

Beth Fancsali, who has known the Bodnar family since she was 8 years old, says, "They are so gifted and committed to bringing out the spirit in each horse." Stan always says "You don't break a horse; you channel the spirit because that is the most important part of a horse." They have incredible insight about what a horse needs. They will honestly appraise a horse's ability and best use and make a plan to get there." Ruthann Peterson, the owner of Merriehill Home Stretch through Oklahoma 2010, who has been a client for over twenty years, believes one of the secrets to the success of this talented group is a combination of hard work and maintaining that unique Merriehill sense of humor. Ruthann tells us that the horses seem to love their trainers and rush to the fronts of the stalls when they walk by. When bringing Merriehill Home Stretch along, Stan showed extreme concern to not do anything that would impede the horse's progress. Stan's talent and patience were rewarded with the 2010 World Championship in Park Harness.

Susan Peterson, yet one more of the longterm clients, gave an example of the great care and professionalism that characterizes Merriehill. Her daughter asked to take Medomak King Cobra (Bucky), who had been retired for a number of years, to show in an open class at a small show. Bucky arrived as trimmed and polished as if he were going to Nationals and he beat 10 Saddlebreds in the championship.

There are many factors that make the Merriehill experience special. When everyone's livelihood is tied to the same goals and aspirations it makes for an extremely motivated and dedicated workplace. The clients feel they are getting enough customer service and attention to detail with essentially five trainers. The Bodnars realize that this business, especially with the current state of the economy, generates an elastic demand. They want their clients to feel they are getting the best 'bang for the buck'.

The team is very proud that people say, "We can tell when we see a Merriehill horse." It means they have achieved a consistency and unique style that has been enormously successful. The two junior horses who won open titles in Oklahoma last year, Merriehill Home Stretch and Cingate Starry Night exemplify their core beliefs. They want their horses to have a natural head carriage. They rarely use an overcheck in their training program and prefer to use a side check to allow a horse to find its own natural carriage. They believe both of these horses could have shown without an overcheck and look pretty much the same. They want a horse to move off its hocks and drive from behind. They also believe there should be a distinct difference between and park and a pleasure horse. Mark says Home Stretch has a true park trot in that he marches down the rail with great animation but not excessive speed. Starry Night is a pleasure horse. She is extremely expressive, trots off all four corners and has two distinct speeds in her pleasure and road trots. Fox Hollow Talk

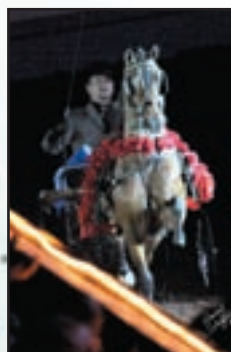
About Me is also a great representative of their breeding and training program. He exhibited the same traits when he won the Junior Exhibitor 13 and Under Pleasure Driving World Championship in 2010 for the Kelley family and their trainer David Rand as he did to win the Pleasure Driving World Championship with Stan in 2009.

The breeding program is a large part of the operation and it provides a pipeline to the training program. They breed the kind of horses they like to train. There are typically 2-3 foals a year with the Merriehill prefix. They also manage and consult on several clients' breeding programs. When you see a horse with a Cingate or Fox Hollow prefix, you will see a strong Merriehill Farm influence. Cindy and Gaeton Lorino, the owners of Cingate Farm have been Merriehill clients for 19 years. Stan told them early on, "This sport is too expensive not to have fun." They took his advice to heart and not only had fun, but great success with horses like Cingate Vincent's Song and Cingate Starry Night who earned them their first open world title. When a client is looking for a new horse, they can usually find what they want right at the farm.

Merriehill has always experienced great success in the show ring and 2010 was a remarkable year. Mark said "While so much is based on Oklahoma results in our business, we feel just as happy about successes at every show. If it weren't for the local shows we wouldn't have been ready for New England and Jubilee, then on to Oklahoma. Having horses with Merriehill prefixes win both Reserve World Champion Mare and World Champion Park Harness made us very proud as breeders." They were equally proud of Whitney's win with Cingate Starry Night as the Open Pleasure Driving World Champion. This was Whitney's first open world championship as a professional. There are many other facets to their business as they helped Melissa Bates win Reserve Youth of the Year. The 2010 dream season also included a first time win with a Saddlebred at Louisville.

Merriehill has been home to countless champions over the years but the team takes great care of everyone. There is a terrific lesson program and a series of fun shows. They go on trail rides, to county fairs, to horse demonstrations and other activities to promote Morgans. Beth Fancsali tells us, "Merriehill makes the horse world fun. They have invited us into their lives and family. We work hard, laugh and thoroughly enjoy spending time at the farm and with the horses."

When the 2010 show season ended, Team Merriehill collectively took a big sigh of relief but was extremely proud of what they had accomplished. Now they recognize that work begins all over again as they try to match and surpass 2010's successes in 2011. They are looking forward to picking up where they left off. They have a plaque hanging in the office that says, "The harder you work, the luckier you get". That one sentence says it all.



The Bodnar family enjoyed a stellar 2010 – (left to right) Stan and Merriehill Home Stretch, Whitney and Cingate Starry Night, Jessica and Merriehill Roxie Hart, and Mark and I'm First Born.