

OBS PRESIDENT TOM VENTURA

The Ocala Breeders' Sales Company's President Tom Ventura recently sat down for a Q&A session with the TDN's Steve Sherack to discuss the upcoming new-look OBS March 2-Year-Olds in Training Sale. The two-day auction--to be held at 11 a.m. Mar. 17 and 18--has expanded its format for 2015 with a total of 610 juveniles catalogued (up from 411 in 2014). In 2014, records were established for gross (\$37,627,500), average (\$187,201) and median (\$135,000). The co-topping 'TDN Rising Star' Carpe Diem

(Giant's Causeway), winner of last term's GI Claiborne Breeders' Futurity, kicked off his sophomore campaign in style with an impressive win in the GI Tampa Bay Derby. He was one of three seven-figure juveniles to go through the ring at OBSMAR in 2014.



Tom Ventura

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Q: Tell us a little bit about what led to the change of expanding the format for this year's OBS March sale. What kind of response have you gotten from consignors and potential buyers so far?

A: It wasn't an easy decision because we had such a good sale last year. But, after talking with the buyers and consignors about opening it up a little more, it seemed that the timing was right. We had the support of the consignors and also interest from the buyers. Some of the buyers may have become a little more hesitant, maybe, to come to the March Sale as the average kept creeping up. We thought that we could get broader participation from the buyers [by expanding] and they were very receptive as we went around and got feedback. The consignors felt that by putting in that next group of horses that were a little more advanced in training, that if the buyers were here for them, that it was good timing [for the expansion] as well.

Q: Coming off a pair of record-breaking March sales, including a trio of million-dollar transactions in 2014, how much more difficult was it to make this change now?

A: Like I said, we were coming off some really strong years. From our end, we wanted to make sure that we were able to retain that top group of horses.

A: We didn't want to expand the sale just for the sake of expanding and then lose some of that upper-end horse. We got commitments from the consignors that they were going to stick with us with those horses. We thought we needed to make a gradual expansion and we got about 200 more horses. We wanted to make sure that we still kept those top-end horses and just added some other ones that were a little more advanced in their training that would stack up physically here as well.

Q: Were you originally planning on making OBS March a three-day sale this year?

A: We thought that three days would be the maximum that we would have. When the numbers came in and the cut-off was in the 600 range, we thought that holding the breeze show over three days was the right thing to do to give us some room to maneuver [in case of bad weather]. We felt that selling 300 horses a day--by that time all the homework is done--that we could get that amount sold each day and not tie up the buyers any longer.

Q: Are 2-year-old select sales becoming a dying breed? While things appeared to go well with a new venue for the Fasig-Tipton Florida Sale at Gulfstream Park, Keeneland April was eliminated from the calendar in 2015, and of the 116 catalogued at Barretts, there were 48 outs and 22 RNAs. What are your thoughts on boutique 2-year-old sales?

A: You need to have numbers to attract a wider group of buyers. It's difficult when you keep a sale for 150 horses or so, and we weren't in that position by any means with March being at 400-plus [in 2014]. It certainly isn't an easy task to hold a boutique-type sale anymore. Especially when you have people traveling a long ways from either California to Florida or even from Japan to anywhere in the U.S.

Q: Will the expansion of the March sale have any effect on your April and June 2-year-old sales?

A: We'll have 1,200 horses again in April, that's our capacity. June remains to be seen. That sale really expanded in numbers last year. And I'm not sure if we'll have quite those numbers again this year. But April certainly hasn't been impacted by this at all.

Q: What are your expectations for OBSMAR and how do you see the market for 2-year-olds playing out in 2015?

A: At the end of the day, it's how these horses do on the racetrack. We're certainly coming off not only a good year in the sales ring, but a tremendous year at the track. You have six Grade I wins at Saratoga [Itsmyluckyday, Palace, Stopchargingmaria & V.E. Day], you really don't need to say more than that. That doesn't even count Carpe Diem, who is among the leaders on the Derby trail.

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From that end, the horses have certainly been performing at the highest levels.

In addition, when you've got the purse structure in New York and a little bit more stability in South Florida, I think that bodes well for the 2-year-old market this year, too.

Q: In early February, it was announced that beginning with the March Sale's under-tack show, OBS would begin to implement the Association of Racing Commissioners International guidelines for controlled therapeutic medications. The first phase includes adopting the ARCI medication schedule for administration of nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs and bronchodilators.

The policy regarding the use of a riding crop was also refined. At any time during a breeze, a rider may only use the riding crop while both hands are holding the reins and they're prohibited from striking the horse beyond the finish line. Excessive whipping before the beginning of the work or in preparation for a breeze is also prohibited.

Can you discuss these changes?

A: We thought that it was important that we get on board with the push toward uniformity of raceday medication with the goal of by next year's 2-year-old season adopting the complete ARCI standards. It's for the longterm benefit of the sale as it will benefit the horses as well and we think it's the right direction to go. We do believe that this year it's very likely that the medication guidelines of the ARCI will be part of a bill that will be passed in the Florida legislation. We thought that we would get in front of that. We thought it was important that we take this position and build some additional buyer confidence.

Regarding the whip, there were always restrictions, we just refined them a little by extending when the riders can/can't use them.

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