



How John Liviakis selects
mares and plans matings



BEHIND THE BREEDINGS

BY LENNY SHULMAN

When the first blanket of snow covers the Bluegrass, we know that breeding season is about to commence. For the past few years at this time *Blood-Horse* has asked prominent breeders to share their philosophies of choosing stallions for their mares, and this time around we travel out to California to talk with John Liviakis who, when not running his Liviakis Financial Communications, one of the leading financial public relations firms in the world, keeps busy reading pedigree analyses and checking in on his broodmares in Kentucky and Florida.

Liviakis, a former Standardbred trainer, has bred grade I winner Gomo, multiple graded stakes winners Handsome Mike and Reneesgotzip, graded stakes winners Tommy Macho, Mighty Caroline, and Renee's Titan, and stakes winner Renee's Queen. Although all of the above won added-money events within the last five years, Liviakis no longer owns any of their dams.

Because Liviakis invests heavily in the young companies he helps to develop, his disposable income ebbs and flows, affecting whether he holds or sells bloodstock.

"When you're a breeder and have all these foals every year, your numbers go up geometrically," Liviakis said from his Mill Valley, Calif., headquarters. "Unless you're extremely wealthy, you can't handle the numbers. So I've had to sell, and you can only sell the ones people want. But besides the financial reasons, I'm also a big believer in the fact that mares regress in their productivity as they get older and have more foals. There are theories that the second foal is the superior one in the cycle; I've had good luck with first foals, and I'm more in that two-to-three-foals school. As you get past the fourth or fifth foal, that's it for me."

Liviakis combs the entries of medium and major racing circuits for potential broodmares. He tracks female offspring of branches of families that have caught his eye, and will buy privately. He also cultivates broodmares from the daughters of families he has nurtured.

Turning his attention to stallions, Liviakis employs both proven and young sires, searching for ones that will most pick up his mares.

RIEK SAMUELS

“I assemble a running list, looking at the individual and the prepotency of the male line,” he said. “Their ability in terms of the talent and soundness they showed while racing, and also the individual as you see them. I’m looking at their eyes, their face, their charisma, and their overall conformation. And I ask myself if this is an individual that can change the breed; that can change history. Horses like Smart Strike and Arch had the intangibles. Then there’s the male line. Certain ones are cold, and you’re taking a risk going that way. Some horses can break through and overcome that, but most don’t.

“Right now my pool of stallion candidates are Animal Kingdom, Uncle Mo, Bodemeister, Violence, Gemologist, Into Mischief, Square Eddie, Atreides, and Young Brian, (the last-named) whom I bred and raced.

“This is a passion of mine, and I’ve put a lot of time into it for a lot of my life ever since I was 17. So I’ve been at it 42 years.”

Below, Liviakis discusses the reasoning behind his mare purchases and, taking 10 of his top broodmares, the factors that led him to his current and future breedings.

RICH LOVE

(Not For Love—Richetta, by Polish Numbers)
First bred in 2014

I bought her privately. When California Chrome was going for the Triple Crown, I tried to figure out where the magic was coming from. The dam was small and a cheap maiden claimer and the sire was pedestrian. I looked closer and saw the dam was by Not For Love and out of a Polish Numbers mare. That cross creates a 3x3 to Numbered Account. I looked for mares bred on that cross and found three. Rich Love was one of them. Her dam, Richetta, was a four-time stakes winner, a Maryland champion, and had produced four-time stakes winner Concealed Identity. The sire line was good. No sawdust in the branches, and there was reasonable quality throughout the family. I bred Rich Love first to Uncle Mo and got Loving Moment, a very good-looking filly that I may keep and race or point for a 2-year-old sale. Rich Love is in foal to Atreides. He’s unproven but intriguing, a half to grade I winner Dreaming of Julia and out of (multiple) grade I winner Dream Rush. He was a beautiful mover with an efficient type of action and a world of talent and won at the stakes level, but he had a tendon issue. I bought a share in him.

Rich Love will be bred back to Animal Kingdom, one of my favorite stallion prospects. The male line is a question mark; it’s certainly not a prepotent male line. But he’s a magnificent individual with extraordinary ability who showed talent on all three surfaces. His German broodmare raced without medication, so you’re getting that tough blood and quality in the female family. And you’re getting an outcross stallion that can create hybrid vigor.

You want to combine that with a mare loaded with Mr. Prospector, Storm Cat, Danzig, or A.P. Indy. Rich Love is by Not For Love, a son of Mr. P out of a Northern Dancer mare so I can create that outcross effect (the foal will be inbred 4x5 to Blushing Groom). And I like the type of individual and uniformity Animal Kingdom is getting.



KEVIN THOMPSON PHOTOS

Rich Love, a private purchase, is in foal to Atreides and will be bred to Animal Kingdom

BRILLIANT AUDREY

(Tale of the Cat—Glacier Peak, by Pulpit)
First bred in 2015

Brilliant Audrey (bred by Liviakis) is my secret weapon; I think the world of her. She has a fascinating cross of 2x3 to the sisters Yarn and Preach. Yarn is prolific. She is the dam of Tale of the Cat and the second dam of Johannesburg and Fed Biz, and she is a full sister to Preach, the dam of Pulpit. They go back to a full sister to Round Table, so the family reeks of quality. I expect Brilliant Audrey’s foals to be extraordinary. She is in foal to Gemologist and will be bred back to Animal Kingdom.

Gemologist is unproven but intrigues me. I would rank him the best-looking equine I’ve seen in my lifetime, in any breed. Those looks don’t guarantee anything, but that’s how impressive his physical is. He has a once-in-a-lifetime hip; so powerful in his stifle and gaskin. The shoulder has so much angulation and his girth has the depth for the cardiovascular. Short cannon, long forearm. He has all the things you’d want to see as an individual, and he was undefeated in his first five starts. He’s by Tiznow, and the jury is still out on them as sires. The male line may or may not carry on. With Brilliant Audrey I wanted the height to stretch her out. She is more of a ballet dancer, real quick and light on her feet, and fast. I figured Gemologist would put that musculature and frame into the mare.



Brilliant Audrey is in foal to Gemologist and will be bred to Animal Kingdom



Chokonni, who traces back to blue hen Courtly Dee, is in foal to Gemologist and will go back to him later this year

OIL PAINTING

(Distorted Humor—Handpainted, by A.P. Indy)
First bred in 2012

I am leasing her for one season from John Sikura of Hill 'n' Dale Farms. I bred her to Violence. John had bred her to him the previous year, but she didn't keep the foal. She didn't seem to have any breeding issues so I inquired whether I could buy her. John didn't want to sell, so we made a deal and he leased her to me for a season, knowing I was going to breed her back to (Hill 'n' Dale stallion) Violence. The mare is extraordinarily well-bred, and I thought her bloodlines should cross well with Violence. He's unproven, but his foals have been well thought of. I have one of my own who just became a yearling, and he's a handsome colt.

Violence has a magnificent bloodline and was very talented. He's a fabulous-looking individual. Each mare in the female family is of a high level of soundness and talent. They all have good earnings and each was by a top sire all the way back to a foundation family. I will go back to the early 1900s and even the 1800s in my research, and I like to see champion mares. Each one in this family is special with no sawdust in the line. It is a pure family.

A lot of breeders will just look at the page and see if it is strong and go by that. But if the foundation isn't there, I don't trust it. I trust a mare that's got the richness and purity and strength going back for generations.

CHOKONNI

(Arch—Apache Plume, by Storm Cat)
First bred in 2014

She is a young Arch mare, which is huge. I've isolated Arch and Smart Strike as the most effective broodmare sires of today on a percentage basis. They don't have enough daughters out there to be on top of the charts, but I would still rank them tops. So I look for mares by them. Chokonni was a winner in a maiden route, and her dam was a million-dollar-selling Storm Cat mare who is out of Aishah, who goes back to Courtly Dee. That's as good as it gets.

Apache Plume didn't do much as a broodmare so someone looking at the page would be turned off by that. My thought is sometimes they will skip a generation where one mare just doesn't have it or doesn't have healthy foals. So here is a young Arch mare who, when bred right, might pop. Taking the Storm Cat daughter of Aishah and now with the Arch in there you get an inbreeding to the sisters Aishah and Althea. You get that Tesio cross of fantastic sisters. And their mother, Courtly Dee, which is about as

powerful a family as any in the history of the sport. So you get all kinds of goodies here. There's a lot of excitement for me with Chokonni, and she's a lovely looking mare to boot.

She's in foal to Gemologist. There is no Mr. P blood in her, so I wanted to get Mr. P up close in there, and Gemologist is out of a Mr. P mare. Chokonni is a bit feminine and needs that strong, powerful hip. I wanted a sire that created that big scope, and I thought the mating would be ideal for her. She is going to be bred back to Gemologist.

SENSATIONALIZE

(Street Sense—Stormy West, by Gone West)
First bred in 2014

I bought Sensationalize as a racehorse and broodmare prospect. She won impressively in two turf routes in very fast times. She is a big, beautiful, correct mare, and I have high hopes for her as a broodmare. I bred her to Lonhro and got Sudden Sensation, a filly that sold for \$20,000 at Keeneland January. She is turfy, with a sloping pastern, but you'd expect turf being by Lonhro and out of Sensationalize, who was strictly a turf mare even though she was bred for dirt.

The Stick to Beauty family is one of the most productive families in the sport in terms of grade I winners and millionaires. You can't find many broodmares you can buy from that pool. Sky Beauty, Maplejinsky, Gold Beauty, Dayjur, Tale of Ekati, and Country Hideaway are all from that family. I tried to pick out the purest branch and came to Storm Beauty (second dam of Sensationalize), a Storm Cat mare and a multiple stakes winner. Sensationalize is in foal to Animal Kingdom, and she is being bred back to Young Brian, who I am standing at GoldMark Farm in Florida. Young Brian was a brilliant 2-year-old, although he didn't run long enough to prove himself. (Young Brian made one start, winning a 6½-furlong maiden special weight race Aug. 8, 2015, at Del Mar by 10¼ lengths in 1:17.10. By Hard Spun—Glacier Peak, by Pulpit, he was retired after fracturing a sesamoid.) I'm not standing him with the idea of being commercial nor am I hustling around trying to get outside matings. I realize he's not going to be commercial off the one start. But I know what he is, and I'm not afraid. I believe in him so much I'm breeding six or seven mares to him.

AMBITIOUS STRIKE

(Smart Strike—Ambitious Cat, by Storm Cat)
First bred in 2013.

She's one of the finest-bred mares you'll find. She's by

the most effective broodmare sire Smart Strike, and her dam is a Storm Cat mare who was a champion grass mare in Canada and has a Pulpit filly Cool Faith who is a stakes horse. Ambitious Strike's second dam is Lilac Garden, who produced Electronic Unicorn, an earner of more than \$3.7 million; and Blushing K. D., who won the Kentucky Oaks (gr. I). So she is quite a mare. And the branch goes back to Balletomane, Nanticoos, and Be Ambitious. Back to the 1800s each dam is state of the art.

I bought Ambitious Strike open. She had a tear that needed surgery, and I am breeding her to Young Brian for her first mating for me. She's really attractive and feminine. She can use a little more height and substance, and Young Brian is an appealing cross because he needs Mr. P and doesn't have Storm Cat in him, so he fits with a lot of mares as long as you stay away from Danzig and Pulpit because he's by a son of Danzig and out of a Pulpit mare. So you look for mares heavy in Mr. P and maybe with some Storm Cat in there, and this is an ideal set-up. I think it's an exciting mating.

CAROLINE VICTORIA

(Lonhro—Mighty Caroline, by Stormy Atlantic)
First breeding will be in 2016

I did the mating for Caroline Victoria. Then I sold her dam, Mighty Caroline, carrying her in utero to Frank Stronach. The resulting foal was so stunning that I bought her back from Stronach as a weanling at Keeneland for \$190,000. She showed a lot of talent in training, but she had an issue and I decided not to mess with her and breed her instead. Mighty Caroline won the Sorrento Stakes (gr. III) for me and is a full sister to a stakes winner.

This family is special to me, going back to Caroline Victoria's second dam, Mighty Renee. I've been with the family for several generations and so breeding Caroline Victoria to Young Brian this year will be special for me.

MANKI

(Arch—Private Ice, by Pivotal)
First bred in 2014

The immediate page has a blank dam, but what I see here is a young Arch mare, which in itself is big for me, and a family that is extraordinarily appealing going back to Nellie Forbes and then her dam and granddam. Each one was a champion filly of her era. Nellie Forbes was a high-priced filly by Secretariat and a half sister to Bold Forbes, and she is the dam of Ancient Times. Together and Midnight Line



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Manki has a yearling by Bodemeister and is in foal to and going back to Atreides

are also in this family.

Pivotal is one of the great European sires and a nice outcross. Manki threw a Bodemeister filly named Amazing Audrey who is a knockout, absolutely stunning. She just became a yearling. I chose Bodemeister because Manki is an outcross with no Mr. P, Storm Cat, or A.P. Indy, so I wanted to infuse in her a stallion rich with that blood. And with Bodemeister I got all three of those lines in one sire. That's the thing about Bodemeister—it's hard to find mares for him

because most of them have Storm Cat or A.P. Indy close up. I think an outcross mare can better use some of that high-fallutin American blood. Manki is in foal to Atreides and is going back to him.

Manki has European blood that you want to wake up, and Arch gives you a leg up because he can wake up the dead. An Arch daughter bred to Flower Alley left I'll Have Another. Uncle Mo is out of an Arch mare. He is a freak broodmare sire. Something makes his daughters powerful as broodmares; perhaps it's coming through Althea, his second dam.

VAN DIEN AVENUE

(In Excess—Lunge, by Western Fame)

First bred in 2015

In Excess is another broodmare sire who has had profound success, considering the limited opportunities he had. His daughters do well, and I give special marks to him. Lunge is the dam of multiple grade I winner The Usual Q. T. Second dam Qualified is the dam of Western Act, a stakes horse who was tough as shoe leather and raced until he was 10. There's soundness in the family and consistency.

So this is a young mare by a big-time broodmare sire, and I think Van Dien Avenue can be exponentially more successful as a broodmare than she was as a racehorse. She is in foal to Atreides and will be bred back to Young Brian.

WILSHIRE HEIR

(Wildcat Heir—Wilshire Boulevard,
by Sadler's Wells)

First breeding will be 2016

What an intriguing mare. Her dam is inbred to Special 3x3. Special is the dam of Fairy Bridge, the dam of Sadler's Wells. Her second dam, Measure, is a half to horses such as Jade Robbery, Numerous, Chequer, and Add. Number, her third dam, produced all those horses and is a multiple graded stakes winner by Nijinsky II. The family goes back to the finest blood in the stud book; it's as impeccable as it gets. Wilshire Boulevard hasn't done much as a producer, but Wilshire Heir showed talent as a racehorse and she's a grand-looking mare: attractive face, beautiful hip and shoulder. She had lameness issues with a knee but won by daylight and has family, so I decided to try her and am breeding her to Young Brian. **B**

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