

Off the 'Pin' Hook

By COURTNEY SLOAN

"SOME PEOPLE HAVE ASKED ME what the name means," said Joe Appelbaum of Off the Hook sales. "It's a pop culture thing, and you either understand it or you don't. But since we're pinhookers, I thought it worked."

Appelbaum, who is 37, first met his partner in Off the Hook, trainer Carlos Morales, at Belmont Park. Venezuela-born Morales trained Florida-bred Yankee Victor (winner of the Grade One Metropolitan Handicap), and Templado (VEN), the 1995 Horse of the Year and two-year-old champion in Venezuela, who won the Deputy Minister Handicap at Gulfstream in 1997. Following in the footsteps of his father, who was a trainer and breeder of Thoroughbreds, Morales was one of Venezuela's leading trainers. "I was the leading trainer for the last seven years I was there," said Morales, 42. "I came to the United States and in my third year at Calder I was the leading trainer at the Tropical Park meeting."

Morales continued, "[Appelbaum] called me to see if I could train his horses. I thought it was one of my friends teasing me—I never had an owner from New York call me! I told him that developing two-year-olds and picking babies was my specialty. We went to Keeneland and I picked a beautiful Siphon [BRZ] filly. I was ready to leave New York—I wanted to go to Florida—and I said I thought she would have a good opportunity at a sale. Nick de Meric was my mentor in this business—he helped me a lot." Off the Hook's sales prep program is based at de Meric's Eclipse Training Center in Ocala.

Appelbaum said, "Some horses—about 50%—we own outright.



Joseph Appelbaum and Carlos Morales with hip # 816

We do all the picking and training. My partners in racing at the time said they wanted to race [the Siphon (BRZ) filly], but Carlos said, 'It's much more prudent to sell and buy a bunch of horses with the money that you can race.' She brought \$500,000—she was the second-highest filly at the sale. Keeneland April 2004, I think it was. We bought five horses [with that money]."

"We have 13 here at the sale. This is our first year with our own consignment," he continued. "We had been buying, prepping, and then selling through other consignors, like Nick de Meric and David Scanlon. Last year we did a few more horses and Carlos is based here now. I'm still based in Manhattan.

"I own True Direction in partnership with Moreton Binn," said Appelbaum. True Direction stands at Lou-Roe Farm in Morriston, Fla. for a fee of \$3,000 live foal. "We have 15 broodmares; 12 of them are in Florida at Eclipse. If you include all the pinhooks and mares, we have almost 50 horses in Florida. The atmosphere in Ocala is really ideal. The barriers to entry in Kentucky with money and so many long-term relationships make it hard to get started. There aren't that many affordable stallions standing there. New York and Florida compliment each other very well. With the New York incentive program, which is very lucrative...and the climate and the depth of the good horsemen here make Ocala an ideal place to breed and develop."

Spectators at the first under-tack preview were treated to a very fast work from another of Off the Hook's consignment: hip number 49, who zipped through an eighth in :10 1/5. A daughter of former Padua Stables stallion Yes It's True and the Play Fellow mare Rue de La Play, the bay filly was bred in Florida by Carl and Martha Johnson. "We knew she had talent," said Appelbaum. "She's fast and she showed it! We were originally thinking Fasig-Tipton Calder but we got behind in the fall with a shin problem. She's a quality horse." ■

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