, isn't he entitled to win some races? People, even some prominent people, don't want to sell just because they're afraid of the possibility that they might look bad."

Since Big Brown, Pompa has done a good job proving that he's more than just lucky. Much of his recent success has come on the racing side. His primary advisors in that aspect of the business are Nick Sallusto and Donald Brauer. They've helped Pompa find a number of underrated horses who have prospered once turned over to the Pompa stable. This Ones For Phil was bought privately after a modest 2-year-old campaign in Florida. He's since won two stakes in the Sunshine Millions series and has career earnings of nearly \$500,000. D'Funnybone also came out of Florida and has, since being bought privately by Pompa, won four graded stakes races. Pompa bought Zakocity off John Franks and, after the horse won the 2004 Discovery Handicap at Aqueduct, sold him to Saudi Arabian royalty for a hefty profit.

Whether it's Pompa or Hidden Brook, the goal is always the same, to find the next big horse, the one that puts a sizeable amount of money into the pockets of everyone involved.

"In this business, you're only as good as your last deal," Hall said. "We're not going to live off Big Brown forever. People are always looking at what you do next."

With Hidden Brook, Pompa just paid \$300,000 for a Smart Strike colt at the same Keeneland sale where they found Big Brown three years earlier. Will this be his next big thing? Considering the track record, you shouldn't bet against it.