

by **DEBRA GINSBURG**

Donnie and Judy McFadden have bred scores of stakes winners during 20-odd years of raising horses at their Billingsley Creek Ranch in Idaho. Until recently, however, they had never produced a graded stakes winner. Buddy Gil, a Kentucky-bred gelding with strong California connections, recently took care of that. In rapid succession, he scored victories in the grade III Baldwin Stakes, grade II San Felipe Stakes and grade I Santa Anita Derby, placing his breeders clearly on the 2003 Triple Crown trail.

"I owned his mother, grandmother

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began slowly at first, starting with their children's interest in junior rodeo and horse shows. Because many of the competitions were timed events, the McFaddens wanted their children mounted on the fastest horses they could find.

of Northern Dancer named Staff Writer. Two years later, when Staff Writer's son Timely Writer captured the Hopeful and Champagne Stakes, it was all the incentive this couple needed to start breeding Thoroughbreds full time.

They started replacing their Quarter Horse mares with Thoroughbreds and one of their earliest acquisitions was a California-bred filly named Forever Rise. Donnie claimed the daughter of Rising Market—Always Lucky, by Lucky Mel, at Santa Anita Park on Super Bowl Sunday in 1981. She would become the third dam of Buddy Gil.

Forever Rise was bred to Staff

Donnie and Judy McFadden

and great-grandmother, and the dam's sire and grandsire," says Donnie. "You can pretty much call him a homebred."

Donnie and Judy are transplanted Californians who wanted to give their four children a rural upbringing in the clean mountain air of Idaho. He was born in Santa Monica, grew up in Orange County and attended the University of Redlands. Horses and the idea of raising Thoroughbreds were the furthest things from Donnie's mind until one of his college friends married Howard B. Keck's stepdaughter.

"This was during the 1960s when the Keck stable included runners like Saber Mountain, Tell and Turkish Trousers," he says. "Because his horses would win big races every time they invited me and Judy to the track, Mr. Keck thought my wife was bringing him good luck. He kept inviting us back. I never believed that could be a turning point in my life."

Soon after those initial racetrack experiences, Donnie and Judy left Southern California. They bought a 700-acre ranch in Hagerman, Idaho, not far from Twin Falls and the Sun Valley ski resort. Their horse involvement



"When the kids grew out of horses, we found ourselves with a lot of nice Quarter Horse mares," Donnie recalls. "We started breeding them and racing their foals. In 1988, our Quarter Horse runners led the nation for number of wins and made us the leading breeders in that category."

During the fall of 1979, the McFaddens purchased their first Thoroughbred stallion with the idea of introducing Northern Dancer blood into Quarter Horse racing. They found their ideal horse in Florida, an unraced son

Writer, then sent back to the track. She scored an 11-length allowance victory at Les Bois Park for her new connections while piloted by an up-and-coming young jockey named Gary Stevens. A native of nearby Caldwell, Idaho, Stevens got much of his early experience riding the McFaddens' Quarter Horses at bush tracks in Jerome and Boise.

Forever Rise ran third in the Speed Handicap at Les Bois and retired to Billingsley Creek Ranch with five wins from 34 starts and \$53,657 in earnings. She became a foundation broodmare for the McFaddens by producing stakes winner Rising Writer from a later mating with Staff Writer, and stakes-placed Forever a Blurr, an earner of \$114,212 by Murtheblurr. Rising Writer earned \$110,970 and produced four stakes horses of her own, including Buddy Gil's dam, Really Rising. Long before that happened, though, the family received a much-needed boost when Forever Rise's half-sister Incindress earned a California championship by winning the 1992 California Cup Juvenile Fillies.

Sired by stakes-winning For Really, Really Rising was sold as a yearling for \$13,000 in the 1995 Washington Mixed Sale at Longacres. She ran second in Golden Gate's Sunday Sally Stakes, and from 12 starts she earned \$30,162. Bred to Birdonthewire, she went through the 1998 Fasig-Tipton Kentucky November Sale as part of the Adena Springs consignment and was bid in for \$6,000. By this time, the McFaddens had caught up with Forever Rise's granddaughter and bought her privately after the sale.

Really Rising foaled a Birdonthewire filly in 1999, then was bred to Eastern Echo. The bay colt she foaled at R. W. and Judy Hicks'

The McFaddens no longer stand stallions at Billingsley Creek, but send their 13 broodmares to stallions in both California and Kentucky. Really Rising gave birth to a Swiss Yodeler filly at Rancho San Miguel in March and was then bred back to resident stallion Roar. Her 2002 After-

The McFaddens still own the mare's first foal, Lookn At a Blur, a stakes winner of \$87,522. She is the dam of Billingsley Creek-bred Lookn Mighty Fine, who was voted Idaho's Horse of the Year for 2002 and helped propel her mom to Broodmare of the Year honors in that state.

Lookn Mighty Fine was the reason why Donnie and Judy sent Buddy Gil to Jeff Mullins. The trainer had horses for the McFaddens in Idaho and he claimed the filly from them for \$62,500. After he subsequently won the Las Madras Handicap and nearly \$300,000 with her, they figured it was time to send Jeff a horse. Buddy Gil, who was



Buddy Gil, winner of the grade I Santa Anita Derby on April 5 (above), the grade II San Felipe Stakes on March 16 (left) and the grade III Baldwin Stakes on February 23 (right), during Santa Anita Park's 2002-2003 winter/spring meet



noon Deelites filly is also a California-bred and is nominated to this year's Del Mar

Yearling Sale. Interestingly, some of Billingsley Creek's former stallions also migrated to California. Buddy Gil's maternal grandsire For Really is now standing at Victory Rose Thoroughbreds, although the McFaddens still own a 55 percent interest, while Synastry is at Hideaway Farms. Murrtheblurr, who sired several of their stakes winners, also stood in California for a while.

Furthermore, three members of their broodmare band have accounted for a trio of hundred-grand winners in California within the past eight months alone. The 20-year-old Here's Lookn Adder is the dam of Cal-bred Takin It Deep and six other stakes winners who have collectively earned nearly \$1 million. Takin It Deep, a son of Beau Genius, sold for \$22,000 at the 2000 Barretts May Sale. He captured the 2001 California Derby and two stakes at the Northern California fairs last year for more than \$350,000 in earnings.

Brookstown Farm in Versailles, Ky., on Feb. 21, 2000, turned out to be Buddy Gil. Although they are primarily commercial breeders, Donnie and Judy race an occasional homebred and they kept Really Rising's colt. Named for his University of Redlands classmate Tom Gilmer, Donnie sold shares in Buddy Gil to four other college friends—Scott Guenther, Tom Scriber, Roger Severson and Charles Johnson. Guenther campaigned graded stakes winner Freespool and 2002 Santa Anita Derby runner-up Easy Grades, while his sister, Sally Humphrey, bred 1980 Kentucky Derby winner Genuine Risk.

No matter where they are foaled, the McFaddens bring their mares and babies back to Idaho every summer and raise the foals at their ranch. "We have the best hay and climate in the country right here," he says. "We also run a training operation where these babies get a good head start."

spinning his wheels in Northern California, started to thrive once he got to Mullins' barn.

He gave the McFaddens their first graded stakes victory when he captured the Baldwin Stakes on Feb. 23. Stevens, who was aboard Buddy's great-grandmother for that Les Bois allowance score, had just wrapped his brief Hollywood career in the movie *Seabiscuit* and was available. The gelding posted a two-length victory at odds of 26-1, despite the presence of the Hall of Famer in the saddle. Victories over the much-ballyhooed Atswah-timtalknabout in the San Felipe Stakes and Santa Anita Derby followed, which could give the McFaddens a Hollywood ending of their own at this year's Kentucky Derby on the first Saturday in May.

"We waited 20 years to win our first grade III," Donnie exclaimed. "We never expected the rest to happen so quickly. Is this exciting or what?"