



Mike Puype in Profile

By Steve Schuelein

Hard work never scared Mike Puype.

When he was 11, he had his own newspaper delivery route in Phoenix.

While Puype earned a degree in business at Arizona State, he worked three jobs simultaneously, including training a couple of horses at Turf Paradise.

Puype, 44, has never slowed down, helping to explain his rise to the top echelon on the Southern California circuit.

"They can't outwork me," said Puype recently after breaking into the top 100 earnings list in North America for the first time in 2010 with a personal high of \$1,782,936 in purse winnings.

"Work ethic is my strongest suit," said the clean-cut trainer known to

be the first to arrive in the stable area at 3 a.m. and the last to leave.

The resident workhorse on the circuit is a prime example of "the-harder-I-work,-the-luckier-I-seem-to-get" philosophy.

"Since I came back to California from Kentucky in 2002, every year has shown an increase in number of starters, number of wins and earnings," said Puype, who currently runs a 48-horse stable divided between Hollywood Park and Santa Anita.

"It's a nice trend to continue, and I'm fortunate to be moving in the right direction," continued Puype, reaping the dividends of his dedication. "I have every expectation of going forward again this year."

The number one reason for Puype's steady ascent last year was a talented filly named Turbulent Descent, who climaxed an unbeaten 2-year-old campaign with a facile victory in the \$412,250 Grade 1 Hollywood Starlet Stakes.

"I don't see having to duck anybody," said Puype, looking forward to a 2011 campaign with the filly scheduled to start with the Grade 1 Las Virgenes Stakes and Santa Anita Oaks before shipping to major tests around the country.

"She's a dream come true," said Puype of Turbulent Descent. "She went from a maiden win at six furlongs to a stakes win (the Moccasin) at seven, to a Grade 1 win at a mile and a sixteenth, and in all three she could have done more.

"David (jockey David Flores) preserved a lot," said Puype. "You've got a filly who's the real deal with an ultra-confident jockey: a lethal combination."

The Florida-bred filly was named for a bumpy airplane flight that landed in Tennessee while transporting her to California from Florida last April after she was purchased at an Ocala 2-year-old sale.

Puype was horrified seeing the lacerations the filly sustained. "She was messed up as bad as any horse I've ever seen come to the barn," said Puype. "One ankle was cut so deep you could put your finger in to the bone. Luckily it didn't involve the joint."

Scott Sherwood, president of the nine-member Blinkers On Racing Stable that is majority owner of the filly, praised Puype. "I can't say enough about Mike and his team and the vets, the way they waited for her in the barn that night," said Sherwood.

Puype credited now-retired trainer Greg Gilchrist, who bought the filly in Florida, for steering Blinkers On to his barn. He also thanked Tom Hudson, manager of Magali Farms in Santa Ynez, for helping him acquire his three other major stakes horses of 2010: Quisisana, Bruce's Dream, and Supreme Summit.

Like Puype, all four horses have a lot of "try" in them.

Ran Jan Racing's Quisisana, a California-bred mare by Magali stallion Decarchy, won the Sunshine Millions Filly & Mare Sprint at Santa Anita in January by a nose over Dubai Majesty, who went on to win the Breeders' Cup Filly & Mare Sprint.



Unbeaten two-year-old Turbulent Descent took a facile victory on the \$412,250 Grade I Hollywood Starlett Stakes

Bruce's Dream, a 5-year-old gelding, swept the California Dreamin Stakes on the Del Mar turf and the California Cup Mile on the Hollywood Park grass for owner-breeder Bruce Corwin.

Supreme Summit was a closing second in the Grade 1 Ancient Title Stakes at Hollywood Park, prompting owner Joseph Lacombe to supplement him to the Breeders' Cup Sprint, in which he closed strongly to finish fourth. "He was 13 ½ lengths back and got beat by 1 ½ lengths," said

Puype looks like a natural but was never steered in the direction of racing. His father, George, owns Aspen Systems, a computer company primarily operating in the meat industry. His mother, Anne, is a retired nurse.

"My parents always pushed education as important," said Puype, who grew up with five sisters, all of whom graduated from college. "Education is a form of discipline more than anything."

Puype could have followed in his father's footsteps, but never had any desire to pursue a career in technology. "Going into training horses may not have been what my parents wanted, but I followed my passion," said Puype.

Puype's passion started at a young age. "My grandparents would come from Minnesota for a winter visit and we lived a mile from the track," recalled Puype of his first visit to Turf Paradise at 11. "I got hooked and wanted to go again."

Puype found jobs in the barn area as a teenager, bought a couple of inexpensive horses with some friends and passed his test for a training license in 1986 for his first client, Melle Bos. "Motivation comes from within," explained Puype of his indefatigable drive.

Puype learned to organize time while training, going to college and handling two other part-time jobs. "I worked as a bartender at a night club and still worked for the newspaper company, the Arizona Gazette, delivering loads of papers to the delivery boys. The job with the paper was good because it only involved an hour and a half of work, but the worst part was that once in a while the papers arrived late, and you would just have to wait."

Puype has not wasted a minute since after going on his own in Turf Paradise with a small string in the late 1980's. Puype got his first look at California in the summer of 1990, working under trainer Mel Stute.

"One of Mel's assistants was Gary Gregory, who was the nephew of Gary Biszantz, who had horses with Mel," explained Puype of his introduction to the owner of Cobra Farm. "Gary (Biszantz) hooked me up with trainer Walter Greenman. I was his assistant in Northern California from 1991 until 1995.

"I went from a barn of seven to 11 horses in Phoenix to one with 25 to 30," said Puype of his expanded learning. "Walter was a great influence on any aspect of my training.

"Walter was a first-class man and always paid his bills promptly," said Puype of the late conditioner. "I tried to model myself after him. Gary Biszantz was the same way."

Puype went on his own with Biszantz in 1995 and enjoyed his first rise to prominence with Cobra Farm in an alliance that lasted until 2002. Those glory days shuttling between California and Kentucky included several major stakes winners producing milestone memories.

Puype's first big horse was Cobra King, who won the 1995 Best Pal and Hollywood Prevue Stakes and 1996 Holy Bull Stakes at Gulfstream Park before being injured in the Florida Derby.

In 1996, Running Flame gave Puype his first Grade 1 win in the \$500,000 Hollywood Turf Cup. In 1997, Argentine-bred Lord Grillo upset Silver Charm in the Grade 1 Malibu Stakes at Santa Anita. Old Trieste won four graded stakes, including the \$500,000 Swaps Stakes by 12 lengths in 1998 and Californian Stakes in a brisk 1:46 2/5 for 1 1/8 miles in 1999.

By 2002, Puype decided to settle permanently in California, establish a public stable and begin the latest chapter of his career. "Gary gave me seven horses to get started, which was very important to set me back up," said Puype. "Countless people helped me along and none stronger than Tom Hudson at Magali." Puype thanked Hudson not only for turning some Magali horses over to him but also for recommending him to several farm clients.

Puype relied heavily on word of mouth for business. "I don't hustle people and don't work the phone," said Puype. "I go by reputation.

"It's not my style to wear a suit, and people I know make fun of me when I dress up for graded stakes," said Puype with a grin.

Puype is more at ease in the barn, performing practically every chore except riding the horse. "I work in the trenches with the crew," said Puype, who blends in easily with assistants Manny Landeros, Francisco Garcia, and Jose Soto and other stable hands.

Puype raises the definition of hands-on to new heights. He personally takes care of everything from feeding to medication, from shoeing to vaccinations. You can find Puype any morning with a lead shank in his hand after cleaning a stall and putting on bandages.

Puype also takes pride in his integrity and spotless record. "If you can't win trying to be clean, why do this?" he asked. "I do the best job I can and let the rest take care of itself."

Puype said he loves to win as much as anybody, but that a family tragedy in 2000 put winning and losing races in perspective. "My oldest sister, Peggy, died of brain cancer at 42," said Puype. "She was a teacher, had done everything right, and it wiped her out in two months.

"I used to take losing so much harder before that," said Puype of his revised priorities. "It doesn't matter if your horse finishes first, fifth or eighth, what's important is that you can get up the next morning healthy.

"It teaches you that this is just a game," continued Puype of the lesson. "I take it seriously, but it is just a game, and I'm a better person for it."

Like most California horsemen, Puype is concerned about the many clouds darkening the horizon of the racing industry. He sees a shortened racing calendar as imperative in restoring the sport.

"The CHRB (California Horse Racing Board) needs to get a spine and decide how many dates it allocates to each meet," said Puype. "Santa Anita took a leap of faith with a four-day racing week this winter. We don't have enough horses for five-day-a-week racing.

"We keep shooting ourselves in the foot, but it starts with a better product," continued Puype. "We are destroying the game with too much schedule. We need to get the field sizes up. The CHRB has to step up and take the initiative to make the product better."

If the board is looking for a trainer willing to work to meet those ends, contact Mike Puype. □



Quisisana (nearside) won the Sunshine Millions Filly & Mare Sprint at Santa Anita last January by a nose over Breeders' Cup winner Dubai Majesty