



CHAD HARRISON

LUCK BE A LADY

BY ESTHER MARR

A few months ago John Sikura of Hill 'n' Dale Farms savored having three fillies pointing toward the May 2 Longines Kentucky Oaks (gr. I). Due to the fragile nature of the game, however, the prominent Kentucky horseman is now down to one prospect—Got Lucky.

But Sikura knows better than to lament the fillies that faltered along the way. They will live to fight another day, and he must remain focused on Got Lucky's biggest test to date: the Run for the Lilies.

"She's from the last crop of A.P. Indy, she's never run a bad race, and she's getting better all the time," said Sikura, who co-bred and co-owns Got Lucky in partnership with Florida businessman Philip Steinberg.

Trained by Todd Pletcher, Got Lucky will enter the Oaks with runner-up finishes in three graded contests, including the Feb. 22 Rachel Alexandra Stakes (gr. III) and April 5 Gazelle Stakes (gr. II). "She'll relish the distance, and I think she's one of the serious Oaks fillies," Sikura said.

At the beginning of the season, a friend asked Sikura if he was embarrassed he had three Oaks probables, since most people don't even have one. "I said, 'No, I wish we had six because a lot can happen along the way,'" Sikura said. "Unfortunately, my point has been proved."

Sikura's other Oaks prospects were Fascinating and Streaming, both daughters of

Got Lucky, on the rail, runs second to Stopchargingmaria (outside) in last year's Demoiselle Stakes at Aqueduct; Got Lucky has run second in two other graded stakes

Got Lucky hopes for good fortune in the Kentucky Oaks

Smart Strike. The former, whom Sikura owns in partnership with Bruce Lunsford, had a minor ailment a couple of months ago that forced her to miss vital spring conditioning time. Fascinating, who placed in the Chandelier Stakes (gr. I) and Del Mar Debutante (gr. I) as a 2-year-old, will soon resume training under the guidance of Bob Baffert.

"Unfortunately, it's bad timing," Sikura said. "We think she's a fantastic filly... hopefully, she'll be Breeders' Cup ready."

Streaming, whom Sikura bred and campaigns with Edward McGhee, turned heads with her Hollywood Starlet Stakes (gr. I) victory last year and then had a promising start to 2014 when she was second, beaten just a half-length in the Las Virgenes Stakes (gr. I). After Streaming faded to seventh in

the Feb. 22 Rachel Alexandra, however, it was discovered she had a chip in her knee that would require surgery.

“We knew something had to be amiss because Bob Baffert thought she was a phenomenal filly,” said Sikura. “Dr. Larry Bramlage took the chip out and her prognosis is very good. She’ll be back in training soon.”

Fortunately, Got Lucky has been right on target for Sikura and Steinberg with on-the-board finishes in all five of her starts. Last year she finished second in her career debut at Belmont Park in October and then missed by a neck in the Demoiselle Stakes (gr. II) at Aqueduct.

Following her second-place Gazelle effort, Got Lucky shipped to Churchill Downs where she will continue training up to the Oaks.

“I think the pace scenario will set up much better for her in the Oaks (than in the Gazelle),” said Sikura. “She’s a pure classic filly in terms of aptitude to get the trip. If she’s good enough, we think she’s a threat. It’s kind of like the NCAA basketball tournament. When you have all the different performers from the different regions, you never know who has the most talent until they all show up together. We’re not the only ones that want to win it, so I hope we’re good enough.”

Before entering the horse industry, Sikura, an Ontario, Canada, native, was a collegiate hockey player and spent time playing professionally in Europe. He eventually returned to North America to join the family’s horse business and took over Lexington-based Hill ‘n’ Dale when his father, John Sikura Sr., died in 1994.

Sikura has developed Hill ‘n’ Dale into a powerhouse breeding and sales operation. The farm started standing stallions in 1995 and this year has 10 sires on its roster, including two-time Breeders’ Cup Sprint (gr. I) winner Midnight Lute.

Sikura, a connoisseur of pedigrees, has been represented by numerous graded stakes winners as a breeder, including 1997 Belmont Stakes (gr. I) winner Touch Gold, whom he bred in partnership with Holtsinger and Star Stable.

When Sikura acquires new racing prospects, his philosophy is to examine a horse’s residual value. In the case of Got Lucky, Sikura initially saw a lot of long-term potential in her dam, the Deputy Minister mare Malka.

“I had long admired the Get Lucky family...I try to buy specific fillies for our broodmare band that I think could be prolific producers,” said Sikura, who sought out Malka after watching her break her maiden at Calder Race Course as a 2-year-old.

“We’ve had huge success with Deputy Minister as a broodmare sire, and I was able to strike a deal and buy a half interest in Malka (from Ben Walden),” Sikura said. “At the time it was a big risk...it was a lot of money and sometimes they work, but most times they don’t.”

The other half-interest in Malka was retained by Steinberg, who is involved in real estate in Palm Beach, Fla. Steinberg and Walden had bought Malka’s graded stakes-winning dam, Get



ANNE M. EBERHARDT

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Lucky, for \$300,000 at the 2002 Keeneland November breeding stock sale. Consigned by Claiborne Farm, agent, she was in foal to Monarchos.

“To me, it’s the best family in the stud book,” said Steinberg. “It’s the Numbered Account branch of La Troienne. It goes back seven generations...every mare back to La Troienne was either a stakes winner or stakes producer.”

Get Lucky is out of the prolific Dance Number, winner of the 1983 Beldame Stakes (gr. I) and the dam of other such prominent horses as 1989 champion juvenile male Rhythm. Get Lucky’s second dam is Numbered Account (by Buckpasser), who was named the 1971 champion 2-year-old filly by virtue of her seven stakes scores that year, including the Spinaway, Matron, and Frizette stakes. Among her offspring is grade I winner and prominent sire Private Account.

An outstanding producer herself, Get Lucky is represented by Supercharger (by A.P. Indy), the dam of Kentucky Derby Presented by Yum! Brands (gr. I) winner Super Saver and grade III winner Brethren; She’s a Winner (by A.P. Indy), the dam of grade I-winning millionaire and 2013 leading sire in New York Bluegrass Cat, grade II victor Lord of the Game, and stakes winner Sonoma Cat; New Dice (by Capote), the dam of Japanese multi-millionaire Molto Grande; and multiple graded stakes winner Daydreaming (by A.P. Indy), the dam of grade III winner Imagining.

Get Lucky’s other stakes-winning offspring are Accelerator (by A.P. Indy), Harborage (by Monarchos), and Girolamo (by A.P. Indy). Girolamo, whom Steinberg bred in partnership with Walden and WinStar Farm, captured the 2010 Vosburgh Stakes (gr. I) for Godolphin Racing. After standing three seasons at Sequel Stallions in New York, Girolamo is standing the 2014

A.P. INDY, dkb/br, 1989	Seattle Slew, 1974 17s, SW, \$1,208,726 1,050 f, 114 SW, 3.66 AEI	Bold Reasoning, 1968 12s, SW, \$189,564 61 f, 10 SW, 3.75 AEI	Boldnesian Reason to Earn
	GOT LUCKY dkb/br, f April 3, 2011	Weekend Surprise, 1980 31s, SW, \$402,892 14 f, 12 r, 9 w, 4 SW	My Charmer, 1969 32s, SW, \$34,133 12 f, 8 r, 6 w, 4 SW
MALKA, dkb/br, 2005		Deputy Minister, 1979 22s, SW, \$696,964 1,141 f, 90 SW, 2.53 AEI	Secretariat, 1970 21s, SW, \$1,316,808 653 f, 57 SW, 2.95 AEI
	Get Lucky, 1988 11s, SW, \$157,760 14 f, 9 r, 9 w, 4 SW	Lassie Dear, 1974 26s, SW, \$80,549 13 f, 12 r, 12 w, 4 SW	Buckpasser Gay Missile
		Vice Regent, 1967 5s, wnr, \$6,215 673 f, 105 SW, 2.89 AEI	Northern Dancer Victoria Regina
		Mint Copy, 1970 76s, wnr, \$53,945 7 f, 7 r, 4 w, 1 SW	Bunty's Flight Shakney
		Mr. Prospector, 1970 14s, SW, \$112,171 1,178 f, 181 SW, 3.98 AEI	Raise a Native Gold Digger
		Dance Number, 1979 21s, SW, \$415,418 6 f, 6 r, 6 w, 2 SW	Northern Dancer Numbered Account



Got Lucky breaking her maiden at Gulfstream Park Jan. 29

season at Darley near Lexington for a fee of \$12,500.

“The family is impeccable,” Steinberg said. “I’m a big believer in (renowned Thoroughbred breeder and trainer) Federico Tesio, and he’s a big believer in bloodlines. You’ve got to get the blood so you can start somewhere to breed on. These good families keep producing. They may skip (generations) sometimes, but they come back.”

Steinberg, who bought his first horse at the 1992 Keeneland September yearling sale, owns a small quantity of high-quality stock. He currently keeps two Mr. Prospector mares at Hill ‘n’ Dale: Miss Du Bois, the dam of grade I winner Film Maker; and Pennant Champion, who is out of the undefeated champion Personal Ensign and is the dam of grade III winner Animal Spirits. Steinberg also has a yearling Girolamo filly named System Time, whom he plans to race and then retain as a broodmare.

While Steinberg and Sikura didn’t know each other well prior to owning Malka, they have maintained a strong partnership due to their similar breeding philosophies.

“John is very astute, and we get along really well—we think along the same lines,” Steinberg said.

The partners thought Malka nicked well with the now-pensioned Horse of

the Year and leading stallion A.P. Indy, the sire of her first three foals. Malka’s first offspring, a filly named Champagne Courage, sold for \$625,000 to Bobby Flay Thoroughbreds at the 2010 Fasig-Tipton Saratoga yearling sale, while her second foal, a gelding named Powerful, topped the 2011 Keeneland September yearling sale when he was bought for \$1.4 million by Amerman, Evans, and Co.

“From a commercial and class point of view, A.P. Indy is a unique horse and has proved to be a great broodmare sire,” Sikura said. “Anytime you can meld two fantastic female families like A.P. Indy and Malka’s, your chances are enhanced for the mare being a producer.

“The Deputy Minister—A.P. Indy cross has also worked very well for us in the past,” Sikura added. “Serenading and Handpainted are both stakes-winning A.P. Indy daughters out of a Deputy Minister mare (Daijin).”

When it came time to breed Malka to A.P. Indy once more in 2011, the stallion’s fertility had started to wane and Sikura and Steinberg had to send the mare back three times before she got in foal. The resulting offspring, of course, was Got Lucky.

“We named her after the grandmother, and also because we got lucky when we finally got (Malka) in foal,” said Steinberg. “So (her name) is a double entendre. We

had to write a letter to The Jockey Club, though, because they thought it was too much of a (sexual) innuendo. We had to explain we didn’t mean that and then they gave us the name.”

Sikura and Steinberg decided to keep Got Lucky since she held the distinction of being the last A.P. Indy filly in her family.

“While I’m a commercial breeder, we like to make sure we keep daughters of our families to try and provide depth and have multiple fillies in those pedigrees,” Sikura explained.

Retaining Got Lucky proved fortunate because Malka died from cancer a year later at age 9. Her last foal is an unraced 2-year-old filly by Smart Strike named Lucky Number, who is in training for Sikura and Steinberg in Ocala.

“Malka’s death was a terrible loss and nothing anyone could have predicted,” said Sikura. “She was very good to us, and unfortunately her life ended way too soon.”

Got Lucky has managed to ease some of the sting from the loss of her dam. The filly exuded class from the time she was a foal and quickly developed into an exciting prospect for Sikura and Steinberg.

“She was mid-sized and very straightforward (as a foal),” said Sikura. “There was never an issue...she had a beautiful face and a ton of quality. I wouldn’t say she was completely robust or big...you couldn’t pick her out in a paddock as far as her athleticism, but you certainly would by her quality. She’s very correct and feminine—not in a light, soft way, but in a way that class exuded from her.”

Sikura hopes Got Lucky’s physical qualities, stellar pedigree, and racetrack experience will translate to a big effort on Oaks day. If so, she could have the credentials to become Hill ‘n’ Dale’s next star broodmare.

“(Thoroughbred breeder) Helen Alexander has always been my hero...the way she has handpicked and meticulously planned matings and reared those daughters and granddaughters and sisters,” said Sikura of Alexander’s blue hen Courtly Dee. “It was always at the back of my mind that we could get involved with some pedigrees that could reproduce like that. Maybe Got Lucky is one. It’s with great gratitude that you watch multiple generations of a family flourish and reproduce in major fashion. It’s the most rewarding thing I can do in the business.” **BH**