



Twin Creeks partners and childhood friends, Randy Gullatt, left, and Steve Davison

RISING CREEKS

BY LENNY SHULMAN

From humble origins Twin Creeks Farm is cresting

Steve Davison and Randy Gullatt have been walking on the ledge of the Thoroughbred business for so long they're no longer afraid of the precipitous fall that lurks a couple of false steps away.

The childhood friends from Louisiana have built, from the ground up, racing and breeding operations that today are thriving from their base at Twin Creeks Farm in Nonesuch, Ky., 15 miles west of Lexington. In typical fashion for the pair, the beautifully manicured 230 acres sit clear across Woodford County from the high-rent district that is home to farms such as Lane's End, Three Chimneys, and WinStar. Surrounded by cattle and tobacco growers, Twin Creeks stands out as a jewel.

In 2010 Davison, Gullatt, and partners realized a dream they hadn't dared fantasize about, as Mission Impazible took them to the Kentucky Derby Presented by Yum! Brands (gr. I). As that one was winding down his racing career, along came the brilliant Graydar to deliver Twin Creeks' first grade I victory. And today, Constitution, winner of the Besilu Stables Florida Derby (gr. I), and Vinceremos, who will run in the April 12 Toyota Blue Grass Stakes (gr. I), each owned in partnership with WinStar Farm, are poised to take the two Cajuns back to Louisville in early May.

Davison and Gullatt grew up in the shadow of Louisiana Downs, which they would sneak into while underaged. The pair had sat next to each other from kindergarten through eighth grade in a small school where the same 30 kids stayed together for those nine years. Gullatt sensed that college wasn't going to do it for him and tried to pursue a career as a jockey. He'd gotten on horses while in high school and became addicted to them right off jump street.

"It was all chips in from there," he said recently, hosting a guest in a modest office inside one of Twin Creeks' four barns.

But Gullatt soon realized staying at riding weight was not a realistic or healthy path for him, so he took out a trainer's license and asked Davison if his father, a successful trucking company owner, would finance their claiming a couple of racehorses.

"I thought to myself there was no way my dad would ever go for something like that," said Davison. "But the horses were something that had got in our blood, so I told Randy I'd ask. Well, I was shocked that my dad was OK with it. I think he's worried about us ever since."

And so started the tightrope act. Gullatt and Davison got lucky with the claimers, winning races at Louisiana Downs, Fair Grounds, and Oaklawn Park. Their goals were modest.

"We were just trying to have some fun at Louisiana Downs and stay in the business without crapping out," said Davison. "At least that was my philosophy. Maybe Randy was more confident. There were a couple of times when my dad was about to pull the plug, and someone would go on a two- or three-race win streak and we'd get a stay of execution. I don't know if Randy knew that, but I was getting pressure on a number of occasions."

Then Gullatt bought some horses privately from Joe Adcock, the former Major League Baseball player who ran Red River Farms in Louisiana. One of those, Joey Jr., reeled off four wins in a row and two stakes, becoming a local hero. Another was Miss Jesy, a Louisiana-bred who took the operation west. With their racing stable outgrowing Louisiana Downs, Gullatt hit the road for California, where Miss Jesy won three stakes and

was named horse of the meet at Bay Meadows in 1991. Gullatt and Davison, the latter of whom left the racetrack to his partner while he finished college and law school, raced a handful of stakes horses in the Golden State as the '80s turned into the '90s.

"Even though we won some stakes races, it was never a great success financially," allowed Davison. "We had some good horses and got lucky, but we weren't really on firmer footing. But I was obsessed with the horses. In law school, where you have very little time to yourself, I was still studying pedigrees



Constitution, right, battles to win the Florida Derby and is on his way to Churchill Downs

and past performances. I've always been fascinated by it."

Gullatt had married his wife, Kim, a former rider, and they were raising two young children, which precipitated another change-of-life decision. Not wanting the all-consuming lifestyle of training racehorses at the expense of raising his family, Gullatt, who had been going to the yearling sales in Kentucky and training some at the autumn meets at Keeneland and Churchill Downs, started farm shopping with Davison's blessing. Jim Squires, the former newspaper editor who would go on to breed Kentucky Derby winner Monarchos, had two farms at the time, and sold the one in Nonesuch to Gullatt and Davison. And just like that, the racetrack operation became a breeding concern, with one major mare that tied both together.

La Paz was a modest Arizona-bred Gullatt trained to win a pair of stakes in Northern California in 1992. The daughter of Hold Your Peace—Classy Craft, by Crafty Drone, won eight races and earned \$175,431 before becoming a founding member of the Twin Creeks broodmare band. Her third foal, Forest Camp (by Deputy Minister), bred and raised by Twin Creeks,

won the 1999 Del Mar Futurity (gr. II). Her Pleasant Colony colt Spanish Empire, co-bred by Twin Creeks, took the 2004 Fifth Season Stakes (gr. III) at Oaklawn Park.

“Forest Camp was our first big success,” said Gullatt. “But we were a young, growing farm, and we needed capital to get bigger and better horses. Owning one big mare...she’s my all-time favorite mare, but we could buy four good mares for what I could do with her.”

Twin Creeks sold La Paz in foal to Storm Cat at the 2000 Keeneland November mixed sale for \$1.6 million to Jane Lyon of Summer Wind Farm, but that hardly ended Gullatt and Davison’s involvement with her. Summer Wind bred La Paz to Unbridled’s Song and brought the resultant yearling to Keeneland’s September sale in 2008.

“Randy and I were living 1,000 miles apart, but I’m sure we both turned down the tab on the page when we saw that pedigree in the catalog,” said Davison. “That colt was the first horse I wanted to see when I got to the sale, although usually you’re disappointed because the one you like on paper isn’t the one you like physically. This time, though, he matched up. He was the best foal she’d had, and that turned out to be Mission Impazible. We loved him because of our connection to the family, and then we loved him as a racehorse.”

And why not? Able to purchase the gray yearling for \$200,000 because Unbridled’s Song was going through a cold spell at the time, Gullatt and Davison partnered with members of Davison’s family and his longtime friend, Hall of Fame quarterback Terry Bradshaw, to campaign Mission Impazible to a win in the Louisiana Derby (gr. II) and a run in the Kentucky Derby.

“The Kentucky Derby was so unattainable when we started it wasn’t even a goal,” Davison said. “We were tickled to be there; we were probably the happiest people ever to finish



Twin Creeks stands grade I winner Graydar at Taylor Made Stallions

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ninth in the Derby.”

Mission Impazible came back from a minor injury to take the 2011 New Orleans Handicap (gr. II) and just missed gaining a grade I victory twice—when second to Pool Play by a neck in the 2011 Stephen Foster Handicap and second to Hymn Book by a nose in the 2012 Donn Handicap. Today he stands in New York at Sequel Stallions with his first foals hitting the ground this year.

“That’s the crazy thing about our business,” said Gullatt. “What would people be thinking about him if he’d won those races? It’s such a minute difference, yet he’d probably be standing in Ken-

tucky with a \$6 or \$10 million higher valuation.”

Mission Impazible moved Twin Creeks back among major players on the racing front. The first few years on the farm Gullatt concentrated on making it a breeding operation, buying mares at auction, privately, and off the racetrack. Twin Creeks bought Cruising Haven for \$600,000 and sold the Unbridled’s Song colt she was carrying for \$2.8 million. They sold her next Unbridled’s Song colt for \$1 million the following year.

“I’m giving you the highlights,” said the good-natured Gullatt. “For every good one you get you have 20 that are no good, and you hope the one covers the rest. Steve’s other businesses (real estate management, energy) allowed us to grow and build up. We raised and sold a lot of nice horses. But our background and love was racing, so we decided to start another racing stable.”

That phase began six years ago, first with fillies that might have residual value even if they didn’t pan out at the races. Buying 10 horses a year—mostly yearlings—for this new partnership, Twin Creeks came up with Garden District, a Dixie Union filly who defeated Rachel Alexandra in the 2008 Debutante Stakes (gr. III) at Churchill Downs. As the racing venture became successful, Gullatt and Davison upped the risk quotient and added a few colts each year.

Gullatt selected Graydar out of a 2-year-old sale in 2011. He had gone to the auction to sell an Unbridled’s Song colt and ended up buying another. Graydar (Unbridled’s Song—Sweetest Smile, by Dehere) had some issues normally associated with waiting for a 17-hand horse to grow into himself and began racing as a 3-year-old, winning two of three starts. At 4 he won the Donn, New Orleans Handicap, and Kelso Handicap (gr. II) in consecutive starts. Quarter cracks suffered just before the Breeders’ Cup World Championships ended his career, and Twin Creeks, which maintains majority interest in both Mission Impazible and Graydar, sent him to stand at stud at Taylor Made Stallions.

“It was a tough decision to retire him,” said Gullatt. “With Unbridled’s Song having died, we knew he would get a good start at stud. We syndicated him and took in partners. You want more people with an interest in your stallions because years



Mission Impazible wins the New Orleans Handicap and stands in New York at Sequel Stallions

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ANNE M. EBERHARDT

Kim and Randy Gullatt with Kettle's Sister, the dam of Vinceremos, now in foal to Mission Impazible

two, three, and four can be difficult.”

Graydar is in his initial year at stud and will cover some 140 mares, including 22 that Twin Creeks has sent his way. Mission Impazible, who bred 71 mares a year ago, will end up with about 100, 20 coming from Twin Creeks.

Developing two stallions in two years isn't bad, but Twin Creeks isn't stopping there. Currently it boasts those two horses on the Derby trail. Gullatt plucked Constitution out of the Fasig-Tipton Saratoga yearling sale for \$400,000. Gullatt and WinStar's Elliott Walden sometimes compare notes at auctions, and if they land on the same horse, they consider a partnership, as was the case with the Tapit colt out of Baffled, by Distorted Humor. His Florida Derby score came in just his third lifetime start.

“He fit what we like—good size, stretchy, and athletic with a good way of moving,” said Gullatt. “And he seemed to have the class. We're trying to find a stallion, and a Tapit colt would be high on the list.”

Vinceremos is another Gullatt/Walden production, bought out of last year's Keeneland April sale of 2-year-olds for \$340,000. The son of Pioneerof the Nile won the Sam F. Davis Stakes (gr. III) and ran back second in the Tampa Bay Derby (gr. II). Gullatt and Davison thought so much of Constitution and Vinceremos that they purchased the dams of both colts before either hit the racetrack.

“Vinceremos trained well at Keeneland

when we bought him and those Polytrack races tend to be close at the wire,” said Gullatt, handicapping the Blue Grass. “That should suit him because he looks like a fighter. He should be competitive.”

Gullatt and Kim handle the administration of Twin Creeks, a strictly private operation that is home to 38 broodmares—the most Gullatt and Davison have ever had—and some 15 yearlings that will be prepped for sales. In a unique arrangement, Mission Impazible returns to Twin Creeks from New York each summer after breeding season to hang out and enjoy the outdoor therapeutic equine swimming pool on the premises.

“We don't like to overpopulate,” said Gullatt. “I try to keep this place so the grass is good and there aren't too many horses in the paddocks. We sell quite a few weanlings to keep our number of yearlings manageable.”

“We go with our gut feeling. Typically, I like selling the best we have, horses we feel are worth so much that their value is too great to take chances with. We'll keep the horses in the middle that we like who might have a flaw so that their value is more than what we'd get for them in the sale. We sold Negligee as a yearling for \$52,000, and she went on to win the Darley Alcibiades (gr. I). I sold a Tapit filly to Stonestreet that I thought was the best filly I ever raised. It's tough selling a horse you think is magnificent. Last year we took a Tapit colt to the sale and then decided to keep him at the last minute. His name is Heartland. Did we keep the right one? Time will tell. I don't know that anybody knows. Horses change; some for the better, some for the worse.

You have to make a gut decision, live by it, and don't look back.”

There hasn't been a huge need to second-guess along this magical journey that has carried Davison and Gullatt from the bayou backwaters to excelling on racing's biggest stages and operating a showcase farm in the self-proclaimed horse capital of the world. At one time they may have been one bad race away from dissolving, but today they have passed the test of quality and consistency, all the while enjoying a friendship that has never wavered from the days of reading Dick and Jane.

“I'm just like a kid in a candy store,” said Davison. “It's ridiculous.” BH



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Gullatt and Davison with James Davison, who bankrolled their first foray into Thoroughbreds