



CTBA Member
PROFILE

HEAD
CHEERLEADER

MARGUERITE ELIASSON

When Marguerite Eliasson greets visitors or clients outside the hacienda-style farm office and foaling barn of E.A. Ranches, the immediate feeling of class and competence is palpable. The 1,000-acre breeding, boarding, and training facility in the fertile hills above Ramona is a breathtakingly beautiful island of peace and tranquility. Every detail is centered around lightning-fast Thoroughbreds, the passion of the late Ernest Auerbach.

Shortly after the real estate developer founded E.A. Ranches in the late 1970s, he handed the reins over to Eliasson, whose 35-plus years of hard work, loyalty to the family, and unshakable belief in the stallions of the ranch are now culminating in a very special feat: This year not one but two offspring of E.A. Ranches' stallions are scheduled to par-



E.A. RANCHES

E.A. Ranches' graduate and Breeders' Cup hopeful Aslelylvssugar, is a son of the farm's late stallion Game Plan, above

ticipate in the Breeders' Cup.

Ashlelylvssugar, a 5-year old gelding by the late Game Plan (by Danzig), will contest the \$4 million Longines Breeders' Cup Turf (gr. IT). The multiple graded stakes winner is already his sire's top earner at

\$847,504 and has his sights set on entering racing's "Millionaires Club" for owner/breeders Sharon Alesia, Bran Jam Stables, and Ciaglia Racing.

Mr. Big (by Dynaformer), who this year stood his first season in California, will be represented by his 2-year-old son Big Score. An impressive winner of the \$102,415 Zuma Beach Stakes at Santa Anita in just his third start, the dark bay colt will give the \$1 million Breeders' Cup Juvenile Turf (gr. IT) a try. The colt's owner/breeder, George Krikorian, also owns his sire, Mr. Big.

"How many small farms dream of having a Breeders' Cup starter sired by one of their stallions, and it almost never happens," said Eliasson. "And now it happens to us, even twice in one year. We are so incredibly lucky."

Still in some disbelief and already anxious three weeks out, she added: "Hopefully, this luck extends to 'Ashley' and Big Score in their races. Hopefully, they can make their mark in Breeders' Cup history." (At the time this article was written, the fields for either race had not yet taken shape.)

Eliasson does not like to contemplate what might be. She knows only too well that in racing — as in breeding — tragedy and triumph are so closely intertwined that it sometimes is hard to bear. One such was the recent fatal breakdown of the graded-stakes-placed filly Big Book, a daughter of Mr. Big and another homebred star in the Krikorian stable. The beautiful gray — born, raised, and started at E.A. Ranches — was a casualty at Del Mar during morning workouts July 23.

And then there are the



© BENJOT PHOTOS

Ernest Auerbach of E.A. Ranches bred and raced grade II winner Belle's Flag, who was named champion 3-year-old Cal-bred filly in 1996



© BENOIT PHOTOS

Cal-bred Ashleylvssugar and jockey Gary Stevens win the grade II John Henry Turf Championship on their way to the Breeders' Cup Turf at Santa Anita Nov. 5



A product of E.A. Ranches, Cal-bred Big Score and jockey Flavien Prat's win in the Zuma Beach Stakes puts them on target for the grade I Breeders' Cup Juvenile Turf

glorious days, the ones that erase years of toils and snares or worse. The highest highs to date — before this year's Breeders' Cup races — Eliasson experienced with Auerbach's homebred Belle's Flag, who was voted California champion 3-year-old filly in 1996.

The daughter of Avenue of Flags, whom Eliasson had helped foal out, went on to win two grade II stakes as a 4-year-old and earned two grade I placings at 5. Her dam, Belledoux, a mare Eliasson helped select out of the 1989 Keeneland November sale, had already produced another graded stakes winner in Tres Paraiso (by Honest Pleasure), who raced in the red and golden silks of the ranch.

Auerbach died in 2010. Against all odds — the economic downturn affected the horse industry over-proportionally — Eliasson and her team succeeded in transforming the mainly private horse operation her boss left behind into one of California's premier breeding, boarding, and training facility, one client at a time.

The ranch also survived two serious wildfires, one of them destroying several structures, including Eliasson's home on the ranch. But miraculously, all humans and animals escaped uninjured. During the rebuilding, she lived in the guesthouse, which was not scorched, not missing a beat. Always leading by example, she is well aware that the buck stops with her — a responsibility that she carries with confidence, although sometimes it weighs heavily on her six-foot frame.

In the past six years, E.A.

Ranches was able to grow the operation from approximately 45 boarders to around 140 resident client mares, foals, and yearlings, plus 50 or more mares that ship in every spring to foal out and/or get bred to one of the stallions at stud on the ranch or at nearby Ballena Vista Farm. She relies on 15 experienced horsemen, three skilled maintenance personnel, and assistant manager Sherrie Tellam, and the team runs like a well-oiled machine, with many of them having worked on the ranch a decade or longer.

Grateful for the trust that the second generation of owners — daughter Heidi Farkash and husband, John — are placing in her leadership and stewardship of E.A. Ranches, Eliasson is committed to providing the best service for her clients and, more importantly, the best care for their horses. From newborn to retiree, she is a fierce fighter for their healthy rearing, tailored training approach, and an appropriately timed transition into a second career or decent retirement.

The perfect example is pensioned sire Turkoman, the Eclipse

Award-winning champion older male and multiple graded stakes winner, who at age 34 is waiting every day for Eliasson to visit and feed him some bananas, his favorite treat.

"What a regal, noble horse he is," she marveled while the still-perky dark bay took his own sweet time to strut across the pasture to the fence. "What a blessing that he can live out his life here."

Indeed, no better place than where champions are born, raised, and cherished — from their very first to their very last day. **CTB**



E.A. RANCHES/LORI PIEDRA

Standing at E.A. Ranches, Mr. Big, a son of Dynaformer, is a rising young California sire