

QUIET Leader



Stacy Pigott-Speedhorse

Dr. Stephen Fisch, president of the Florida Quarter Horse Racing Association and owner of a thriving equine medical center and stallion station, has played an instrumental role in returning Quarter Horse racing to the Sunshine State.

by Michael Compton



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Dr. Stephen Fisch and his wife Kelley are surrounded by family (mother Betty, sister LeeAnn, son Dr. Joe Fisch, father Will, and oldest daughter Jessica) at the 2010 AQHA Racing Conference in New Orleans when he received the Gordon Crone Award.

Dr. Stephen Fisch, a Quarter Horse enthusiast since childhood, has parlayed his passion for fast horses into a meaningful career of service.

A graduate of the University of Georgia College of Veterinary Medicine, Fisch is founder and owner of AVS Equine Medical and Surgical Hospital in Tallahassee, Florida. The hospital, which focuses on diagnosis and treatment of equine lameness, surgery, equine sports medicine and reproduction, is a family affair. Fisch's wife, Kelley, is the hospital's breeding coordinator, and son, Joe, a graduate of the University of Florida's College of Veterinary Medicine, is a veterinarian at the hospital. Fisch's father, Will, is the hospital's accountant.

"When Kelley came to work at the hospital our family dynamic changed some," said Dr. Fisch. "And Dr. Joe is an excellent equine veterinarian. I am very proud of him. My family is a big part of the hospital."

Stephen and Kelley's three daughters—Jessica, Casey and Zoey—show horses and ride hunter-jumpers. Each have worked at the hospital at some point either answering the phone, grooming stallions, feeding the horses, cleaning and a multitude of other tasks.

Fisch established Equine Veterinary Services in 1984 with one technician and



courtesy Steve Fisch

a mobile vet truck. Two years later, he purchased land and opened Animal Veterinary Services (AVS) Hospital. As business grew, Fisch expanded the operation in physical size and scope once again in 2004 to its current location just east of Tallahassee. With the move came another new name, AVS Equine Medical and Surgical Hospital.

The 35-acre facility houses a 26,000 square foot state-of-the-art complex. The hospital has two surgery suites, along with separate induction recovery rooms, large digital x-ray room, extensive horse treatment areas, covered stallion collection area, two climate controlled neonatal stalls, 20 mare and foal stalls and several paddocks.

"The focus of our hospital changed. Our needs changed," Fisch said. "We have a lot more room here. We pretty much outgrew our last facility. Now we have large, spacious paddocks. Basically, we are a totally different type of hospital now compared to when we started."

SUNSHINE STATE STALLIONS

AVS Equine is home to three stallions, Bono Jazz, Mr Joe Im Kool and Streakin Six Cartel. All are owned by outside clients.

Bono Jazz, by Jazzing Hi out of Pro Bono, by Summum Bonum, won nine of 22 career starts and earned \$316,124. During his racing days, he won the PCQHRA Breeders' Futurity-G1, Governor's Cup Derby-G1, El Primero Del Ano Derby-G2 and Fallbrook Handicap.

As a stallion, Bono Jazz has already produced a champion. He is the sire of Be A Bono, (14

wins to 6) with earnings of \$1,313,348. He was AQHA's World Champion, Champion 3-Year-Old and Champion 3-Year-Old Gelding in 2004.

"I like to choose stallions that not only have speed, but soundness as well," Fisch said. "Bono Jazz is big-boned and he has good feet. He's a big, stout horse. He performed at the top end as a racehorse and he puts out a nice looking baby."

Streakin Six Cartel is an Oklahoma-bred son of Corona Cartel out of the Grade 3-winning Streakin Six mare Streakin Six Love. Streakin Six Cartel captured the Remington Park Futurity-G1 and also was a finalist in the Heritage Place Futurity-G1 and the Texas Classic Futurity-G1 at age 2.

"He's a little bigger than Corona Cartel," Fisch said of Streakin Six Cartel. "This was his third year at stud. We bred about 80 mares to him last season. He had a real nice book."

Mr Joe Im Kool, a son of Royal Quick Dash, recently became the 47th American Quarter Horse to earn the exclusive title of AQHA Supreme Champion.

"He appeals to a different group of breeders," Fisch said. "He is a stallion that can produce a racehorse or an all-around rodeo type."

QUIET LEADER

As president of the Florida Quarter Horse Racing Association since 2005, Fisch has been instrumental in returning Quarter Horse racing to the Sunshine State.

"In August of 2005, the AQHA held a meeting in Ocala about getting racing going again in Florida," Fisch explained. "About 250 people showed up. There was a good bit of interest. It was a slow day for me, so I drove to Ocala to listen. I never planned on actually getting involved."

"Two groups were formed," he added, "a legislative group and an organizational group. John Shaw wanted me to participate and convinced me to join the organizational group even though I was just there to listen. No one from the legisla-



Bono Jazz

Bono Jazz is currently one of three stallions that stands to the public at Dr. Fisch's AVS Equine Medical and Surgical Hospital in Tallahassee, Florida.

K.C. Montgomery



*"I get a big thrill out of racing because I know what it feels like up there."
—Former jockey Dr. Steve Fisch*

Dr. Fisch with Flying Fish Farms homebred Aforgone Conclusion (First Down Straw-Easy Launch, Apollo-TB).



Courtesy Steve Fisch

tive group showed up at the next meeting in September. At that point, three different people came up to ask me if I would accept a nomination to be president. I told them, 'If you want to elect the greenest person in the room then I would accept.' I knew plenty about raising, racing and riding horses, but I didn't know the first thing about starting a race meet or leading an organization."

With encouragement from those around him, Fisch embraced his role as president. He is quick to praise the FQHRA board of directors and others who have helped him along the way.

"I've had so many good people around me," Fisch said. "I couldn't have done all this without them. I knew I wasn't the smartest guy in the room, so I worked at surrounding myself with the best possible people I could. In the very beginning, I called Butch Wise and asked him for advice on legislation and how they set up the Oklahoma-bred program. His advice was 'you need to call Debbie Schauf.' I did just that and Debbie and Laverne Perry from the Louisiana Quarter Horse Breeders Association came to Tallahassee in February of 2007 and donated three days of their time with our board of directors. They gave us the paths they took with each of their state-bred programs. When I need advice on state statutes and I need it accurately

and quickly, Debbie is one of the knowledgeable people I have on speed dial.

"Trey Buck, the AQHA director of racing, has been an important information source as well," he added. "I have heard him tell new presidents and directors, 'If you don't call me as much as Dr. Fisch did when he became president of FQHRA, I'll know you are not working.'"

With the weight of an organization hungry for the return of racing to Florida on his shoulders, Fisch set out to educate legislators about the benefits of the Quarter Horse racing and breeding industry.

"We went to the state Capitol the following March and pounded the pavement," Fisch said. "We knocked on doors and met with legislators to help them better understand the role of Quarter Horses in Florida. Ultimately, we put some language together showing how Quarter Horse racing could benefit the state. If I had not had such a super crew at the hospital we would not have been able to spend the required time to get the job done during those first few years since the legislative session coincides with breeding season. Taking off my wranglers after checking mares, putting on a coat and tie and heading to the Capitol made for some long days.

"It was a lot more work than I ever thought it would be," he added. "I knew why I liked the

industry. I love to raise horses. I enjoy trying to produce the fastest horses out there. It wasn't until I led the organization that it really hit me how much the industry means to other people. From jobs to economic impact, Quarter Horse racing is a huge deal. This business changes people's lives not just in Florida but all across the country."

Quarter Horse racing returned to Florida in 2009 following an 18-year absence. The inaugural meet at Hialeah consisted of two 20-day meets held back to back. Average purses were \$100,000 per day for a total of \$4 million.

"To see the horses go down the track that first day proved that all of the hard work was worth it," Fisch said. "With more than 28,000 people in attendance, I thought to myself, 'we're finally here.'"

Hialeah's fourth Quarter Horse race meet kicks off in December. Fisch related that the upcoming 30-day stand will feature average daily purses of \$120,000 for a meet total of \$3.6 million. He said he expects the following year's meet to offer purses averaging \$140,000 per day for 40 days for a total of \$5.6 million.

"We've had some really good horses come down here so far," Fisch said. "The feedback I've received from horsemen has been positive. Track management has been very responsive to the needs of the horsemen. My general impression is



Courtesy Steve Fisch

Dr. Steve Fisch with Tsunami 09, a Flying Fisch Farms-bred yearling who went on to win the All Canadian Futurity (far right, grey horse on the inside).



Courtesy Steve Fisch



Clive Cohen/NewsMedia

that everyone is approving of the situation. Plus, you can't beat Florida's weather in December, January and February."

In addition to his service to the FQHRA, Fisch is a national AQHA Director, a member of the AQHA Racing Council and AQHA Racing Committee, the American Association of Equine Practitioners (AAEP), and the Florida Association of Equine Practitioners.

THE EARLY DAYS

A jockey at several bush tracks around south Georgia and on his grandparents' farm before attending college, Fisch credits his first horse, Red Baron, for igniting his passion for American Quarter Horses while growing up in Moultrie, Georgia.

"That first horse is always special," Fisch said. "I bought Red Baron from my cousin when I was in the seventh grade. He wasn't great but he was a good looking horse. People would pull over to the side of the road, park their car in the ditch and take pictures of him. Red Baron is responsible for getting me involved in riding match races on my grandparents' farm. Match racing was a big deal back then. We even had an AQHA approved oval track with a 10-horse gate called Green Acres Raceway in Valdosta. I rode there also.

"Red Baron probably didn't even want to be a racehorse," Fisch added. "I remember one race where my gate didn't open. It was a relief to him. Other, more competitive horses would have come out over the top of the gate to leave there."

These days the Fisch family races horses under the banner of their Flying Fisch Farm.

"I get a big thrill out of racing because I know what it feels like up there," Fisch said. "We didn't race any this year but I have the confidence in the horses we raise to sell that if they don't sell, we'll take them to the races."

On the breeding end, the Fisch family broodmare band stands at nine. At sales, Fisch estimates he will go through 100 mares at the winter sales to come out with one or two.

"We breed to our stallions as well as outside stallions," Fisch said. "I'm always looking to the future when it comes to developing our broodmare band."

CIRCUIT TRAINING

Fisch is excited about the future for Quarter Horse racing in Florida. He believes a thriving racing program will impact the industry at all levels, including breeding sheds and sales rings.

"I'm very passionate about this industry," Fisch said. "It gives me great satisfaction to walk the barns at Hialeah and see the owners and

trainers happy to be racing again in Florida. It is a wonderful feeling."

Fisch is hopeful that more racing permits will be enacted in the coming years in Florida, creating a circuit. Currently, there are six permits throughout the state that have not been used.

"You can see the Quarter Horse racing program growing up in Florida," Fisch said. "Our goal is to have at least three of the six permits being utilized. That will definitely jump start the breeding program in the state. There has already been a tremendous increase in interest in racing in Florida. I would like to see enough racing to where owners and trainers can make a good living here without having to ship their horses out of state.

"I look forward to the day that the Quarter Horse racing industry in Florida has grown into a well-oiled machine," he added. "I wake up each day with a prayer for guidance, excited to work toward realizing that potential. The excitement of knowing the importance of the Quarter Horse racing industry in Florida and its effect nationwide, along with the daily excitement of performing my veterinary profession gets me out of bed in the morning."

That must be welcome news for those betting on the future of Quarter Horse racing in the Sunshine State. 🐾