

Flag Is Up Farms: A Very Good Place To Start



*Thoroughbred Farms
In California*

by RUDI GROOTHEDDE

In today's fast-paced Thoroughbred world, it's very satisfying to find a place that truly emphasizes the need to be patient and kind when it comes to starting young horses. Such a place is Flag Is Up Farms in Solvang, California, which celebrates its 40th anniversary of equine success this year.

Its owners, the world-famous "horse whisperer" Monty Roberts and his wife of 50 years, Pat, an internationally acclaimed sculptor herself, have come a long way since their grammar school days in Salinas. From being the nation's leading two-year-old consignors between 1973 and 1990 to their close association with 2004 grade I winner Sabiango (Ger), they have worked hard together to make Flag Is Up a very good place to start when it comes to caring for Thoroughbreds.

Asked about what they attributed their continued success to, Monty states simply that it is, "To the team. Pat and I have been partners for half a century now, and we have extended our team to include many competent people some of whom have been with us for more than 20 years." He then adds, "I suppose a short answer would be that all of us put the horse first."

Back In The Day

Conveniently located halfway between two of California's premier racetracks, Santa Anita Park down south and Golden Gate Fields up north, and just one mile east of Highway 101, Flag Is Up was established by Monty and Pat back in 1966. Even



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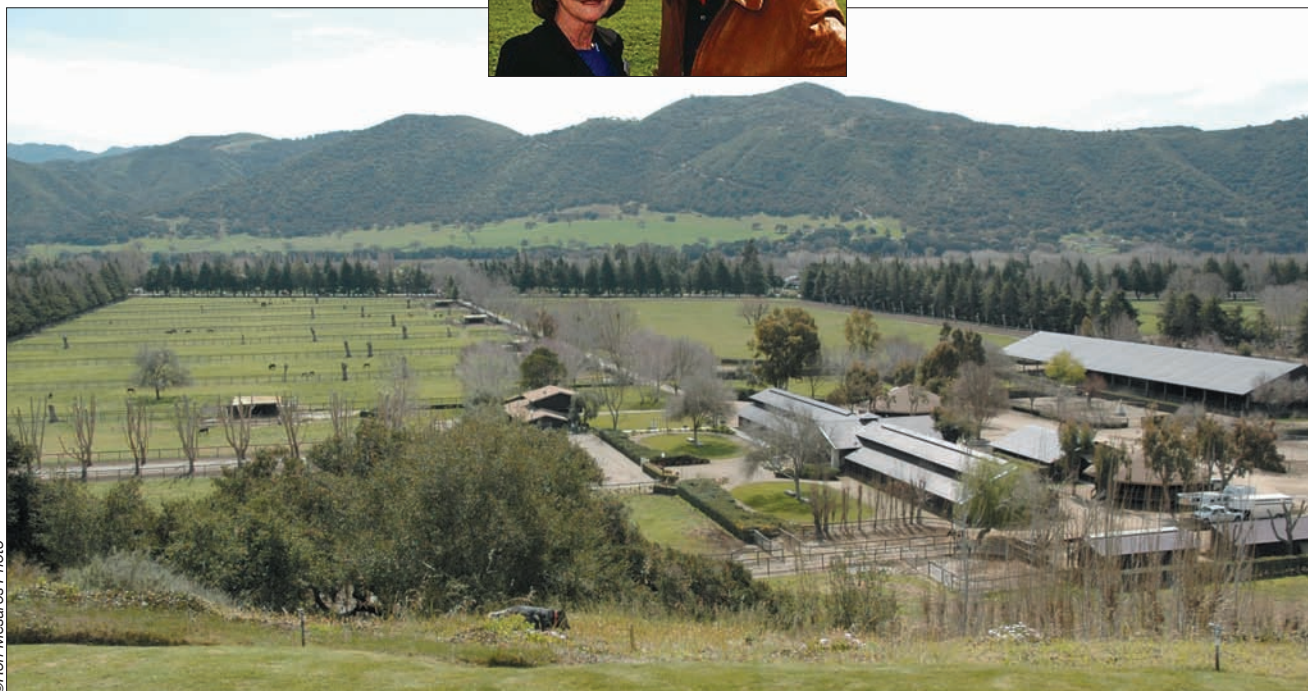
though it has been considerably downsized over the past four decades from over 1,000 acres to its current 95-acre status, it remains a popular destination for horses in need of breaking, training, lay ups and sales preparation.

After being introduced to Thoroughbreds in 1959, Monty has been starting—his innovative version of breaking—horses with a method that he since has developed over the years. "Join Up® is the title of the body of work that I do, and I feel that it is important to utilize this method to provide a completely violence-free environment for every horse," says the 70-year-old horse show and rodeo champion. The author of five books, including his first best-seller *The Man Who Listens to Horses*, and countless training videos, now travels the world demonstrating his unique gifts.

From the Queen of England to hundreds of corporations to the man on the street, Monty Roberts is in demand, and so is Flag Is Up. Even though he spends only a couple of months at the farm every year, it is thriving under Pat's management, while Monty's influence manifests itself in Flag Is Up's 20-plus employees who are all versed in Join Up® and thus provide each and every horse with the best care possible.

Entrusted with a lot of this responsibility is the farm's Training Superintendent, Wayne Robison. "My main goal with young horses is to give them the physical

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*Thoroughbred Farms
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and mental foundation they need to succeed at the racetrack,” says the 22-year-old native of South Dakota who first worked at Flag Is Up in 2001, returning to the farm last year after gaining invaluable experience with trainers both back east and in Southern California. He adds, “Monty and Pat give me a lot of freedom, yet they are always there if I have any questions. I love working here because it’s a great opportunity to train at a first-class facility.”

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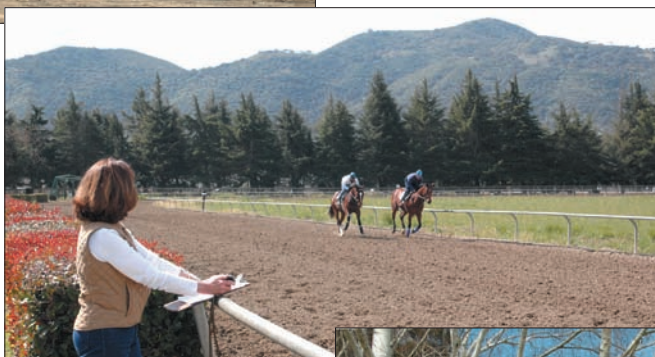
First-Class Facilities

Besides the farm’s obvious pride and joy, its professionally maintained 5/8ths-of-a-mile training track which is 48 feet wide and consists of a solid clay based surface with a three-inch sandy loam cushion, Flag Is Up is blessed with many other first-class training amenities and technological innovations.

There are two large arenas, including a 24,000-square-foot covered area with a two-inch deep yellow sand and coarse plaster sand surface that offers an alternative location to train during bad weather, and numerous paddocks with adjacent feeding pens and run-in sheds. Also still on-site are the two covered round pens (50 feet in diameter) that were groundbreaking in nature when Monty originally had them built. “I like the efficient design of the training area. It is very easy to work with,” says Wayne.

Another of Flag Is Up’s original structures, all of which are still in great condition, is its 40-stall main barn. Combined with the other five barns on the property, it brings the total stall count to 89. These individual 12x12 units prove to be both safe and comfortable based on their soft and easily manageable baked wood pellet bedding. It prevents allergens from becoming a problem and their door openings on each side always provide good air circulation and quick exits for the horses in the case of an emergency.

Monty confides that, “It has been a lifelong pursuit to achieve efficient and effective facilities that contribute to a high level of education for the horses with safety foremost in mind.”



Other notable facilities at Flag Is Up include: the Monty Roberts Equestrian Academy, which is open all year for students of Join Up®; a private mill, that has been producing a fresh and nutritionally balanced feed ever since the farm’s inception; a portable irrigation system, which is continually fed by three wells; and a USDA-approved quarantine facility, that is currently being upgraded. Once completed, hopefully by the end of summer this year, the latter will encompass a 12-stall barn, a four-horse free walker and two turn-out paddocks, thus making it a perfect spot for horses traveling to and from Dubai, Europe, Hong Kong and Australia to transition.

Another exciting addition that is soon coming to Flag Is Up is the installation of a revolutionary new oval-shaped horse walker which Pat likes to refer to as, “a moving stall. We believe that it will be the future of horse walkers because it should further reduce the risk of injury. It is the only way to go.”

Monty has been working for the past few years with a German company on the design and manufacture of this 12-horse free walker that will be the first of its kind in the United States. Wayne mentions, “Whereas today’s conventional walkers require the horse to constantly turn, this walker allows horses to travel a straight line, reducing the stress on their joints as they jog or walk freely in its individual compartments which are separated by rubber partitions.” Monty adds, “It is my hope that I will be able to bring to the Thoroughbred industry a long

list of reasons why the oval horse walker will be shown as the very best of cutting edge technology when it comes to horse walkers and exercisers.”

The Secret Formula

“We owe it all to the wonderful horses we have had to work with,” says Monty when questioned about the reasons why Flag Is Up has enjoyed so much success over the years. However, the outstanding results are equally due to his non-traumatic training method of Join Up®, through which he’s started over 15,000 horses.

Numbered among the farm’s successful graduates of the program are two-time Prix de l’Arc de Triomphe winner

Alleged, grade I Santa Anita Derby victor An Act, European champion Lomitas (Ger), California champion Walk in the Sun, grade I winner Mehmet, \$2,308,923-earner Star of Cozzene, U.S. highweights Cathy Honey and Aladancer, as well as many others.

Wayne explains his starting process, integrating the Join Up® method. “Beginning in September or October, the young horses aged 18 months and up are started in the round pen. I start by driving them with lunge lines, generally having a rider up on them within the first three days. Then I take them to one of the large arenas and start them jogging figure-eights. After about a week of getting them comfortable with this, the babies move onto the training track, where they eventually jog two to 2 1/2 miles a day. Gate training and teaching them to change leads usually begins within 30 to 45 days of their introduction to the track. If all goes well, they’ll be galloping by December and breezing by mid-February depending, of course, on the horse’s readiness. We have them go out in sets of two, three or four—under myself and our three experienced exercise riders—to give them the experience of being in a real race.”

He adds, “I am comfortable doing all kinds of speed work on this track, which means that I can get my horses to a point where they are breezing on a weekly basis. From March onwards, the horses begin to leave to trainers at the track, well prepared for a successful racing career.”

The People That Matter

Flag Is Up prides itself on the good service it provides to its clients. With the help of its other dedicated, knowledgeable and longstanding employees, including Office Manager Sally Holt, Foreman Salvador Sanchez, Head Groom Manuel Castro and Facilities Manager Fernando Oroasco, the farm caters to the every need of a clientele list featuring Jeff Lovinger, Baseline Equine, Marty Gellman, Shimamura Racing, Leonard Dunham, trainer Paul Aguirre, trainer Barry Abrams and his major client Madeline Auerbach, to name but a few.

As Madeline explains, “I count myself as being very, very lucky to have found Flag Is Up. Back in 2000, my late husband and I had a number of babies from the first crop of our stal-

lion Unusual Heat who were ready to take the next step and be trained. Jim thought very highly of Monty’s Join Up® method and because he was already then really sick, we were looking for the best place possible that was also a close enough drive. I’ve been sending all my babies there ever since.”

Madeline and her partners have about 10 horses at Flag Is Up right now and have seen many of Unusual Heat’s progeny successfully graduate from the starting program. These include graded stakes winner Tucked Away, multiple stakes winner Thermal Ablasion and one of Madeline’s favorites, 2003 California Cup Mile winner Lennyfromalibu who is now enjoying a well-deserved retirement back at the farm in the company of his pet goat!

On The Horizon

For Monty and Pat, the future will hopefully mean an opportunity to spend more time together. As Monty says, “Time will obviously dictate that I spend a great deal more time at Flag Is Up, and I look forward to a more relaxed existence than I have had for the past 15 years.”

For their children, daughters Deborah and Laurel and son Marty, the future will eventually mean inheriting a famous legacy that each of them have been involved with, both in the past and presently, and which they have seen thrive over the past 40 years.

For the horses, most importantly, the future will certainly mean even more benefits than they have right now. This translates into greater success for those associated with the farm. “Thoroughbred owners should choose Flag Is Up, because we are providing their horses with a world-class facility and a dedicated team who cares,” says Monty.

Monty concludes, “I always had and continue to have great hopes for the Thoroughbred industry in California. I further hope that Flag Is Up Farms will continue to be a major factor in the world of the Thoroughbred horse for the rest of my days, and even for the next generation to come. I love working with horses, and I am driven to complete a mission in which I become as good as I can at understanding them. My life’s goal is to leave the world a better place than I found it, for horses and for people, too.”



FACT-FILE

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Services: Starting, Training, Lay Ups & Sales Preparation
Horse Population (April 2006):
 Horses in Training 58
 Lay Ups 15
 Yearlings 12
 Mares 12
 Stallions 2
 Quarter Horses 50
TOTAL 149