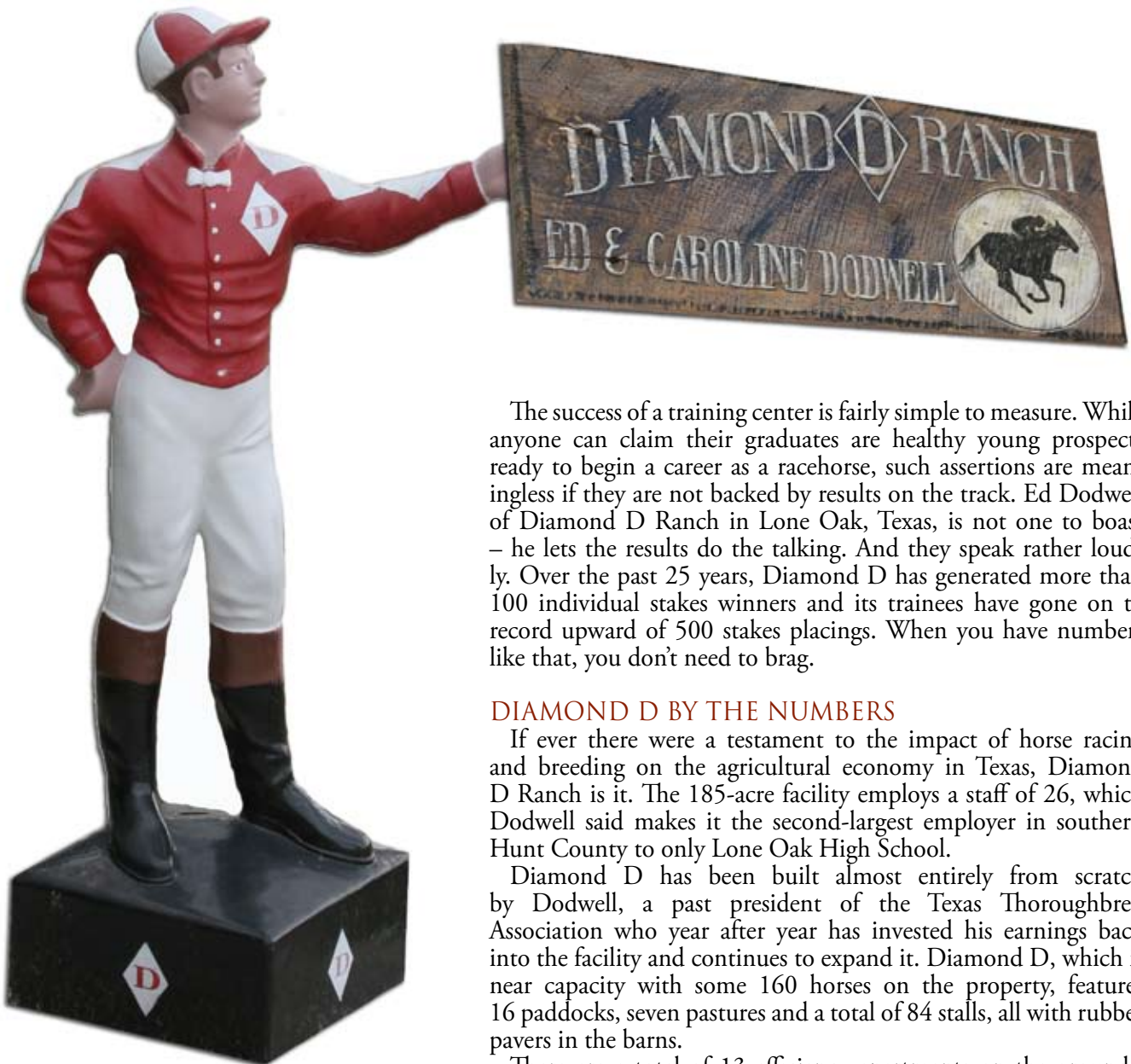


Diamond IN THE ROUGH

OVER THE PAST 25 YEARS, *Diamond D Ranch*
HAS LAID THE GROUNDWORK FOR MORE
THAN 100 STAKES WINNERS

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STORY AND PHOTOS BY DENIS BLAKE



The success of a training center is fairly simple to measure. While anyone can claim their graduates are healthy young prospects ready to begin a career as a racehorse, such assertions are meaningless if they are not backed by results on the track. Ed Dodwell of Diamond D Ranch in Lone Oak, Texas, is not one to boast – he lets the results do the talking. And they speak rather loudly. Over the past 25 years, Diamond D has generated more than 100 individual stakes winners and its trainees have gone on to record upward of 500 stakes placings. When you have numbers like that, you don't need to brag.

DIAMOND D BY THE NUMBERS

If ever there were a testament to the impact of horse racing and breeding on the agricultural economy in Texas, Diamond D Ranch is it. The 185-acre facility employs a staff of 26, which Dodwell said makes it the second-largest employer in southern Hunt County to only Lone Oak High School.

Diamond D has been built almost entirely from scratch by Dodwell, a past president of the Texas Thoroughbred Association who year after year has invested his earnings back into the facility and continues to expand it. Diamond D, which is near capacity with some 160 horses on the property, features 16 paddocks, seven pastures and a total of 84 stalls, all with rubber pavers in the barns.

There are a total of 13 efficiency apartments on the grounds, which Dodwell said is one of the keys to the long-term success of the ranch. Because of its relative isolation about an hour's drive northeast of Dallas, the availability of housing for grooms and ranch workers is limited.

“We bit the bullet and built an apartment building,” said Dodwell. “Without that we couldn’t have survived. We couldn’t have kept as much help.”

Diamond D’s five-eighths mile sandy loam track, which is licensed by the Texas Racing Commission to record official workouts, features a covered gazebo to allow owners to watch their young stars in action. To keep horses fit, rain or shine, Diamond D has three indoor walkers and two indoor round pens.

SAFETY AND EFFICIENCY WITHOUT CUTTING CORNERS

Safety and efficiency do not necessarily go hand in hand, but they do at Diamond D. It’s not hard to notice the careful planning that went into nearly every aspect of the operation, from safeguards to lessen the chance of equine and human injuries to a comprehensive drainage system to ensure an adequate water supply. The ranch stands out with its miles and miles of white iron-pipe fencing, but that’s not just for looks.

“I know in Kentucky they cringe when you talk about iron fencing, but it’s a lot safer than wood,” said Dodwell. “A horse might run into it and get a hematoma, but wood will break and stick into him. Plus they respect it so much; we don’t usually have one horse a year hit it.”

Water is always at a premium in Texas, but Dodwell has taken great steps to make sure the lack of it is never a problem at Diamond D. The ranch has drains everywhere with an intricate underground maze of pipes flowing into the clay-bottom ponds, which never dry up.

“There’s only one place where we don’t catch water, but we are working on that,” said Dodwell. “We use every inch of this place for hay, drainage, pasture or paddocks. We even cut hay out of the infield of the track. We’ve tried to make everything efficient and user friendly.”

Another feature of the facility is a well-designed system of pathways connecting the barns, paddocks, pastures and training track. While that’s not particularly unique, Dodwell has taken it a step further and added a series of swinging gates that serve to break the paths into small segments.



SCOOTER, CAROLINE AND ED DODWELL OF DIAMOND D RANCH HAVE SEEN MORE THAN 100 HORSES LEAVE THE TRAINING CENTER AND GO ON TO BECOME STAKES WINNERS.

If a horse gets loose while going to the track, a gate can be closed, reducing the chance of a horse getting injured or being able to run free.

And while the farm is a model of efficiency and prudent spending, Dodwell did splurge a bit on one luxury item – for his two Rhodesian Ridgebacks.

“I think we have the only two-bedroom, Hill Country stone air-conditioned dog house in the country,” he said.

The dogs, Shaka and Jama, earn their keep by serving as night watchmen, always on the lookout for coyotes.

THE DIAMOND D PROGRAM

Dodwell said it takes about seven months from start to finish to get a young prospect ready to go to a trainer at the track.

“If a horse is mentally and physically mature, I like to start breaking in September (of their yearling year) and then bring them back up in December to start getting them ready for Lone Star,” said Dodwell. “Even if you are not going to run a horse until he’s a 3-year-old, it’s good to get them

broken and then give them some time off.”

Just after they become yearlings, Dodwell separates the sexes and puts a special friend in each pasture – a donkey.

“If it starts raining, sleeting or snowing, he’ll take them in the building or he’ll take them to water or feed,” Dodwell said. “It’s worked real well.”

But horses won’t learn to run fast from a donkey, so they are put through the



A SYSTEM OF SWINGING GATES HELPS TO PREVENT HORSES FROM BUILDING UP A HEAD OF STEAM SHOULD THEY GET LOOSE BETWEEN THE BARN AND THE TRAINING TRACK.

Diamond D training program.

“The first 30 days are breaking, the second 30 are galloping and the last



AMONG THE MANY SAFETY FEATURES AT DIAMOND D ARE RUBBER PAVERS IN THE BARN.

30 we breeze them four times – a $\frac{1}{16}$ th, an $\frac{1}{8}$ th and two $\frac{3}{16}$ ths. At that point we try to tell the owner whether we see any talent or not.”

In addition to getting young horses ready for their racing debut, the ranch also provides rehab services, layups and sales prep and consignment. Diamond D’s reach extends well beyond the borders of Texas; Dodwell has been a mainstay at the Kentucky sales and more than half of his clients are from out of state.

Among the gems to come through Diamond D are Texas-bred superstars Jim’s Orbit and Darby’s Daughter, both Grade 2 winners and Grade 1-placed homebreds of Jim Cottrell. More recent grads include Be a Resident, winner of this year’s Texas Thoroughbred Association Sales Futurity and a division of the Texas Stallion Stakes, and 2005 Texas Champion 2-Year-Old Filly Final Trick. On the national scene, Diamond D alum Baghdaria just added another stakes win in the Indiana Oaks (G3), and Unbridled Express finished third in this year’s Hopeful Stakes (G1) after learning his early lessons at the Texas training center. And that schooling paid off to the tune of \$1.8 million for his owners – the reported selling price for a half-interest in the Unbridled’s Song colt.

A COUPLED ENTRY

Coincidentally, or perhaps not, the success of Diamond D has spanned nearly the same time period as Dodwell’s marriage to his wife, Caroline. Both husband and wife have a keen eye for horseflesh, and Caroline, a former schoolteacher, is an accomplished trainer in her own right. While she no longer trains at the track, she conditioned multiple stakes-winning Texas-bred Silent Reflex, a son of Staunch Avenger, and she won the Jean Lafitte Futurity at Delta Downs numerous times, back when it was one of richest races of the year for 2-year-olds.

“As soon as I graduated from college, I bought a horse before I bought a car,” said Caroline. “My parents were not horse people so it wasn’t until

I was 14 or 15 before they ever bought me a horse. They thought I’d outgrow it, but I never did.”

Caroline helps with breaking and is on the pony most days while horses are working on the track. Her name is on the trainer line of many of the winner’s circle photos that cover almost all the wall space in the Diamond D offices, and sitting next to the VCR is a tape with footage of a feature from an old Louisiana Downs replay show chronicling an amazing meet at the Bossier City track where she won with nine of her first 12 starters.

Over their 26 years of marriage, she’s seen the ranch built from mostly vacant land to a bustling and successful factory turning out stakes winner after stakes winner. And she’s been witness to Ed’s constant tinkering to improve the operation.

“I’ve seen him sit up long into the night drawing things out,” she said. “We had a little bit of dead space in a barn, so he sat down one night and then it became our therapy room.”

HANDING OVER THE REINS

Ed Dodwell is not exactly the retiring type, nor the kind of guy who sits around in an office. So it would take something pretty major to keep him from getting on a horse every morning and running the show at Diamond D. Luckily for Dodwell, his family was there to support him and take over the day-to-day operations when that major event – a heart attack followed by open heart surgery – occurred a bit over two years ago.

“To be honest, after I woke up from surgery I said it’s over; there’s



DODWELL USES DONKEYS TO LOOK OVER YEARLINGS IN THE PASTURE AND LEAD THEM TO SHELTER IN BAD WEATHER.

no way we are going to survive because all the customers depend on me,” Dodwell recalled.

To make matters worse, the now 67-year-old Dodwell has endured seven additional surgeries since then, mostly for a bone infection in his neck, plus he’s

been slowed by a bout with double pneumonia and an intestinal infection. Despite all that, Diamond D didn’t miss a beat as his son, Jimmy, filled the void.

The promotion to headman for Jimmy, or “Scooter” as he is known, didn’t come quite as quickly as he had thought it would, although it wasn’t due to a lack of effort or knowledge.

“I had been here for 18 years observing and working,” said the younger Dodwell. “I started as a groom, spreading manure and mowing pastures. I had to work from the bottom up. He sure wasn’t just going to give me the headman job. It made me appreciate it more, and I know what

everyone else needs to do because I've done it."

Not having to worry about the daily operations of the ranch undoubtedly helped Ed in his recovery, especially since he knew Diamond D was in good hands with Scooter, Caroline and the rest of the staff. In keeping with the family-run business theme, Scooter's wife, Jodi, who said she "didn't even know what a racehorse was 16 years ago when I married into this business," is the office secretary.

"When Scooter came here, he presumed he was going to be president, but that took a little while," said Ed. "But he stepped right up. I thought a lot of times he was sitting on the pony half asleep, but I guess he really was paying attention."

As for Scooter, he has tried to follow the example set by his father.

"The clients are the boss; we work for them," said Scooter. "I've tried to do everything exactly like he did it."

The biggest adjustment for Scooter has been the daily contact with the customers, which had always been handled by Ed.

"I thought Jimmy sounded more professional, so when someone called I'd say this is Jimmy, and then they'd ask for Scooter," he said about his phone duties. "I always figured I would outgrow the name, but I'm



THE 4-HORSE ELECTRIC STARTING GATE AT DIAMOND D HAS HELPED TEACH COUNTLESS RACEHORSES PROPER GATE MANNERS.

42 now and everyone just knows me as Scooter."

Just like his father, Scooter knows the importance of a hands-on approach and enjoys the success of each and every Diamond D graduate.

"I like watching the horses develop and seeing them do well at the track and seeing the owner's reaction," said Scooter. "They are like your kids. Not all of them do what you want them to do, but if a few of them do it makes it all worthwhile." ★