



Dr. John McKinley in one of the two vet clinics he owns and operates.

Having Fun Again

Dr. John and Shelagh McKinley's deep commitment to breeding quality Standardbreds paid off in spades last season as their Tymal Farms enjoyed its best year ever at the track and in the sales ring.

By Heather MacKay Roberts
Photos by Chris Gallow

"It was gut check time, that's for sure," recalls Dr. John McKinley who owns the boutique Standardbred breeding operation Tymal Farms with his wife Shelagh.

When Ontario breeders were devastated and disgusted a few years ago by a depressed market at the yearling sales, the couple had a tough decision to make. Do they stick it out and invest more into their farm or, like many others in the province, throw in the towel and cut their losses?

They opted to continue on with their operation near Oldcastle, Ontario (near Windsor) and that decision paid off handsomely in 2006 as they enjoyed their best year ever both at the sales and on the track since they began breeding

Standardbreds 15 years ago.

Their nine horse consignment at the Forest City Sale was led by Tymal Artista who topped the second day session when she was purchased by Gregg McNair for \$82,000. The Art Major filly is a half-sister to Tymal Trinity one of last year's better two-year-old pacing fillies in Ontario.

"Artista was a gorgeous filly, one of the nicest we've ever sold off the farm. She certainly looked the part," says John.

The farm was the leading consignor at the premier Ontario sale conducted in London as their colts and fillies averaged \$37,778.

They also sold three yearlings at the Kentucky Selected Sale. "That was the first time we've sold in Kentucky and we

really were impressed, it truly is the horse mecca there," John notes. "We had sold in Harrisburg a few years ago but didn't have the stock. This time we sold with Preferred Equine and they did a great job for us."

The consignment was topped by the Andover Hall filly Tymal Madelena who sold to Robert Lindstrom of Sweden for \$70,000.

Several top competitors shone the spotlight on Tymal Farms on the race-track during the 2006 racing season including Tymal Trinity who captured headlines when she handed superstar Luck Of Michelle her first defeat in Ontario Sires Stakes action in a \$101,000 Gold series elimination at Rideau Carleton in late September. A Mach

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Three filly, Trinity earned a total of \$148,000 last year.

Tymal Timeout, a rookie daughter of Royal Strength, collected \$234,712 last year. The consistent miss had standings of 6-4-1 in 14 starts during her debut season.

Other successful graduates included the two-year-old trotting colt Tymal Cherub who won an elimination of the William Wellwood Memorial and over \$70,000 and the rookie trotting filly Tymal Francesca, a winner of \$38,000 last year.

McKinley refers to Cherub as "a diamond in the rough. He should have made twice as much as he did. He's got tons of speed but is a bit big and immature. I have 100 per cent faith in Gregg (trainer McNair) to do right by him."

The wonderful year proved to the couple that they'd made the right decision a few years back to remain in the breeding business when the future appeared rather bleak.

"We decided if we were going to stay in we had to spend some money to obtain good mares. The last few years haven't been stellar but we figured if it was going to work we had to keep at it and operate it as a business. You have to be vicious about culling, there can be no pets in the field. Over the past four or five years we've turned our entire broodmare band over and you have to live with every decision you make.

"It's difficult to come away from a sale where you've broke even, if that, to say 'I've got to go out and buy better mares.' We had to borrow from our other business to be able to do it and that's a bit frightening when you aren't sure of the future of the industry.

"We were grinding away for a few years and I'll admit it wasn't much fun, but this year that's turned around and we've had a lot of fun. Shelagh deserves much of the credit as she goes above and beyond the call of duty."

"It's a long time between breeding a mare and getting the yearling to market," says Shelagh. "There's so much to take into consideration, it's hard to predict what sires will be fashionable by the time that yearling sells."

"I truly believe that the Ontario



Photo by New Image Media

At \$21,000 no one got rich selling Tymal Timeout as a yearling in the fall of 2005 but trainer Wayne Henry made it pay off last summer. The Royal Strength filly won \$234,712 and gave her dam Lukes Elvira a valuable credit while helping her Kadabra yearling sister sell for \$30,000 last year.

market is going to improve. Look what is happening in Pennsylvania and New York. The Americans are more content to stay home now and perhaps that will mean there will be less competition in the Ontario market," explains John.

"Slots coming to New York and Pennsylvania was a godsend to Ontario. That doesn't mean that you can show up at the yearling sale without quality stock though. We believe the Ontario program is still the best in the world so naturally that's where we'll concentrate most of our breeding. It's very nice to get the breeders' awards as well, they can add up substantially.

"We had a great year (in 2006) with \$450,000 in yearling sales it was easily our best year ever. And it has given us the opportunity to try and add to the top end of our broodmare band."

To that end they went shopping last fall, but they didn't concentrate on broodmares, but rather race mares and ended up buying three at the Standardbred Canada mixed sale in London and one at Harrisburg.

They shelled out \$50,000 for the five-year-old Tagliabue daughter Blossom Seelster, a winner of \$372,000 to date and a multiple stakes winner and track record holder. The mare was placed in McNair's stable as was another of their purchases, Patsys Point, a Striking Sahbra

filly who has \$118,000 on her card to date and is currently racing at Woodbine.

"We'll race them for a few months to recoup some of their purchase price," says John. "We're considering racing Patsy as a four-year-old (in 2007), but haven't made a final decision."

At Harrisburg he bought the four-year-old Cams Card Shark daughter Secret Deal, a winner of \$128,000 in her career with a mark of 1:52.1. "She's done her racing career, but I liked the look of her. She'd raced in the Breeders Crown as a two-year-old (finishing third in her elim and fourth in the final) so she had some class.

"In the past we've bought mares in foal, but the last couple of years at Harrisburg they've gone a bit bonkers with the prices. I don't have a great deal of time to be chasing mares so I thought if we could get a couple of mares at the London sale it would work out and it did. Patsys Point took a new life mark of 1:56.1 in her first start for us.

"We wanted to step up the quality of our broodmare band and I figured we could spend \$100 to \$120,000. It worked out well and we couldn't be any happier with the mares we bought."

The horse breeding operation is a secondary business for John, a veterinarian who operates two clinics, the South

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Howard Animal Clinic and the Amherstburg Animal Clinic which is overseen by his partner Dr. Martin Ross.

The clinics handle small animal work. "The only large animal work I do is on my own horses," admits John who served as an Ontario Racing Commission vet at Windsor Raceway for several years.

"I started out in London with large animals after I graduated and it was cold work and I got tired of being booted around. The small animal work is much safer and warmer."

John had been exposed to harness horses since his youth as his father Bob, a Member of Parliament for 15 years, owned a number of racehorses over the years. While he was attending the University of Guelph he purchased a horse from his father and used it to obtain his driver's license at the now defunct Oranville and Elmira Raceways.

In 1991 he and Shelagh decided to open a small breeding operation. With John's commitments at the vet clinic, the majority of the day to day work at the farm falls on Shelagh's shoulders.

"I always liked horses. I had riding horses and my father had owned a few different breeds, including Thoroughbreds. I didn't know what a Standardbred was before I met John though," Shelagh admits.

"I have one Spanish Andalusian mare that we bred by frozen semen to a multiple Brazilian and U.S. champion who is now located in Texas. This mating resulted in a flashy colt that will eventually be offered privately for sale through our website as a Dressage prospect."

"The Andalusian is the type of horse Bo Derek rode in the movie 10," explains John.

That mare and the 20 plus Standardbred mothers keep the couple busy throughout the year.

They bought the property where the clinic is now located in 1988 and it also held a training centre which was sold in 1993 to Stan Malec who operates it as the Classic Farms and Training Centre. The McKinleys severed six acres off to hold the clinic which is 9,500 square feet.

In 2000 they purchased a 40 acre property just down the road which previously belonged to Ontario horseman Bill Gale and was already set up as a horse operation.

They rent out the house at that location and live a half mile away on a 10 acre farm which is where the mares foal.

The name Tymal was derived by combining the names of the couple's children, Mallory and Tyler. Mallory is taking business at University with a goal of becoming a lawyer. Tyler, 19, played three years in the Ontario Hockey League and is now attending the University of Windsor and plays for that school's hockey team.

One of the farm's early claims to fame is having once owned two of the sport's greatest pacing broodmares when they first started their horse operation.

That began with the first mare they ever bought at the Royal Blue Sale at Mohawk.

She was called Cathedral City and she gave birth to a Run The Table daughter which Tymal sold at the 1994 Canadian Classic Yearling Sale, the first time they had offered yearlings at public auction. The filly was hammered down to respected Ontario trainer Larry Ainsworth for \$32,000 and a year later she'd be collecting an O'Brien award as Canada's Two Year Old Pacing Filly of the Year. Not a bad beginning.

The filly's name was Cathedra who would earn \$733,000 in her career before being retired. She is now a member of the famed Hanover Shoe Farm band and her foals to date include such stars as Cabrini Hanover, Cathedra Dot Com, Western Shooter and The Preacher Pan.

The couple regrets not having a member of that family still in their broodmare band.

"After Cathedra the mare had three colts by Run The Table but we weren't able to get a filly before she died," says John.

The same year they bought Cathedral City, they also purchased a few yearlings and the star of the half dozen proved to be the Armbro Emerson daughter Classic Wish which they bought from Daylon Farms for \$25,000.

The filly earned close to \$50,000 for them before they sold her for six figures early in her three-year-old season to John Grant of Hornby, Ont.

Classic Wish would become the fastest Canadian-sired filly of all time when she time trialed in 1:52 at Lexington later that year with John Campbell in the bike. The winner of \$430,000 in her career is now owned by Winbak Farm. She has also gone on to become a leading matron having left \$2.5 million winner Bettors Delight (who was also owned by Grant) and Triple Crown winner No Pan Intended.

When the McKinleys began their breeding operation they



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concentrated primarily on pacers but have branched out into trotters in the last few years.

"At the Grand Royal Farm dispersal a few years ago we bought Sand Smooth Action, the dam of Grand Sovereign (a winner of \$354,000). We also have a lease arrangement with Ron Waples on a few mares including Lukes Elvira, the dam of Tymal Timeout. That relationship has worked out quite well, Ron and his wife Liz are great to deal with," notes John.

"Now over half of our broodmare band are trotters; they seem to sell well."

At the beginning they didn't use the Tymal prefix in the names of their foals but a few ago they decided to out of necessity.

"We found it was becoming more difficult to find names for them and figured it would be easier to name them Tymal something," recalls Shelagh. "You take a risk with that though as everyone knows where they came from if they don't turn out."

The couple are optimistic about the future of their operation. "I have a good feeling about the Ontario program. I think it's going to get better for those of us here. It isn't as conducive any more for breeders from the states to breed their mares here as much as they once did.

"What really hurt us in the past was the stud fees. You had to spend so much on the fees and many didn't get the return. Now the farms have lowered the fees to a reasonable area which has remedied some of the problem.

"What we find is if someone has made money with a horse they've purchased from you, they'll be back. We noticed that a lot this year."

John admits that they have an advantage with a vet as an owner. "I'm able to diagnose pregnancies early and address any problems that may arise. We've had a really good success rate in getting mares in foal and I think that's because I'm able to stay on top of it."

One decision the couple made two years ago was to stop taking in outside mares and simply concentrate on their own stock.

"We found it wasn't worthwhile. The time and effort you put into it wasn't worth the return and we were spread too thin and then found ourselves having to chase the money.

"We also don't take yearlings in to prep any more and I think that all has paid off this year. If we take time on someone else's horse, that's time away from our horses. In the long run it's better. We are concentrating on a good feeding program and handling the yearlings more."

The ability to focus strictly on their own horses has obviously paid off well for the couple and the farm and they have high hopes for the future.

"It was a good year for us and we're very optimistic that Ontario is moving onward and upward. I feel pretty confident.

"We love the business and being around the horses and really wanted to make a go of it which is why we hung on. Hopefully we can build on what we have and I believe we're poised now to do a lot better. I truly believe the best is yet to come." 🐾

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Rick Webb, Farm Manager, is seen with OK Acrobat and OK Amazing at their training stable. These two colts have been jogging since October and are preparing to qualify for the Two-Year-Old In Training sale in late May, 2007.

OK Acrobat is a Mach Three gelding out of Leapfire. OK Amazing is a Presidential Ball gelding out of Big City Dreams.

Caroline Thornton and Ken Morden own the boutique operation that is geared toward producing the best Standardbred horses possible. Our team of professionals is dedicated to that result.



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