

WINNER'S CIRCLE

Breeder

BY LENNY SHULMAN

ARTHUR HANCOCK III CAN RECITE

pedigrees as well as any other Central Kentucky hardboot, meaning he can go back off the top of his head through generations of equine families at sometimes dizzying speed. Hancock, though, is also a big believer in omens, karma, and philosophical pieces of wisdom, which he can also recite on demand. All of the above played a role in his 2009 purchase of the mare Steady Course from the dispersal of William T. Young's Overbrook Farm. Steady Course's name hit the bright lights Nov. 19 when her son Mastery won the Bob Hope Stakes (gr. III) at Del Mar. The son of Candy Ride at that moment became Bob Baffert's leading contender for the 2017 Triple Crown series.

"I just looked at the mares in Bill's dispersal and liked her looks," said Hancock. "I don't have a lot of money, and I thought she was a fair price, so I bought her."

Juddmonte Farms' Kentucky manager Garrett O'Rourke hurried into the sales pavilion at Keeneland that November day in 2009 just in time to see Hancock signing the \$20,000 ticket for Steady Course.

"She was the only mare I wanted in that sale. I thought she would fit Empire Maker and that she was affordable and classy," said O'Rourke. "But on my way to the sale, I got called back to the farm, and by the time I got to the pavilion, there was Arthur."

"See, that's fate," noted Hancock. "If Garrett had been bidding, well, there's no way I could compete against Juddmonte. 'Bigger boats may venture more, but smaller boats should stay near shore.' That's Benjamin Franklin."

What Hancock didn't know was that O'Rourke wanted the mare for himself, not for Juddmonte, so it would have been a close bidding battle, but one that didn't come to pass.

So Hancock, who owned and bred Kentucky

MASTERY OF THE BUSINESS

Arthur Hancock III does it his way...again

Derby (gr. I) winner Gato Del Sol, owned Derby winner Sunday Silence, and bred Derby winner Fusaichi Pegasus, took Steady Course (by Old Trieste) home to his Stone Farm outside Paris, Ky., and came to realize that she is a mare who likes to skip pregnancies every other year, including with the Yes It's True baby she was carrying when Hancock purchased her.

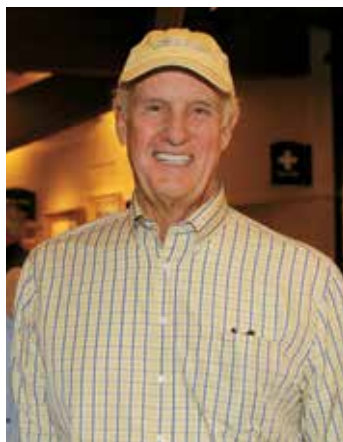
"She's an every-other-year mare. She has a foal and then she won't have a foal," said Hancock. "That's just the way she is. You could put the foal on a nurse mare and maybe get her back in foal, but I don't believe in that. You have to let nature take its course; otherwise, it can mess them up. A philosopher said, 'Inexorable nature will avenge any infringements upon her commandments.'"

Still, Hancock has done just fine with the intermittent mom. He sold Mastery at the 2015 Keeneland September yearling auction to Gatewood Bell for \$425,000. And Steady Course gave birth earlier this year to a First Samurai colt that Hancock likes just fine, and who got even better-looking after Mastery took a graded stakes.

"He's a hell of a nice colt," said Hancock of the weanling, "and he's got some attitude to him. When we'd turn him out as a foal, he'd buck up and get a hump in his back and snort. I've never heard a foal do that. He's right down here at Barn 9 and in the same field Mastery was raised in."

True to form, Steady Course is barren for 2017, but Hancock plans to breed her back to Candy Ride and is hoping for a filly to perhaps keep for his broodmare band. For the time being, he is just happy to have bred and raised yet another in a long line of fleet runners. And he counts his blessings to have Steady Course.

"(Trainer) Horatio Luro used to say you can't squeeze the lemon dry in this business, and I think that's the way this mare is," Hancock said. "You don't mess with Mother Nature." B



Arthur Hancock III