



James Graham

Born: May 17, 1979 in Finglas, Dublin, Ireland.

Resident: Lexington, Ky.

Family: Married to Lisa Caverley in September.

James Graham's record at Keeneland:

Total Wins: 41

Stakes Wins: (0)

- Ranked second at the abbreviated Fair Grounds meet at Louisiana Downs (2005-06).
- Also finished second behind Robby Albarado at the previous Fair Grounds meet (2004-05).
- Finished fourth in his first two Keeneland meets—spring and fall of 2005, with 12 and nine wins, respectively.
- Finished third at the 2005 Arlington Park meet with 80 victories and winnings of \$1,925,311 and finished fifth in 2006.
- Received the "Rising Star Award" at Arlington after finishing fifth in the 2004 standings.

Irish-born jockey James Graham has a lot to smile about. He finished second to Roman Chapa at the 2005-06 Fair Grounds at Louisiana Downs meet, after finishing second at Fair Grounds the previous year. He ranked third at Arlington Park's meet in 2005 and fifth last year as well as fourth in his first two Keeneland meets, in 2005.

He won 112 races in 2006 with his mounts earning more than \$3.3 million. Victories included the Double Delta Stakes at Arlington aboard Ladyburn, the Fairway Fun Stakes at Turfway on Gallant Secret and the Lagniappe Ladies Sprint on Destiny Calls at Fair Grounds.

He married Lisa Caverley, who is also Irish and assistant trainer to Jeff Thornbury last September. They purchased a 50-acre farm in the Lexington area in early 2005 that will be a working farm.

His agent Britt McGehee reported that they are very happy and planning their life together.

"He works as hard as he can, seven days a week," McGehee said. "In all the time I've known him, he's never had a bad day." McGehee has handled Graham's book for most of his riding career.

In 2005, he won 191 races to rank 40th nationally and his mounts earned a total of \$5 million to rank 41st.

"I've done well everywhere I've ridden," he said in January of 2005 right before the Fair Grounds meet ended. "Things are going great. I'm tied for second-leading rider. We're holding our own." The last few days in Louisiana enabled him to claim sole possession of second place.

"I get the same excitement from winning a \$5,000 claimer as I do from winning an allowance race," Graham said. In fact, he was very pleased about winning a maiden \$10,000 claimer toward the end of the Fair Grounds meet that resulted in a payoff of \$111.

"I always try to learn a little bit more every day," said Graham while at Arlington in 2005. "Things just seem to keep going my way. I was second in the standings at the Fair Grounds this winter, and I think I was fourth or fifth in

the standing at Keeneland this spring. I'm especially proud of that because all the top riders in the nation seem to go there each spring trying to pick up Derby mounts.

"You learn a lot more when you ride against the most successful riders, and I was happy to do as well as I did against that type of competition."

In his first Keeneland meet in the spring of 2005, he won 12 races to finish fourth, posting an average winning payoff of \$22.20, much to the delight of handicappers. In the fall, he finished in fourth once again, this time with nine wins.

After the fall 2005 Keeneland meet, he returned home to Ireland for his first vacation in three years. "It was brilliant," he said. "I had a super time. During my 13 days of vacation, I rode one horse while at home."

The middle of seven children, it was the first time in 10 years that he and his six siblings had been together in his mother's house.

"I'm the black sheep," he joked. "I think they're proud that I'm doing what I want to do, though. This isn't a job to me. If I didn't enjoy it, I wouldn't do it."

A gregarious sort, Graham makes the rounds in the mornings, visiting barns and chatting in the racing office. "I get on as many horses as I can," he said of his mornings.

"I like to have a smile on my face," he said. "It's nice to be nice to people."

Among Graham's 191 wins in 2005 were seven stakes races. At Fair Grounds, he won the Sarah Lane's Oates Handicap with Miriam L. for trainer James Hodges. At Hawthorne, he won the Milwaukee Avenue Handicap for Frank "Bobby" Springer on Home of Stars. Moving on to Arlington, he won five stakes—the Awad (on Exceptional Ride) for Ken McPeck; the Isaac Murphy Handicap (on Jaguar City) for Springer; the Dr. Fager (on Stormy Impact) for Frank Kirby; the Sweetest Chant (on Eyes on Eddy) for Paul McGee; and the John Henry (on Home of Stars) for Springer.

"Things went great in 2005," Graham said. "I had a lot of help from trainers Tom

Amoss, Bobby Springer and Jeff Thornbury. I won a lot of races for all of them. I also have to thank Lisa. She keeps my head where it's supposed to be." It was Lisa who thought coming to the States might prove beneficial to his riding career.

In 2004, Graham won his first stakes race—on July 11, 2004, at Canterbury with Berbatim in the Canterbury Park Lassie. Berbatim was also trained by Springer.

He then won the first graded race of his career on Aug. 21, 2004—the \$150,000 Arlington Breeders' Cup Oaks (G3)—on Lovely Afternoon, in a deadheat. Lovely Afternoon was trained by Anthony Mitchell.

He began the meet as an apprentice and lost his "bug" during the course of it. "Within a week of losing my bug, I won a Grade 3 race at Arlington," he later told *Daily Racing Form*. "Ever since then, I just kept rolling along."

He has credited an analysis of how other jockeys ride with his success. "I just ride very aggressively and try to find the right spots on the track," he told the *Form*. "Riding down here (at Fair Grounds) for the last couple of years, I've watched Robby Albarado carefully. He capitalizes on other riders' mistakes. Calvin Borel is another great one. Everyone has been very helpful to me when I've made a mistake. When you make the same mistake twice, that's when you get in trouble."

He received a few votes for the Eclipse Award for top apprentice rider in 2004.

While in high school in Ireland, a guidance counselor had asked him what he wanted to do with his life. He said he knew then that he wanted to become a jockey. He left home at 15 and entered Ireland's jockey school. He said there are two, two-week introductory sessions, the purpose of which in part is to try to determine if a person is actually jockey material, before beginning the 10-month course. During the course, the students learn all of the basics of horsemanship, from cleaning stalls to grooming and tacking up the horses. "They teach you the basics, but then it's up to you to improve," he explained.

After he completed the course he went to work for trainer John Oxx for about a year and a half, where he groomed horses, mucked stalls and exercised horses, and for trainer Patrick Martin.

But since riding opportunities were relatively scarce, he came to the U.S. shortly before the Breeders' Cup of 2002. He exercised horses for Jeff Thornbury and then took out his jockey's license, winning his first race at River Downs on July 1, 2003 on B.J. Star.

"I'm still looking for my first Grade 1 win," he said, and undoubtedly a Kentucky Derby mount. But you can be sure he'll have a smile on his face as he tries to accomplish these feats.

