

INTERVIEW

Foyt successful in 'other' type of racing

By ANNE LANG

Special to Daily Racing Form

HOCKLEY, Texas - A.J. Foyt Jr. - the John Henry of auto racing who last year hung up his helmet after four decades of prominence in the grueling sport - has stepped into another kind of winner's circle in his home state of Texas.

Few people are aware that Foyt, 58, has been a serious player in the thoroughbred industry for nearly 25 years. His 1,500-acre breeding and training center in the rural community of Hockley is one of dozens outside the Houston area, and Foyt is regarded as just another dedicated horseman by neighbors engaged in similar activity.

But in 1993, Foyt's quiet dedication paid off when his Texas-breds earned a total of \$232,303, making him the state's top breeder for the year. And with a major-league Houston racetrack due to open down the road in less than four months, Foyt is likely to stay put in the competitive mainstream.

"If we see that Texas racing is really going over well, we'll jump back into it full swing," said Foyt, who had pared down his equine stock during the past few years. "I've got all the facilities here, including a 40-stall barn and a training track. Sam Houston (Race Park) is only 20 miles from my ranch, and it's freeway all the way."

Foyt is well acquainted with freeways, both straight and oval. Born and raised in the asphalt jungle of Houston, he was introduced to car racing at an early age by his mechanic father. Foyt was just 5 years old when he competed in his first event behind the wheel, an exhibition match race against an adult driver at the Houston Speed Bowl. Incredibly, Foyt won - and his competitive spark was ignited.

During the lifelong car-racing career that followed, Foyt racked up four Indy 500 wins, a feat paralleled only by Al Unser Sr. and Rick Mears. Today, Foyt remains the only racer in history to win the Indy, the Daytona 500 and the 24-hour Le Mans. He'd like to add a classic horserace to that list.



FOYT: Auto racing legend owns a breeding/training center in Texas.

Foyt had a shot at the Kentucky Derby in 1986 with a grandson of Mr. Prospector named Rare Brick. The colt had begun blazing a trail toward Louisville, Ky., with wins in the Mountain Valley, Southwest and Rebel Stakes at Oaklawn Park that year. But he cracked his foot in the Rebel and was laid up for seven months. Resuming racing again in a fall Breeders' Cup prep at Keeneland, Rare Brick came home an eight-length victor. Back at the barn, it became evident that he had cracked the foot again.

Rare Brick, whom Foyt co-owns with Josephine Abercrombie, now stands at Clarence Scharbauer's Valor Farm near Dallas. From four crops to race, he has sired 53 percent winners from starters, with total progeny earnings of more than \$1.8 million.

Foyt's road to breeding success began in 1965 when, acting on a lifelong desire to own and operate a ranch, he acquired the Hockley property. He bought his first runner, a quarter horse, in 1972 - the same year he captured the Daytona 500. Shortly thereafter, he switched to thoroughbreds.

In the early 1970s, Foyt's son Tony

obtained a trainer's license, and Foyt turned 20 head over to him to start a stable at Oaklawn. The family stable grew to include 35 to 40 horses over the next two decades, while Foyt burned up the world's auto tracks.

Near tragedy struck in September 1990 on the Road America racecourse in Wisconsin. The brake pedal on Foyt's \$450,000 car broke as he approached a 90-degree turn at 190 mph. It took him a full year to learn to walk again, but Foyt recovered enough to return to competition. And during time trials for the 1993 Indy 500, he had a revelation.

"Everybody was always saying to me, 'When you gonna quit?' And I'd say, 'I don't know, but it'll come to me.' Well, that morning, I went out and ran faster than anybody, about five minutes before qualifying opened. I knew I possibly could have won the race," he said. "I went in and told my crew, 'That's it. I've had it. I'm through.'"

Nowadays, when he's not overseeing his Houston Honda dealership, banking interests and various other investments, Foyt spends most of his time at the ranch. Tony came home to supervise the ranch cattle operation in 1990, so Foyt's racing prospects are sent to Angel Montano or Larry Edwards in Kentucky.

Horseracing has replaced car racing as a sole means of excitement for the adventuresome Foyt, although he admits: "I guess my first love will always be the cars. But horseracing has inspired me quite a bit. The two sports are a lot alike.

"I have a great respect for these animals. You know, a lot of people think racehorses are treated so cruelly, but they ought to see how a horse is handled after a race. I mean, he gets a nice rubdown, he gets wrapped up in soft bandages, the works. When I won a 500-mile race, I still had to go to the shower and bathe myself, and if I got a rubdown, I did it myself. These horses have a pretty damn good life."

MORNING BRIEFING

Shootout Seems to Be an Idea That Needs to Be Shot Down

A burning topic in NHL circles is the possibility that the league might adopt a tiebreaker shootout, such as the one at the Winter Olympics, where Sweden edged Canada to win the gold medal.

Mel Lowell, Tampa Bay Lightning executive vice president and one of those favoring the idea, told Jim Smith of Newsday: "Ties are like taking a bath with your socks on. Nobody likes ties. We are an entertainment industry; any form of entertainment that does not change becomes stagnant. I think a shootout would make the game more attractive."

Anti-shootout: Bruce MacGregor, Edmonton Oiler assistant general manager, takes the other side: "I don't see NFL games being decided by somebody throwing a ball through a tire. I don't think it's part of hockey."

Last add shootout: Paul White of USA Today Baseball Weekly, says of the Sweden-Canada climax: "It was like having the seventh game of the World Series tied after 12 innings, stopping the game and deciding it with a home run derby."

Trivia time: Who holds the high school record for 100 meters?

Name change: Will it be Roberto Kelly or Bobby Kelly for the Cincinnati Red center fielder this season?

"It's Roberto," Kelly said. "That Bobby guy was always hurt."

As Bobby Kelly last year, he missed half the season after injuring his shoulder diving for a ball.

Diplomatic corps: Ben Hogan played in only one British Open, in 1953 at Carnoustie. He won, but still had this to say about the Scottish greens:

"You can't putt on putty. I've got a lawn mower back in Texas. I'll send it over."

Wonder what he would have said if he *hadn't* won.

Changing sports: Joe Morgan, baseball Hall of Famer, has become a tennis buff. Morgan says his forte is coming to the net after a big serve.

"You can't knock me off the court," Morgan told Tennis magazine. "I've faced Sandy Koufax's 99-m.p.h. fastball, so everything's easy after that."

Not bad: Turf writer Anne Lang of the Daily Racing Form calls thoroughbred owner-breeder A.J. Foyt "the John Henry of auto racing."

Forget records: Pitchers in the Hall of Fame usually have a solid won-and-lost record.

But not Satchel Paige and Rollie Fingers. Paige won 28 and lost 31 in the big leagues, but he had done his best pitching as a much younger man in the Negro Leagues.

Fingers was 114-118, but his true value lay in his enormous number of saves.

Trivia answer: Derrick Florence of Ball High in Galveston, Tex., with a time of 10.13 seconds in 1986.

Quotebook: Senior golfer Rocky Thompson, asked how he knew that no one used a driver in competition as long as his 54-inch model: "Nobody else is that stupid."

—SHAV GLICK