

# Alvin & Neile Toffel



by **DEBRA GINSBURG**

Alvin and Neile Toffel have experienced an interesting assortment of careers. He was an Air Force pilot who worked in the White House during the Nixon administration and eventually found himself presiding over the Norton Simon Museum. She is a singer and dancer with a lot of major Broadway and film credits to her name. They've come to love their little side interest of breeding and racing Thoroughbreds above anything else.

"I think it's because each race provides an unambiguous result, unlike so many endeavors in life," Alvin explained. "Despite all the build-up and hype, horses settle the matter between themselves without regard to their pricetag, who the owners are or what they have. It's a sport where the underdog and the small guy still have a fighting chance. We regard ourselves as one of those 'small guys.'"

Although he and Neile now live in Beverly Hills, Alvin grew up in a tough neighborhood not far from Hollywood Park. It was ideally situated for him to pursue the two great loves of his childhood—horses and airplanes. He often rode his bike to the track in the mornings to watch the Thoroughbreds work out, after which he would then head out to the airport to observe new planes being built.

He became an engineer for North American Aviation following a stint in the Air Force, then was loaned to the White House to work in the Office of Management and Budget. There, he helped to organize and launch several small companies and attracted the attention of the great American industrialist Norton Simon. Toffel became Simon's right-hand man and was eventually hired as president of the Norton Simon

Museum in Pasadena, a position he held for 10 years.

Even while he was building a solid reputation for himself in the business sector, Alvin's love for horse racing never left him. His work with the museum allowed him to see horses as great works of art.

"They certainly are beauty in motion," he explained. "I always wanted to own a racehorse but never thought I could afford to breed the kind of horse I wanted to race."

He became partners on some claiming horses, then started looking around for mares with good bloodlines that had been injured on the track and could be bought inexpensively. That is how he found Fly to the Ridge, a daughter of champion Riva Ridge. She gave the Toffels their first stakes horse, Riva Ranger, and four other winners.

Sired by Video Ranger, Riva Ranger had the look of something special. When he captured the 1995 Graduation Stakes by 3 1/2 lengths at Del Mar for his second win in two starts, he had Alvin and Neile entertaining thoughts of the Kentucky Derby.

Then, in an instant, their greatest triumph dissolved into a nightmare. Riva Ranger broke down right past the wire and collapsed on the track. He could not be saved. The congratulatory hugs and handshakes were replaced by condolences from friends and fellow horsemen. The Toffels quickly learned all about the highs and lows of the racing game.

While it took Alvin and Neile nearly a decade to breed a horse like Riva Ranger, their second good horse was right around the corner. This was Remy Sexy, winner of the 1996 California Cup Juvenile Fillies.

She was produced from Mesquite Miss, whom Alvin had purchased as a 2-year-old from the 1989 California Thoroughbred Sales (CTS) Horses of Racing Age Sale, for \$14,500 on the advice of Dean Greenman, Walter Greenman's son.

"Dean liked the way the filly moved, but cautioned us not to spend a lot of money on her," he recalled. "I had a good feeling about her, so I kept on bidding."

Mesquite Miss did well on the allowance level, winning four of 17 starts and \$50,650 before a slab fracture ended her racing career. Remy Sexy and her first four foals were all sired by Huddle Up, whom the Toffels also acquired inexpensively.

A son of Epsom Derby winner Sir Ivor, Huddle Up was one of the first yearlings that D. Wayne Lukas purchased for Eugene Klein at the 1983 Keeneland July Sale. At \$425,000 he was the most expensive Sir Ivor yearling sold that year. As a runner, he hardly lived up to his breeding or his fancy

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pricetag, placing in four minor stakes and earning just \$87,017. Alvin grabbed him when he showed up in a claiming race and retired him to stud.

"I always considered Lukas a good judge of conformation and he had thought very highly of Huddle Up early on," Alvin explained. "I bred a few mares to him when he first went to stud and came up with three nice winners."

Mesquite Miss' second foal, REXY SEXY was named for theater critic Rex Reed. Alvin's wife of 23 years, whose stage name is Neile Adams, had a long and successful career on

seemed to cross very well with stallions that have Never Bend in their pedigrees. Huddle Up is out of a very nice Never Bend mare and Smokester is sired by Never Tabled, a son of Never Bend. She is currently carrying a foal by Menifee, who is also out of a Never Bend mare."

Although he was foaled at Harris Farms, Only the Best accompanied his mother to Kentucky and benefited greatly from the time he spent back there. "He grew strong and tough," Alvin added. "I've never seen a horse as fast out of the gate as he is. Only the Best is a good example of the type

of horse I've always wanted to breed."

The Smokester gelding recently ran second in the grade III San Miguel Stakes (Jan. 12), but the Toffels have received several offers for the horse and may sell him. Their racing stable also includes Dancing On a Dime, a Tossofthecoin filly that races in Neile's name and resides in Armando



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The Toffel's REXY SEXY won both the California Cup Juvenile Fillies Stakes (above left) and California Breeders' Champion Stakes (above right) in 1996, while her half-brother ONLY THE BEST also carried their silks to victory in both the 2002 Sunny Slope Stakes (below left) and Malcolm Anderson Stakes (below right)

Broadway. Several years ago, she created a one-woman show for the Cinegrill in the Hollywood Roosevelt Hotel and when she took it to New York, Reed gave her a nice review. The Toffels promised to name a horse for him. REXY SEXY, who also won the filly division of the California Breeders' Stakes and \$195,924, was the result. "You wouldn't believe the following this filly had because of her name," Alvin said.

Now part of the Toffels' small but select broodmare band which include her dam and an unraced full sister Mesquite, REXY SEXY's first foal is a 3-year-old Skip Away colt and she's currently in-foal to Honour and Glory. Huddle Up has stood at Harris Farms since 1999 and has remained basically a private stallion, although John Harris himself bred stakes-placed Green Team from him.

Mesquite Miss was represented by a second stakes winner last year in homebred Only the Best. Trained by Brian Lynch, who also developed Riva Ranger and REXY SEXY for the couple, the speedy son of Smokester scored runaway victories in the Malcolm Anderson Stakes at Bay Meadows and the Sunny Slope Stakes at Santa Anita for earnings of \$140,764.

"We absolutely fell in love with Free House and wanted to breed a horse just like him," Alvin explained. "Mesquite Miss



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Lage's barn up north. She also did well recently, breaking her maiden at Golden Gate Fields late last year on Dec. 27.

While they are enjoying great personal success at the races, the Toffels always consider the welfare of the horse above anything else. They would like to see the racing industry create a pension plan for horses, one where a small percentage of the purse money goes into a fund that continues to finance the care of these wonderful animals long after their racetrack careers are over. "Everyone seems to be getting something out of this sport, except the horses who have no organized voice," Alvin explained.

Cautious and conservative in their thinking, the Toffels have always done things their own way. "We proved there is real hope for small breeders who approach this business with logic, care and a great deal of patience," he added. "Selecting and breeding racehorses is a lot like buying fine art. You seek the opinion of experts and make the final decision yourself—and hope that luck is riding on your side."