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# TOUCHING BASE WITH ANTONY BECK

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Dating back to his family's initial foray into the business when he was a child, Antony Beck has had a lifelong passion for Thoroughbreds. Although his earliest involvement began in South Africa and in England, these days Antony's focus is very much in Central Kentucky, where he is president of Gainesway Farm. He has the final word on selection of stallions for the farm, determination of matings for the Gainesway mares, and the placement and purchase of horses at auction. Antony has also stepped forward to accept leadership roles in Thoroughbred racing. He serves on the boards of the Breeders' Cup, Thoroughbred Owners and Breeders Association, and Blood-Horse Publications, and is a member of The Jockey Club.

*Gainesway's property has a unique history, with many years associated with the great Whitney family Thoroughbred dynasties, then John Gaines' era of great stallions, and your late father, Graham Beck, establishing his own Gainesway legacy. That adds up to a heavy load of stewardship of racing history as well as personal sentiment. Do you ever find it somewhat overwhelming?*

**I feel that I do act as a steward of this magnificent farm and loving it and loving the tradition and history of it is a driving force is my motivation. The business is a tough one, and sometimes it can be somewhat overwhelming but the people who have come to work here over the last 12 to 15 years feel equally inspired by the tradition and are dedicated to wanting to keep this a wonderful farm and continue the legacy. Without the team here at Gainesway, nothing at all could be achieved.**

*In the stallion business, it is to be expected that only a few horses will really "hit." Does having collected a number of successful sires such as Birdstone, Tapit, Corinthian and Afleet Alex in rapid succession give you a sense of confidence in your judgment and the judgment of your team?*

**I've always tried to get as good of a stallion as I possibly can. I think every stallion is different. Birdstone showed tremendous guts and determination as a racehorse and great speed at 2. Tapit was just such a brilliant 2-year-old and fast horse and had tremendous speed with a phenomenal stallion's pedigree. Afleet Alex was one of the best racehorses I've ever seen, both at 2 and 3. Each was very different. I've tried to focus on quality rather than pure numbers of stallions. This year, we have To Honor and Serve and I truly believe that he has all the hallmarks of being as good of a stallion as we will ever have at Gainesway.**

**I think I'm frequently nervous about making a selection, but, for example, in the case of Hat Trick, he was a great miler, raced drug free and had already produced a Champion and Horse of the Year. That was a sort of no-brainer deal. There wasn't any real lack of confidence. In the case of To Honor and Serve, I feel confident that he will be a great stallion. It comes down to trusting my own judgment and the judgment of the team.**

*Gainesway is a multi-service farm, preparing and selling yearlings as well as standing stallions and racing, etc. Which elements give you the most satisfaction when success is attained for the farm and/or your clientele?*

**Gainesway's success in the sales ring has been profoundly notable in recent years. I can claim very little credit for that because Brian Graves, Michael Hernon and Neil Howard have developed that side of the business themselves and have done exceptionally well. My only request to all of them has been that we do not have too many numerically but rather focus on quality and be a genuine boutique operation. We have a very high clearance rate of yearlings and of the major consignors, we nearly always have the highest average because of our dedication to quality. I am very proud of what the team has achieved.**

**When it comes to racing, I have always tried to buy the progeny of our stallions and put them in good, capable hands. Afleet Express' victory in the Travers was without question the pinnacle of my racing so far. I have very few horses in training but I like to have as good of a horse as I possibly can have.**

**If you were to ask me what my favorite aspect of the business is, however, I would have to say that standing stallions is what I get fairly obsessed about. Great stallions have stood on this farm since the days of Peter Pan, Mahmoud, the great John Gaines stallions Lyphard, Riverman, Blushing Groom, and more recently, Gainesway horses like Mr. Greeley, Afleet Alex, Birdstone and Tapit. I am profoundly hopeful that To Honor and Serve will be equally as good. The history and the legacy is very important to me.**

*Conversely, what are the key disappointments and/or frustrations?*

**The disappointment for me is not with Gainesway, but with the inability of our industry to act as one, although I applaud The Jockey Club's leadership. The other frustration and I believe our greatest hurdle is the fact that our demographic is aging and we're not getting enough young people to enjoy and follow the sport.**

*In Lexington, we can stop by various shops and chose from an assortment of Graham Beck wines. Are you involved in running that enterprise and other businesses that your father was involved with, in South Africa and elsewhere?*

**I maintain sole ownership of the company with my mother, and we are very fortunate to have a wonderful CEO who manages the company very well. I am involved, but I have wonderful people to look after things for me.**

*You have been involved with racing in several countries. How would you contrast the aesthetics of the day to day presentation of racing in North America with those in Europe and South Africa?*

**I think in all three countries, television is really important, however, other than the three main centers where fans participate – here in the US, Saratoga, Keeneland and Del Mar – racing is pretty dull, even for Grade I's. In the UK, the fans will follow the circuit as it moves from the different tracks; in South Africa, it's really only the two or three big days where you get full attendance at the tracks, rather like here. Keeneland would still be my favorite place to go racing.**

*You have either sought roles of leadership, or allowed yourself to become involved in various roles, in support of American racing. Which elements of the business do you regard as the most stable and which ones give you the most concern?*

**As I alluded to before, the aging demographic is the biggest concern we as an industry have.**

**The most stable aspect of the business, I think, is the ingredients it takes to be an owner: One, to love the beauty of the Thoroughbred, two, to be naturally competitive, three, to be patient, and of course some access to money. These things are constant, and provided racing is seen as sport, it will flourish.**

*You have supported equine research on a personal level. How would you place the importance of veterinary research in the overall picture of racing, breeding, and the public's response to the sport?*

**Laminitis is such a dreadful way for a horse to pass away. There is a lot of research into the causes of laminitis, and I think that is very important. I experienced the disease first-hand with Mr. Greeley, and it had a profound affect on me. I've seen a few horses suffer from it, and it is just terrible.**

**It's a tough sport, where horses have been bred for almost 400 years for speed rather than soundness. I think retiring horses before they break down should be the goal of every horseman. While all of the admirable research being done is of tremendous value, it must be used concurrently with proper management of the animal.**

*There was a time when Gainesway stood such internationally prominent horses such as Vaguely Noble, Blushing Groom, Lyphard, and Riverman, while Northern Dancer was in Maryland, Nijinsky II at Claiborne, Caro at Spendthrift, etc. In essence, the best "European stallions" stood in this country, and the world's breeders and yearling buyers beat a path to our breeding sheds and sale pavilions. Do you think this was an anomaly, or it is a realistic ambition for North American stallion farms to return to that level of international clout?*

**The two largest Thoroughbred breeding entities, namely Coolmore and Darley, have operations all over the world, and they do bring extremely talented internationally raced horses to the United States – Giant's Causeway, Henrythenavigator. I think that it is a good idea for American breeders to support such moves and I think there's no reason why foreign raced horses should not be successful in North America. Hat Trick was a foreign-raced horse, and he was booked full this year and had a very good graded stakes horse in the United States in Howe Great. Whether we will ever reach the level of the 1980's again, in terms of foreign-raced sire power, is something I can't prognosticate.**

*International breeding at times seems somewhat capricious. For example, there was the sudden emergence of the Gainesway stallion Mr. Greeley having a comet-like phase of success in Europe. What are your general observations of how the international bloodstock industry views current North American stallions, and to what degree can the international popularity of American stallions be orchestrated?*

**Racetrack success by American-based stallions in Europe needs to be the yardstick for foreigners to find American blood desirable. They have to have the opportunity and they need to be successful for people to come back to the well – like Tapit's appeal in Japan after Testa Matta's Grade I success this year. Keeneland ought to be congratulated on getting so many international horsemen, from Europe and the Far East, to participate in their sales. By getting the horses over there, and by then performing, is how the success happens.**

*What are your key ambitions for Gainesway, and what gives you the most satisfaction in terms of fulfilling your father's aims?*

**My ambition has always been and will continue to be to assemble and maintain a top-notch team at the farm. Teamwork is at the heart of Gainesway's ethos.**

*In addition to your own family's eclectic background, your wife Angela (nee Levy) is from a background deeply involved in racing but also in art. Gainesway also has an award-winning garden. Are you able to absorb and enjoy such various elements of life while also having hands-on guidance of a major Thoroughbred operation?*

**Gainesway is a beautiful arboretum, and we have a wonderful tree-planting program and have had since we've owned it, really for future generations. It is part of the respect and love that we all have for this farm. It goes hand-in-hand with looking after the horses on the farm.**

*What is your favorite vacation site, or activity?*

**Without question, Harbour Island in the Bahamas, doing absolutely anything or nothing.**

*What type of cuisine do you enjoy the most?*

**Anything my wife cooks!**

*What music are you most likely to have playing in the car or office?*

**Classical.**

*Aside from keeping track of the Turf, what books and magazines on other matters do you most enjoy?*

**The Financial Times. I thought Ulysses, by James Joyce, was the most difficult book I've ever read, by far.**

*Can you tell us something about yourself that would surprise people who know you or know about your career?*

**I'm in the horse business because I absolutely love it, and that wouldn't surprise anyone!**