



*Will Work for
Carrots*

FORMER RACEHORSES FIND NEW JOBS
WITH HELP OF THE PADDOCK FOUNDATION

BY SARA FARRIS • PHOTOS BY THOMAS B. SHEA

Growing up on a small breeding farm, I used to look over each foal in the spring with the same thought my dad had: "Will this one be our next stakes winner?" As they grew up, it became almost a game trying to predict which ones would go on to earn their way at the track and which ones would flop.

It wasn't until after college, as my event horse got older, that I started looking at the weanlings and yearlings with a new eye. I'd pick out the ones with good gaits and outgoing personalities and think to myself, "I hope this one doesn't make it running, so I can take him and turn him into a jumper."

In 2008, my hope became a reality as one of our Accredited Texas-bred Thoroughbreds became my first project horse. Retiring my loyal and seasoned horse in his 20s, I jumped right into training a 4-year-old gelding that had been off the track for nearly a year, living the care-free life on our farm. I had no clue what I had signed up for.

WHAT I DIDN'T KNOW ABOUT OTTBs

Having ridden my entire life and shown competitively at various levels, I considered myself to be an experienced and capable rider. However, a few months into training this young and energetic off-the-track Thoroughbred (OTTB), my confidence in my abilities went downhill.

Every ride was work. Each day presented new achievements and new challenges. Working full-time, I had to enlist my trainer to supplement my riding during the week. As the bills came in and the ups and downs continued, I often thought to myself, "My friends are at happy hour having fun, and I'm paying a ton of money to come out here and be frustrated." I still joke that if it weren't for his good looks and charming personality, I might have given up.

Fortunately, persistence won out, and soon my OTTB's amazing talent as a jumper began to be realized. Frustrations gave way to humor as I began to understand some of his unique quirks, many which are common for young



"TUCKER," WHO RACED UNDER THE MONIKER TURK'S COUNTDOWN, DID NOT FIND MUCH SUCCESS IN TWO STARTS ON THE RACETRACK, BUT HE'S TURNED INTO A WINNER IN THE SHOW WORLD FOR OWNER SARA FARRIS.

Formed by TTA, The Paddock Foundation is a non-profit corporation with a mission to support and advance the care of Thoroughbred racehorses after their racing careers by supporting rescue, retirement, rehabilitation, re-training and rehoming.

This year, along with the TAKE2 program, The Paddock Foundation sponsored the Texas Thoroughbred Jumper Challenge in the AA hunter/jumper circuit in the effort to raise awareness and encourage the use of former Thoroughbred racehorses in the show-horse arena.

The Paddock Foundation provided a display and information table in the Retama Park grandstand on December 8, and The Paddock Foundation President Ken Carson was on hand to make the winner's circle presentation for the \$50,000 Fiesta Mile and raise awareness of OTTBs.

"The Texas Thoroughbred Association is proud to support The Paddock Foundation and encourages all members to get involved or make a donation," said Mary Ruyle, TTA Executive Director. "Many TTA members and directors, including Mike Kindred and Ken Carson, have graciously donated their time to make this program a reality for Texas."

For more information about The Paddock Foundation, go to www.facebook.com/thepaddockfoundation, or for show information, contact Patrick Rodes at (940) 367-1217.

Thoroughbreds (just new to me!). With each year of maturity, he excelled at an unbelievable rate. After two years, I sold him to a young rider who had the time and commitment to take his talent to the next level.

THIRD TIME'S A CHARM

Now I'm on my third OTTB, and with each one, it gets easier and easier. I've learned that patience and persistence are the best approach to re-training an OTTB. My current Thoroughbred, Tucker

(registered as Turk's Countdown), has proven to be just the right fit for my needs, and it's fulfilling to see the progress we have made in a year.

While nowadays so many flock to buy expensive Warmbloods for jumping and dressage, I still favor the athleticism and mindset of a Thoroughbred (not to mention the price tag). OTTBs offer a great work ethic, competitiveness, keenness and appreciation for having a job to do. They are often good at handling diverse environments, having traveled from training facilities to the track and everywhere else in between. Plus, they usually embody a bold attitude and are willing to take on new tasks.



racing, polo or recreational riding.

The Paddock Foundation, a non-profit corporation established by the Texas Thoroughbred Association, is one such organization looking to encourage the transition of racehorses to their new careers off the track. By raising awareness of the talents these young OTTBs offer as well as providing incentives in the show arena, The Paddock Foundation is building upon the rich history of Thoroughbreds in Texas and providing a better future for these courageous athletes.

The foundation's primary goals are to:

- Educate, encourage and facilitate the placement of retired or unsuccessful racehorses
- Support organizations that retrain Thoroughbred horses for second careers
- Support organizations that provide for the retirement and care of the Thoroughbred racehorse
- Support therapeutic riding programs and equine educational programs

I applaud and am excited to support The Paddock Foundation and similar organizations across the country as we serve a common goal to provide not only great homes but great purpose for our OTTBs. We'll need continued support from our horse community to ensure the regrowth of Thoroughbred prominence in Texas and beyond.

In the meantime, I'm looking forward to entering Tucker in an upcoming Texas Thoroughbred-sponsored class. His show name may be All Tuckered Out, a fitting depiction of his track career, but my OTTB is just beginning to show off his untapped talent for all to see. Riders up! ★

LOOKING FOR INFORMATION ABOUT THOROUGHBRED RETIREMENT AND RETRAINING IN OKLAHOMA? THE JANUARY/FEBRUARY ISSUE OF SOUTHERN RACEHORSE WILL PROFILE THE OKLAHOMA THOROUGHBRED RETIREMENT PROGRAM (OTRP). FIND MORE INFORMATION ONLINE AT WWW.OTRP.INFO.

BUILDING A FOUNDATION OF SUPPORT

As large as the pool of available OTTBs seems to be, the resources for the rehabilitation and re-training of these athletes is limited. If it weren't for the wonderful trainers I've worked with over the years, I would not have tackled the re-training of a young horse. However, with training, there's a cost. I'm excited to see organizations forming to help OTTBs find their second career, whether it's jumping, eventing, dressage, barrel