



Photos by Brock Sheridan

McArthurs investing in Texas with Jaramar Farm

By ANNE LANG

Anyone who feels that the grace and style of Kentucky Thoroughbred establishments is lacking in Texas is certain to change his opinion after a visit to East Texas' latest premier development, the 136-acre Jaramar Farm.

This state-of-the-art training and boarding center, located in the rural community of Fulshear (about 30 miles west of Houston) is the 8-month-old culmination of a long-term dream for the McArthur family, whose 3-generation ranching roots trace back to West Texas and the clan's late patriarch, cattleman Floyd McArthur. A facility where both form and function exist in harmonious abundance, Jaramar is aptly regarded as a symbol of hope and renewal in a state that's suffered more than its share of setbacks since pari-mutuel's 1987 passage.

"We sort of grew up on the race-track, and this place is the sum of our collective experiences," explains Oscar McArthur, 54, whose Houston-based real estate and development company (also called Jaramar) provided the funds for building the farm. Oscar and his brothers Bill, 49, James, 57, and Richard, 51, acquired a taste for racing early on while accompanying their father to Texas bush tracks. The races always included a McArthur-owned runner or two, and the hands-on participation inspired all four boys to eventually become trainers.

By the time the family moved to California, Floyd's sons were young adults and ready to go to work on the Golden State's wide variety of tracks and breeding farms. Over

time, James emerged as a top Quarter Horse trainer, with a long list of winners and two All-American Futurity victories to his credit (Easy Date in 1974, and Eastex in 1984). In the late 1960s and early 1970s, Bill conditioned multiple World Champion Quarter Horse runner Top Rockette, and numerous other race-track winners in later years.

Along the way, Richard switched from training to horse-shoeing, and today his farrier services are in constant demand by the likes of trainer Richard Mandella. Oscar, after enjoying many years of breaking and training young horses for the track, joined the suit-and-tie world. He moved back to Texas in the mid-1970s and launched the Jaramar Company (named for his three children: Jarrett, Amy and Marissa), which has been a steady source of prosperity for the McArthur family—and certainly the training center. The latter enterprise has

brought all the brothers except Richard (who remains in California) back to Texas with their families.

"Texas is really our home," Oscar declares. "This is where the business is based, so this is where we wanted to base the farm. We're a close-knit family, and this is a family-run operation."

That it is. Although Oscar still spends much of his time at the company's downtown headquarters, he's also a regular presence on the farm, and lives just down the road. In another nearby house lives the family of Bill, who oversees the farm's training activity and much of its

business affairs. Oscar's son Jarrett, 24, resides on the farm itself and acts as all-around facility manager.

James, who conditions horses for the McArthurs and others at various tracks around the country (he's currently at Ruidoso), uses Jaramar as his home-training base during the



At the farm are Bill McArthur (left), Jarrett McArthur (center) and Oscar McArthur.

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off-season months. James' wife Donna is also an accomplished trainer, based in Southern California, where she saddles many of the McArthur-owned Quarter Horse runners. The other brothers' wives, as well as an assortment of grown children, nieces and nephews, round out the family members who participate in varying capacities at Jaramar Farm.

An Ambitious Undertaking

"We've had some pretty prominent horsefolk come through our gate, and when they ask us who designed the training track, the barns and the buildings, we tell them we did it ourselves. Their amazed reaction is a tremendous source of pride," admits Bill.

It's easy to see why. At Jaramar, no expense or detail appears to have been spared or overlooked—starting with the 5/8th-mile oval, which is situated just a stone's throw inside the electronic security gated entrance, on the left. The track, mostly a manufactured mixture of sand and clay, is comprised of two stabilized bases topped with a sub-cushion and cushion. There's a two percent slope on the straightaway, and a 4-5 percent slope on the turns. Bill states that even if the track absorbs as much as 8-10 inches of rain on a given afternoon, "it's dry by morning."

Jarrett adds that one of the toughest challenges they face is "keeping enough water on the track during a drought." To combat the often long rainless stretches, a truck loaded with water supplied by a large farm well is used daily on the surface, and it's the top priority of three full-time maintenance workers to keep the track in constant prime condition. A sophisticated 4-horse starting gate is prominently positioned in the 500-foot chute, and the entire oval is enclosed by a highly professional-looking rail. The track gets

plenty of use: during the peak winter months, 30-50 horses go out each morning, generally in sets of four.

Directly across from the track is the farm's main building, designed with the quietly elegant, Southwestern Spanish architecture of all the Jaramar structures. Two towering, century-old oaks frame the entranceway of tall twin doors made of heavy, intricately carved wood. Inside, a spacious tile-floored foyer leads to the main barn straight ahead, with the farm's

constructed (pre-fabricated by a Kentucky-based firm) with 2" x 6" tongue-in-groove wooden walls, reinforced by steel corners, edges, and gates. The stalls, bedded in shavings and each with its own wall-mounted fan, are situated in two separate back-to-back banks, with a 16-foot-wide center aisleway.

One of the most impressive features borders the entire outside perimeter of the stalls, while still within the covered walls of the building. It's an aisleway nearly 20 feet wide, which serves as a convenient exercise area during bad-weather days. Overall, the barn's sizeable doorways, its filtered sources of natural light, its detailed ventilation system and its general placement make the interior significantly cooler than the summer temperature outdoors. Construction is due to start soon on a second 40-stall barn that will mirror the main barn's design.

Just beyond the main barn is a roomy covered round pen, with a raised outside platform for spectators. Nearby is a double row of large turnout enclosures (about a dozen in all), which

despite the recent drought are lush with grass. A center lane between the paddocks leads to the holding barn. At the back end of the property is a 60-acre pasture where Jaramar's broodmares spend most of their time. All of the farm's grazing areas, which are enclosed by v-mesh wire fences topped with a white 2" x 4" vertical rail, are liberally dotted with a variety of native shade trees.

"We acquired this property about two years ago," Oscar says, adding that the finishing touches were completed in January. "You wouldn't believe this was the same place, if you'd seen it before we went to work on it. The site was mostly an old pecan grove, with a few acres of corn and a few head of



The interior of the main barn at Jaramar Farm is both functional and attractive with stone archways, tongue and groove ceiling, and stalls and wide shed rows.

offices on the left. A large, cool reception area welcomes visitors with deep leather sofas, plush carpeting, mahogany tables and desks, a large-screen TV/VCR unit, and an impressive array of equine art. Another hallway leads to a labyrinth of smaller offices.

It's hard to say who is afforded the most luxurious comfort at Jaramar: humans or horses.

Elegant rock arches make the transition from the Spanish architecture of the exterior and offices to the working environment of the barn. However, luxury remains constant. The interior of the main barn is cavernous, its wood-planked, cathedral ceiling soaring nearly three stories above the structure's 46 box stalls. The 12' x 12' stalls are

cattle running around. But we were able to see the potential for a beautiful training and breeding facility."

And their vision has been brought to fruition. Capping the whole scene, of course, are the horses: about 90 in all. Of those, about a third (mostly owned by the family) are young trainees and a few lay-ups, although when James was home earlier in the year, there were 60-70 horses in training — the majority of which are now racing. There are approximately 17 broodmares, and a variety of weanlings and yearlings make up the balance of the population.

Looking Ahead With Confidence

"I don't care if you've been in this business your whole life, you're gonna make a few mistakes, on a daily basis," Bill declares. "But you learn from those mistakes, and they help you improve."

The McArthurs will soon know whether some of their breeding combinations and expensive equine purchases over the past year will turn out to be "mistakes" or wise choices. They're the first to admit that they're new at the risky game of developing their own bloodstock, despite decades of collective success in training both Thoroughbreds and Quarter Horses. At last year's Texas sale, they brought home several of their own that didn't reach reserves, but acquired a Personal Flag filly as well. They've begun to shop seriously at the major Kentucky sales, and the youngsters of varying ages now romping in Jaramar's fields include sons and daughters of Unbridled, Gulch and Broad Brush.

There also are foals by Texas stallions Marfa, Rare Brick and Hadif. Although the majority of McArthur mares are still sent to Kentucky to be bred, a sizeable portion of them return to Texas to foal. Oscar says the brothers plan to remain active in the Texas-bred program, and indeed, their commitment to the Lone Star State runs genuinely deep.

"For years, we've seen the long line of Texans with big farms in Kentucky and other major states," Oscar observes. "The Bunker Hunts, the Will Farishes, the Josephine Abercrombies, and so forth. I'd like

to see everybody come home, but I realize that's not going to happen, at least in my lifetime. But our goal is to be able to run a large contingent of our horses close to home. We sure want to see Texas racing succeed."

"We want to breed a few, race a few and sell a few," he continues, "to establish ourselves as a well-rounded operation with top-quality horses. As a training facility, we want to become a dominant force. As for our sale horses, we've upgraded our yearling stock to the extent that they'll be in the top 10-15 percent of Barrett's and the better venues. We'll take the cream of the crop to the sales, and if they don't bring their reserves, we'll run every one of 'em."

"We've intended all along to keep a high percentage of our homebreds to race."

In the meantime, amid all the hustle-bustle of operating a first-rate training and breeding establishment, the McArthurs don't completely forget to pause from time to time and reflect on their accomplishments. Bill puts the family's philosophy into perspective.

"We knew what we wanted, and fortunately we had the money to put into it, so we held nothing back," he states, gazing with a satisfied expression at the idyllic setting all around him. "To say this is the best facility around is really not an understatement. It's a proud feeling to know that the work you've put into your farm will help your horses prepare to perform their best and meet your goals."

Oscar nods in agreement, adding: "We're here to stay. We might have to ship some out to race, but we'll always be based right here. Even if all the Texas tracks closed tomorrow, we'd still be here. This is home." 🐾



The entrance of the offices and barns greet visitors with stately oaks and bright landscaping that contrasts well with the modern Spanish architecture.

Anne Lang is a freelance writer and a former editor of The Texas Thoroughbred. She currently is a contributing writer for Spur magazine, an Austin stringer for People magazine and a columnist for Daily Racing Form. She is also a national writing award winner for articles she wrote for Horse & Rider and Western Styles magazines. She has also been published in The Blood-Horse, Thoroughbred Times, Equus, Horsemen's Journal, Racing Times and The Backstretch magazines.