

The Ultimate Honor



From the Executive Corner

by DOUG BURGE

The cover of this January 2008 edition of our *California Thoroughbred* magazine features the five newly inducted members into the California Hall of Fame. These three noteworthy individuals and two legendary horses have contributed immensely to the Thoroughbred industry in the state and are well deserving of such an honor.

John Harris has been a fixture among the state's leading owners and breeders for several decades. Horses bred and/or owned by his Harris Farms continue to have a major influence on California racing as they are frequently spotted in the starting gates and winner's circles in both Northern and Southern California.

It is, however, John's commitment to the industry in California that sets him apart. He has always been a strong believer in the California-bred program and has worked tirelessly to improve the environment for those breeding and racing in the Golden State. It has been through John's leadership and influence in both the Legislature and throughout the racing community that has resulted in California offering one of the largest Incentive and Restricted Racing Programs in the country.

As a 30-year member of the CTBA Board of Directors, and two-time Past President, he is very deserving of this honor. But, most importantly, it is through his caring, appreciation and friendship to everyone that shares his love for California racing that makes him more than deserving. This honor is long overdue.

Long time trainer and CTBA member, Mel Stute, is another deserving addition to the Hall of Fame. For over 50 years, Mel has been a wonderful ambassador for the California racing industry, campaigning numerous stakes-winning Cal-breds. The best, of course, was 1986 Preakness winner and Eclipse Award-winning three-year old Snow Chief.

Over the years, Mel has been a great supporter of the California breeding industry, always attending the local sales and frequently appearing in the results, purchasing yet another Cal-bred hopeful. On our big racing days (California Cup, California Gold Rush and Sunshine Millions), you can always count on quite a few Mel Stute horses to compete.

Along with wife Annabelle, Mel has also bred numerous Cal-bred winners. As a tremendous advocate for the industry, and one always willing to give of his time to help promote California racing, he is indeed a deserving recipient of this honor.

The nation's winningest jockey, Russell Baze, has become the seventh jockey inducted into the California Hall of Fame. Fast approaching 10,000 wins, with the bulk of those taking place in Northern California and with Cal-breds, it is only fitting that Russell join the elite group of inductees.

As a member of the National Racing Hall of Fame, Baze continues to annually win the riding titles at Golden Gate Fields and Bay Meadows Racecourse. He is also a fixture at many Cal-bred stakes events, often venturing south to pilot the top Northern California contenders. This year alone, he won two California Cup races, including the Classic. Russell Baze is yet another very deserving entrant into the California Hall of Fame.

The two equine heroes being inducted into the Hall of Fame, Decidedly and Flying Paster, are both great representatives of the high quality of horses bred in California over the years.

Decidedly, bred by George Pope and foaled at his famed El Peco Ranch in Madera, is best known as one of the three Cal-breds to win the Kentucky Derby. His record-setting victory in the 1962 Derby was a full second faster than the previous mark. He stood at stud in California and Kentucky for 20 years.

Flying Paster, bred and owned by B. J. and Georgia Rider, was named California Horse of the Year as a two-year-old. He was a grade I winner at three and five, retiring as only the third Cal-bred millionaire at that time.

As a sire, Flying Paster proved to be one of the best stallions to ever stand in California. He was a leading sire in the state for five years in a row, leaving a lasting impression on the bloodlines of many Cal-breds.

Each of these inductees are featured on pages 23, 24, 26, 28 and 30 of this issue. They have all played a very vital role in the success of California breeding and racing.

Please join us at The Langham Huntington Hotel & Spa (formerly The Ritz-Carlton Huntington Hotel & Spa) in Pasadena, on Monday, Feb. 18, when we will honor these individuals and the California champions of 2007. 🐾

