

Incredible Success, Inevitable Gains

William Raymond has created a small but impressive training/breeding dynasty in central Texas, the foundation of which is one phenomenal race horse who's still going strong

Some people spend a lifetime searching for an outstanding stakes horse, buying and selling perhaps 500 prospects before finally giving up and switching to a more rewarding pursuit, such as . . . real estate.

Others, like Bill Raymond, strike gold almost immediately. Raymond's Inevitable Leader, bought six years ago at the Keeneland Fall Sale for \$19,000, has amassed nearly \$722,000 in earnings for his proud owner, who entered the horse business as a neophyte in 1980.

Beginner's luck?

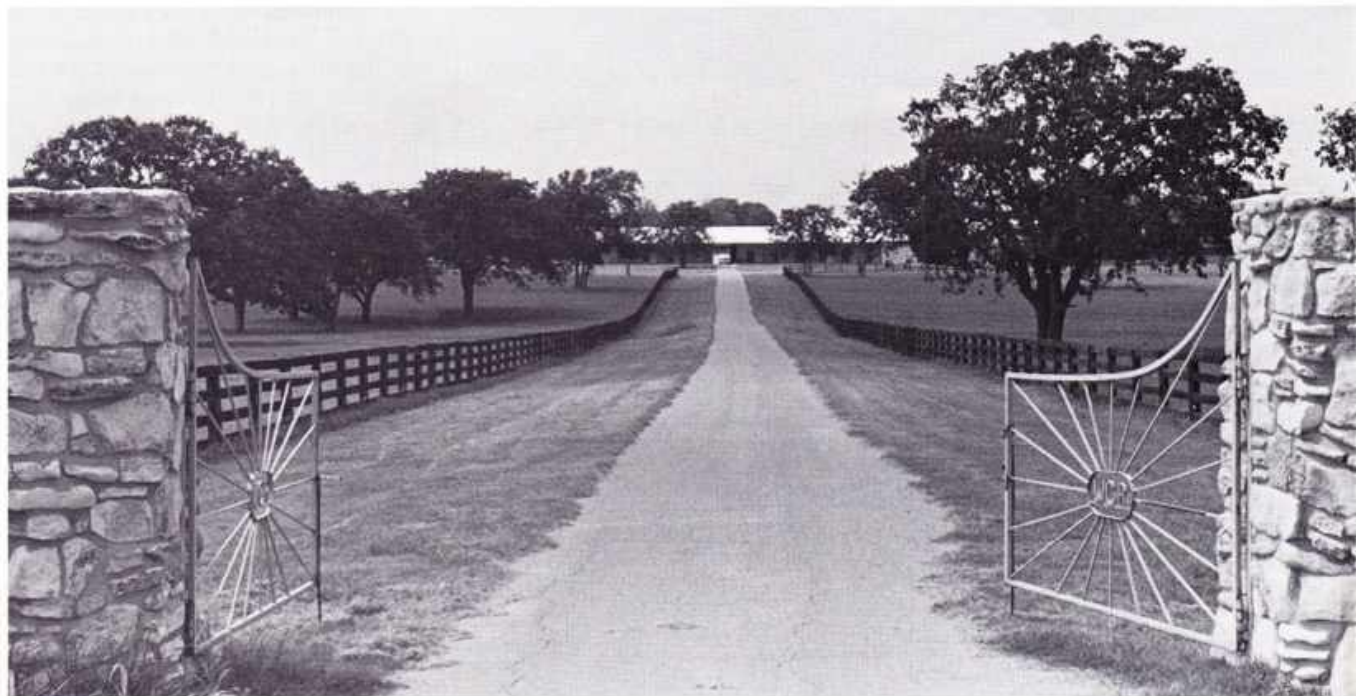
Story & Photos
By ANNE LANG

Maybe. Whatever elements of fact and fate came together to bring down the auctioneer's gavel on Bill Raymond's final bid that special day in Kentucky, the outcome of that purchase went a long way toward solidifying Raymond's already-increasing involvement in the exciting—and risky—world of race horse ownership.

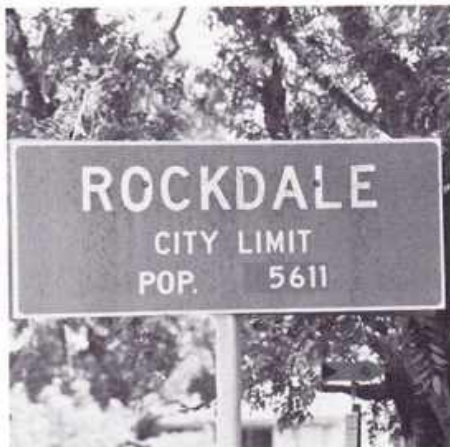
Raymond admits to a certain

degree of luck contributing to his decision to buy Inevitable Leader, a Mr. Leader horse out of Squaw, by Speak John.

"He [Inevitable Leader] was not my original choice," Raymond recalls. "Clifford Simms and I had gone to that sale, and Clifford thought I ought to buy a Mr. Leader. The one I wanted sold for more money than I wanted to pay. Inevitable Leader sold during the latter part of the sale, and his price was within my limits, so he's the one we came home with. But I'm sure he's done a lot better on the track than the other [Mr.



Entrance to the 69-acre Raymond Ranch outside Rockdale



The iron racing jockey outside Raymond's barn sports the maroon and white colors of Raymond's alma mater, Texas A&M University



Above: Raymond with his highly successful Inevitable Leader at home in Rockdale; below, Inevitable Leader winning the \$50,000 Barksdale Handicap earlier this year



Leaders] we looked at — in fact I know he has, because he's Mr. Leader's leading money-earner. So we got lucky."

A resident of Rockdale since 1978, Houston native Raymond's primary occupation is in oil and gas. He is in partnership with Lambert Hollub of Seguin; Raymond handles the land work and lease acquisitions, while Hollub takes care of the drilling. Like so many people involved in the roller coaster-like oil business, Raymond's adventuresome nature attracted him to the similarly speculative world of horse racing. Although he had absolutely no experience with the sport, some of his local horseowner friends encouraged him to take the first step: investing in a couple of runners.

"I found it all to be very interesting and it just kind of grew on me," Raymond said of that first year. Inevitable Leader was among the second crop of racing prospects purchased by Raymond; in 1981, he took another giant step by starting a horse farm just outside Rockdale and buying his first mares.

Today, more than 40 head of Thoroughbreds — a mixture of weanlings, yearlings, mares and horses in training — make their home on the lovely 69-acre farm which includes a 3/4-mile sandy loam training track with starting gates, spacious 16-stall brick barn, 12 sprawling paddocks with run-in sheds, and two automatic hot-walkers.

"We started this pretty much from scratch," Raymond said, gazing out over the neat, green paddocks liberally shaded with mature oak trees and bordered by brown post-and-plank fencing. "What you see now was totally done by us; it was pretty rough when we bought it."

"Us" refers to the balance of the Raymond clan: including Raymond's wife Andrea and children Kyle, Kent and Rebecca, ages 17, 14 and 12 respectively. The Raymond residence is located in town for the convenience of its proximity to the children's schools and friends. All five family members are enthusiastic supporters of the growing and successful equine enterprise; all attend the races on a regular basis.

So what was the motivating factor which led to this development and success in the life of a man who, prior to 1980, had no horse background to speak of, and no

previous links to the racing/breeding world?

"I've always liked horses, but I'd never owned one," Raymond muses. In fact, his fondness for animals in general prompted him to major in agricultural economics at Texas A&M, from which he graduated in 1966 with a degree in that field. His education there has proven to be invaluable toward running the farm and its related activities, Raymond states.

The advice of established racing and training experts has also contributed to Raymond's steadily expanding knowledge of the business. California trainer Ron McAnally, who trained Inevitable Leader at three and four, "really helped a lot" during the early years, Raymond said. "If I had a question or a problem, I could call him. He never told me *what* to do, but he'd always advise me as to *what* he would do. He was very, very helpful."

Though he was a newcomer to racing when he bought Inevitable Leader as a yearling in 1980, Raymond knew of Tommie Morgan's reputation as one of the best two-year-old trainers in the country, and that's to whom he sent the colt to prepare for his freshman year on the track.

But despite Morgan's phenomenal ability, 1981 turned out to be a frustrating year spent largely on rehabilitation from an injury. In the 1981 Riley Allison Futurity, Inevitable Leader shinbucked but still managed to finish third, a doubly admirable feat because the jockey dropped his stick coming out of the gate and had to hand-ride the colt all the way.

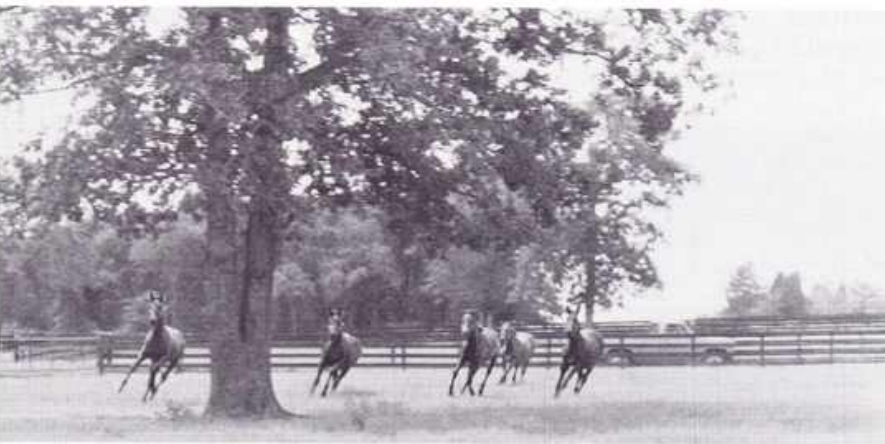
The shinbuck episode resulted in a recovery period of nearly five precious months. Although Raymond credits Morgan for doing all that he possibly could, the colt just did not respond quickly to treatment.

"We'd get him to the point where we thought he was about right, then Tommie'd breeze him and he'd sore up. Then we'd race him and he'd sore up. So we finally just pinfired him and turned him out for six weeks. If we'd done that to begin with — right after the Riley Allison — we'd have probably done a whole lot better."

Raymond still regrets the outcome of that race, even if the horses' shinbuck had not been a factor.



Above: the 16-stall brick barn at the Raymond Ranch
Below: interior of the barn



Above: youngsters cavort merrily in the spacious, shady paddocks
Below: rear view of the barn, with one of two automatic hot-walkers in the foreground



"There's no doubt in my mind that the horse could have at least run second, and he possibly could have won it, had the jockey not dropped his stick." That event went down in Raymond's memory as one shared by countless race horse owners throughout the world: the "if only . . ." lament, similar to fishing stories of "the one that got away."

Inevitable Leader was the one that got away, however: away to a fresh, sound start his three-year-old year out west with McAnally. After completing his freshman year under Morgan's eye with a still-respectable bankroll of \$38,414 (two wins, a second and a third from nine starts), Inevitable Leader captured the attention of California racing fans when he won the Leland Stanford Stakes (\$40,000) at Bay Meadows, and three other races that year, netting \$64,950 for the season.

He added winnings of \$26,000 to that amount in 1983, and continued to race injury-free, as he has to this day.

Not surprisingly, Raymond cites soundness as one of the horse's most positive and consistent attributes, for which he is ever grateful. Since the time of the unfortunate shinbucking, Inevitable Leader has not been plagued by any injuries or illnesses, with the exception of a mild kidney

infection last fall. And Raymond, who has trained the horse himself (in Rockdale) for the past three years, insists that the seven-year-old shows no negative signs of his relatively advanced racing age.

"It seems to me that he runs just as good now as he ever did. Of course, he's mature now, and mentally he's probably better than he's ever been. But physically, he trains the same as he always did. He runs on no drugs other than Lasix — he is a bleeder — but we give him nothing to run on, nothing to train on."

Career highlights from Inevitable Leader's racing history (which shows 12 wins, 5 seconds and 13 thirds from 63 starts, for a total of \$721,779 in earnings) include wins in the 1985 G3 Fair Grounds Classic Handicap and the 1984 Ark-La-Tex Stakes at Louisiana Downs (both \$100,000 races), and place finishes in the G2, \$200,000 New Orleans Handicap (1985) and G2, \$150,000 Cornhusker Handicap at Ak-Sar-Ben (1984).

Inevitable Leader also chalked up show finishes in the G1 Meadowland Cup Handicap (\$500,000), the G2 Hawthorne Gold Cup Handicap (\$250,000) and G2, \$100,000 Razorback Handicap. The latter two races were this year; the Meadowland was in 1984.

But in Raymond's estimation, one of Inevitable Leader's greatest coups was his second-place finish in the G2,

\$175,000 Red Smith Handicap at Belmont last year.

"It was really a star-studded field," Raymond said of that race. Inevitable Leader beat Tsunami Slew and Hail Bold King, among other notables, missing first by "only the last couple of jumps." Though the horse's numerous wins elsewhere have been among solid, respectable company, "as far as the quality of the competition goes, it was much tougher at Belmont. Even though he didn't win [the Red Smith], that to me was a very impressive race," Raymond stated.

Inevitable Leader hadn't sprinted since his two-year-old season, when Raymond decided to enter him in the Island Whirl Handicap at Louisiana Downs earlier this year. Though it was the first time since 1981 that he'd been raced less than a mile, and though he normally prefers to lay off the pace a bit, the horse rose to the occasion like a pro, showing "quite a bit" of speed and winning the \$100,000 event. Among those he defeated was Big Pistol, who had just come back from setting a six-furlong track record at Churchill Downs.

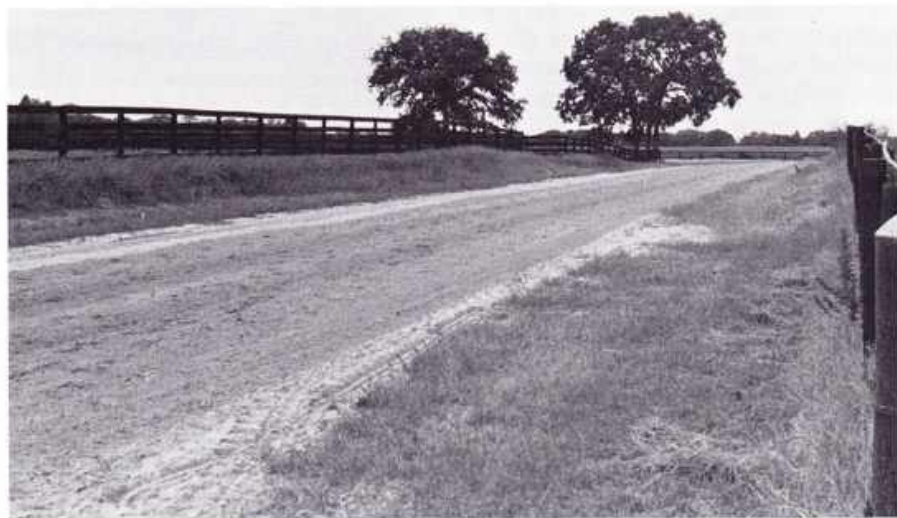
In the \$50,000 Barksdale Handicap at Louisiana Downs this year, Inevitable Leader was also a track record-setter, covering a mile in 1:33 and change and finishing the 8½ furlongs in 1:40 flat. He holds the track record there for 1 1/8 miles; he has both a dirt and turf record to his credit.

Overall, Raymond is pleased with his horse's consistent performance throughout his six-year racing career, but the fact that Inevitable



Left: Raymond (center) and wife Andrea after winning a race at Delta Downs in 1984. Jockey is Jeff Faul, a frequent pilot of Inevitable Leader

Below: Raymond's 3/4-mile sandy loam training track



Leader doesn't win more often frustrates his owner, who feels the horse is capable of doing better.

"You can run him just about anywhere and he'll hit the board, but he just has trouble winning," Raymond explained. It's not a problem of his getting out front early and then slowing down, either: "Usually he just gets outrun when he gets beat. He'll give you 100 percent every time, but he's just a notch away from being one of the best race horses in the country."

Raymond has an indefinite period of time to pursue that elusive, high-winning formula. Inevitable Leader is racing and training in the fittest possible condition, and Raymond plans to run him for at least another year and "see how he does. We'll play it day by day. Until he tells us he's ready to quit, we'll just keep on running him. And somewhere down the line, you know, he's going to start backing up. When he does, that'll be it."

That will be "it" for racing, that is. Unlike another older race horse, the great John Henry, who ran out over \$6 million through his nine-year-old year but retired as a gelding, Inevitable Leader has the promise of a long and active stud career in his future. Raymond has begun experimenting with that potential by breeding the horse to several of his own mares already.

How did these intermittent breedings affect Inevitable Leader's concurrent racing performance?

"Well, we bred five to him the same week he ran in the Barksdale and he set a new track record, and we bred three to him the week before he won the Island Whirl, so I can't see that it's hurt him any," Raymond chuckles. "He's a real good-natured horse; the breeding activity didn't



change his disposition at all. He doesn't bite or kick. He's very well-mannered."

This pleasant temperament is indicative of the Mr. Leader bloodline, Raymond added.

Some of the mares (all Raymond-owned) bred to Inevitable Leader this past season are by stallions Seattle Slew, Raja Baba, Shecky Green, Fifth Marine, Bold L.B., and Zen. Raymond sent the horse and those mares to Dr. Charles Graham's Southwest Stallion Station in Elgin for breeding, and "it worked out real well," he said.

Raymond ships most of his other mares to Kentucky to be bred, then brings them back to Texas with their babies. Most foal on the bluegrass, but several have foaled on the Raymond farm. In addition to those bred to Inevitable Leader, Raymond currently has mares belived to be in foal to Sing Sing, Advocator, Highland Blade, Raise A Man and Explosive Wagon.

A typical day for Raymond consists of spending several hours at the farm first thing in the morning, then heading for his office in town at midday. Raymond returns to the farm later in the afternoon to check on everything before his four-person staff (which includes grooms and exercise riders) finishes up for the day. Raymond keeps busy with several

Inevitable Leader displays the "look of eagles" as he surveys the Rockdale property

horses in training besides Inevitable Leader. He has three prospects being conditioned by Bobby Frankel in California, but handles the rest himself at Rockdale. A Run The Gauntlet colt is among Frankel's current charges, and Raymond has hopes for that one, who has started several times and is stakes-placed.

None of Raymond's other runners have done nearly as well as Inevitable Leader, and he hasn't had much luck with fillies, although in some respects he prefers fillies to colts, because he can breed them later on, Raymond said. His Candlelight Affair (Tom Tulle/Royal Advocate by Advocator) ran third in a G3 race at the Meadowlands in 1984, but had to stop racing due to a tendon injury. She is recuperating at the Rockdale farm with hopes that she'll return eventually to the track; otherwise, Raymond said, he will breed her. So far, she is the only one who has shown significant potential among Raymond's fillies.



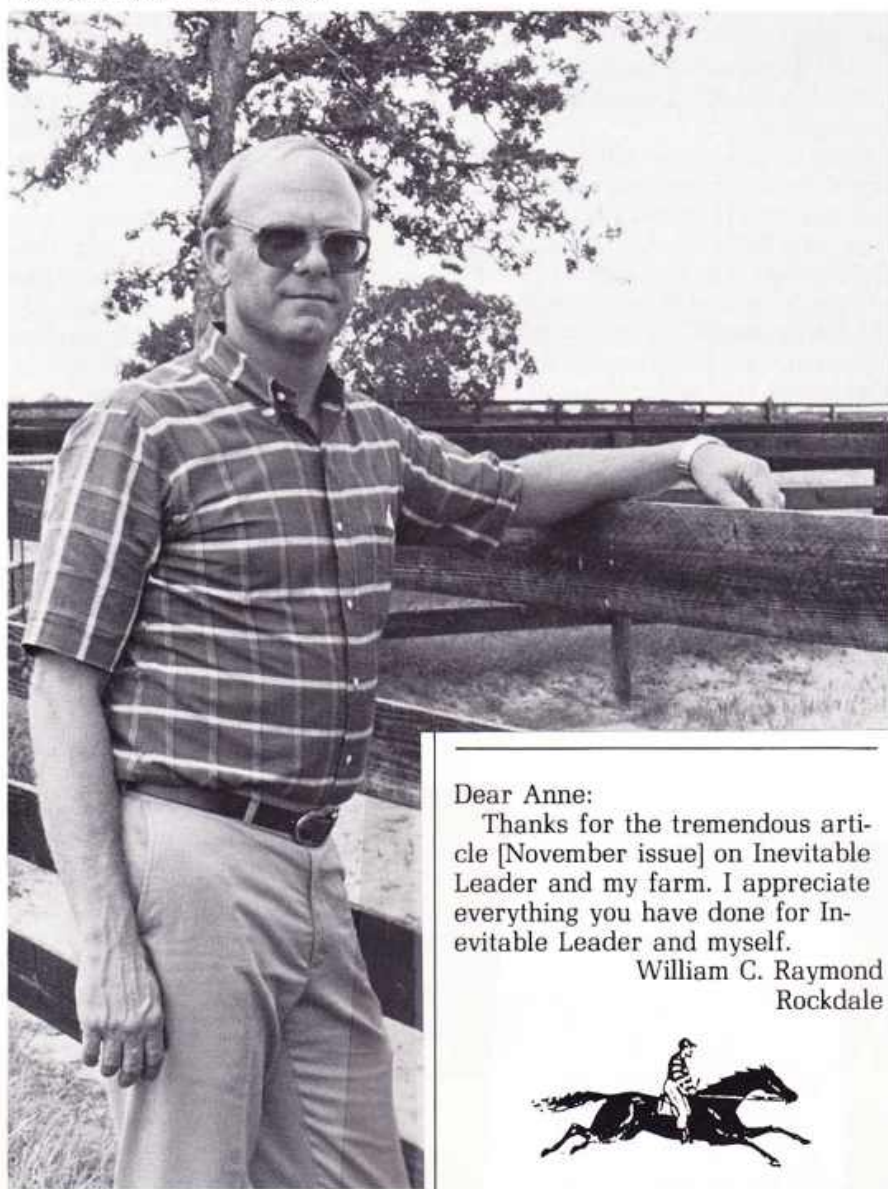
Candlelight Affair, a G3 stakes-placed mare, was one of Raymond's best female racing prospects before being sidelined with a tendon injury. The Tom Tulle mare may recover enough to race again; otherwise, she will be bred.

There are no plans to expand farm operations in the near future, even with the promise of pari-mutuel for Texas — the likelihood of which recently improved with legislative passage of a racing bill, calling for a statewide referendum in 1987. Raymond has a more practical viewpoint: "If the economy dictates to expand, then we'll expand. If it



Numerous racing prospects enjoy one of 12 paddocks, each with its own run-in shed

Below: Raymond is hoping pari-mutuel for Texas will allow him the opportunity to stand Inevitable Leader in his home state



Dear Anne:

Thanks for the tremendous article [November issue] on Inevitable Leader and my farm. I appreciate everything you have done for Inevitable Leader and myself.

William C. Raymond
Rockdale



doesn't, we won't. But we can do a lot with what we've got. I'm very content right now."

Raymond looks forward to the day when he'll be breeding as many mares in Texas as he breeds in Kentucky; maybe more. A key factor in his decision on whether or not he'll stand Inevitable Leader in his home state lies with the future of Texas racing.

"I just wish we'd get pari-mutuel betting so somebody could stand him in Texas and he'd have a shot at [producing Texas-breds]," Raymond said. "Of course, I want the horse to have every opportunity in the world: my first choice would be to stand him at Claiborne. But I know that's not possible, and I would like to see him stand somewhere around here for the simple reason that I could breed my own mares to him, and keep him here on the farm."

"Of course, I'm going to do whatever's best for the horse: if I get a real good deal in Kentucky where I felt like I could get maybe 40 pretty good mares, then actually I'd send him up there. I'd hate to have to send my mares up there to breed to him, but I would do it. We're going to do whatever's best for him — wherever he'll get the most coverage, and the best opportunity to produce runners."

"We've had some of these early two-year-olds that are blessed with a lot of speed, but they've never made it to the track. They've chipped, or one thing or another, before they ever got the opportunity. When you get a sound one like Inevitable Leader, it sure makes you appreciate him. I'd rather have one that was sound, with maybe less ability, than one that could run a hole in the wind that was always hurt. You [the trainer or owner] can do just so much — the rest is up to the horse."

Even the most proven and successful people in racing have their share of wins and losses, triumphs and disappointments, and Raymond is no exception. But his motivation for staying in the horse business is similar to that of thousands of others.

"It kind of gets in your blood. It's a lot of fun, and I enjoy it. I guess it's the competitiveness, too — to win. It's kind of like the oil and gas business, you know: once you get into it, it gets into your blood and you start to enjoy it, and you decide you'd like to hang around for awhile." ■