

# A Choice Establishment



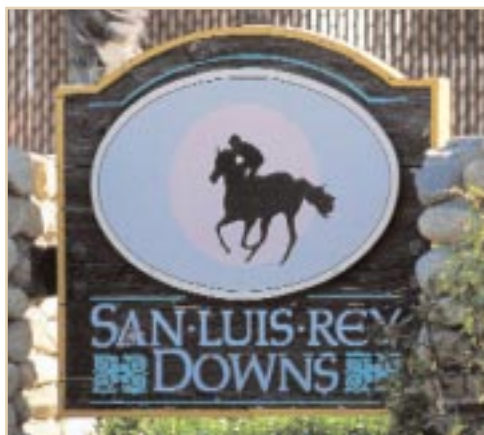
by RUDI GROOTHEDDE  
Photos by Deanna Sparks-Kjorlien

“For those people with high caliber horses, who truly enjoy training, this is the place to be,” declares Leigh Ann Howard, General Manager of San Luis Rey Downs, the premier off-track Thoroughbred training center in the state of California. She then adds, “We want to get to a position so we can attract the finest horses in the country,” and with long-time equine residents like trainer Laura De Seroux’s 2002 Horse of the Year Azeri, the Bonsall, Calif., facility is well on its way to achieving that goal.

On the subject of lofty aspirations, Leigh Ann is certainly the right person for the job of taking this wholly-owned subsidiary of Frank Stronach’s Magna Entertainment Corporation (MEC), since 1999, to the next level. Besides overseeing (since February 2001) the 200-plus acres that are home to nearly 40 fellow trainers, Leigh Ann is the manager of Valley Creek Farm, the president of California Thoroughbred Trainers (CTT), a CTBA director, and active in many other arenas of the local breeding and racing industry.

Yet in conversation with her, it soon becomes apparent that she wants to do

even more and will not rest until this already impressive home to such turf legends of the past as Sunday Silence, Cigar, Best Pal, Fusaichi Pegasus, Ferdinand, Lady’s Secret, A. P. Indy, Cougar II, etc., is improved even further. In this vein, Leigh Ann concludes that, “Management’s goal



is to provide as many different training choices as possible, so that each horse has a chance to find the regiment that they are best suited to and thus perform at their optimum level.”

## Team San Luis Rey Downs

Helping ensure a successful future for San Luis Rey Downs, located in rural San Diego County only 32 miles from Del Mar and 99 miles from both Santa Anita Park (south) and Hollywood Park (southeast), are about 40 other qualified and experienced staff members.

Assistant Manager Sandi Moore is a mainstay for everyone at the Racing

Office, while Projects Director Laura Rosier, who also maintains a barn in the complex, is always easy to find. She is usually either out and about on the grounds or in her office just alongside the chute where the majority of the horses enter and leave the one-mile main track, originally built in 1969. Laura has spent 22 years at the training center because, “I had seen a lot, from Tijuana to Idaho and even to the fair circuit, but ever since I came here I have never wanted to leave.”

For resident horsemen to utilize back at the track, there is a three-man CHRB (California Horse Racing Board)-licensed starting gate crew who work under the watchful eye of starter Tony Phillips. Lee “Mossy” Mosbacher, who is somewhat of a local legend, is one of a duo of clockers—the other being trainer Dan Dunham’s wife Holly—who accurately time all of the horses working out, from two different positions. Furthermore, helping control the nearly 500 Thoroughbreds at San Luis Rey Downs who use the track any time between 5:30 a.m. to 11 a.m., seven days a week, are a couple of outriders, namely Amanda Guthrie and Susan Alfonse.

Last, but certainly not least, Alice Dubs heads up a dedicated and watchful crew of security guards who patrol the complex, with two members on each shift, 24 hours a day. Meanwhile, Luis Hernandez and his four-person crew diligently care for the track surface while Romero Estrella heads the maintenance team which ensures that the barn area stays in good shape.

## Where Real Training Options Still Exist

San Luis Rey Downs also prides itself on the fact that it is able to provide an extensive array of facilities, making this completely self-supportive training center the envy of many others. The barns are either metal or concrete block in structure, and



have 20, 40 or 80 stalls in each of them. Horses enjoy the outdoors in a regulation-size equine swimming pool (15 feet deep), the relatively new 5,000 square foot arena, numerous paddocks, four individual round lunging pens, two free-run exercisers (trainers De Seroux and Paula Capestro), and even a couple of different trails through the countryside.

"The 'Creek Trail' is flat, has a sandy footing, and runs about a quarter-mile along the creek bed," explains Leigh Ann. "The 'All Weather Trail' is about 18-feet wide, over a mile long, has a wood chip base and is bordered. This trail has moderate to severe elevation changes as it rolls over the hills, giving horses a real opportunity to stretch and build their muscles," she proudly concludes about this pet project of hers.

Another plan that is on the front burner is the development of a 1 1/4-mile grass gallop in a now fenced-off area located west/northwest of the main track. Right now, additives are being mixed into the soil so that the planting of the turf can begin as soon as possible. "Don't get the wrong idea, though," confides Leigh Ann. "We are not going to rush this, as it needs to be done right, from the beginning. We need a good base so we don't have to re-do it." When completed, the gallop will start off straight and flat, make a dogleg, then a loop, and finally end with an uphill climb.

Other resources to take advantage of at San Luis Rey Downs include a veterinary office and large x-ray room, as well as its tack, feed and gen-

eral stores. The 100 or so trainers' employees who permanently live on the property either stay in the dormitory above the track kitchen or in rooms within or above the various barns. There is also a zero alcohol tolerance system in place. So, because the management have done a lot to make life more comfortable and enjoyable for the workers, like providing a recreation area and hosting holiday entertainment and parties, the workers tend to maintain the positive attitude of, "You've done that for me, so I'll try to keep the place clean," says Leigh Ann.

### The Past, Present & Future

For over 30 years, San Luis Rey Downs has proved itself to be a leader in its class, and with such talented trainers on its current roster as the aforesaid Laura De Seroux, Neil French (who just had a very successful Santa Anita meet) and D. Wayne Baker (15th in the standings at Del Mar last year), to name but a few, that trend promises to continue well into the future.

With its wide open spaces, peaceful surroundings and temperate weather, it is definitely a place where

its horses get the opportunity to relax, away from the rigors of their busy training schedules. Their quality of life is good, especially when compared to those horses spending their time at a crowded racetrack.

It is not surprising, then, that trainer Paula Capestro confidently states, "This is a world class facility that allows us to produce champions."



Azeri



## SAN LUIS REY DOWNS FACT-FILE

*A Wholly-Owned Subsidiary of Magna Entertainment Corporation (MEC)*

**General Manager:** Leigh Ann Howard  
**Assistant Manager:** Sandi Moore  
**Projects Director:** Laura Rosier  
**Head Starter:** Tony Phillips  
**Official Clockers:** Lee "Mossy" Mosbacher & Holly Dunham  
**Outriders:** Amanda Guthrie & Susan Alfonse  
**Head of Racetrack:** Luis Hernandez  
**Head of Security:** Alice Dubs  
**Head of Maintenance:** Romero Estrella  
**Physical Address:** 5772 Camino Del Rey, Bonsall Calif., 92003  
**Telephone:** (760) 414-3273  
**Fax:** (760) 758-9994  
**Web Site:** [www.thoroughbredinfo.com/showcase/slrd.htm](http://www.thoroughbredinfo.com/showcase/slrd.htm)  
**E-Mail Address:** [slrdho@aol.com](mailto:slrdho@aol.com)  
**Services:** Thoroughbred Training Center

### Horses in Training

Maximum .....500  
 Current .....465

### Resident Trainers (in alphabetical order)

D. Wayne Baker	Carlos Lopez
Susan Bump	Jim Mascari
Carlos Cabello III	Martin Meza
Paula Capestro	Peter Miller
Vicki De Mull	Elizabeth Nowak
Laura De Seroux	Sal Orozco
Dan Dunham	Laura Rosier
Neil French	Tim Rosier
Jacque Fulton	Heinz Schwab
Ron Glatt	Sam Scolamieri
Mike Goodin	Gordon Severson
Byron Hendricks	Sam Semkin
Sal Hernandez	Bob Sides
Joe Herrick	Denny Sparks
Leigh Ann Howard	Brian Strong
Tom Hunter	Charles Trent
Fred Lamazor	Ventura Vargas
Tony W. Locke	Lloyd Wicker