



Bob Holthus

Born: June 24, 1934 in Table Rock, Neb.

Residence: Royal, Ark.

Family: Bonnie (wife), David and Paul (sons), and Debbie (daughter).

Bob Holthus's record at Keeneland:

Total Wins: 70

Stakes Wins: (3)

- Leading trainer at Turfway Park in the fall of 2004.
- Leading trainer at Oaklawn Park nine times (1967, 1971, 1977-1978, 1982, 1985, 1989-1991).
- Has topped the standings at five other tracks—Arlington, Detroit, Ellis Park (tied in 1998 with Bernie Flint), Hawthorne and Louisiana Downs.
- Two-time winner of the Arkansas Derby—1988 with Proper Reality and again in 2006 with Lawyer Ron.
- Honored by the Kentucky Thoroughbred Owners and Breeders as leading trainer last year.
- Inducted into the Arkansas Walk of Fame, for outstanding residents of the state who have made significant contributions to society.
- Honored by Oaklawn Park in 2002 for 50 years of winning races there.

Bob Holthus followed in his father's footsteps as a successful horse trainer. Nine times the leading trainer at Oaklawn Park, the 72-year-old also has topped the standings at Turfway Park (fall of 2004), Arlington, Detroit, Ellis Park, Hawthorne and Louisiana Downs during his training career of 55 years.

That's right. He took out his first trainer's license in 1952 when he was just 18 and saddled his first winner later that year, when Colleen won at Columbus in his home state of Nebraska.

Holthus grew up around horses. "My dad bought his first horse (Sand Brush) the year I was born," he recalls. "That started him in the business and me, too," he once told *Daily Racing Form*. "I never wanted to do anything else."

His father, Paul Holthus, raced a large stable throughout the Midwest, and he credits his father with being one of the two people who helped him the most. The other was Bryan Wise.

"Bryan Wise, a man I spent five years with back in the early '60s, was really helpful," he told *Daily Racing Form's* Marty McGee. "Then there was C.O. Viar, who was from Tennessee, who really gave me my first chance with a public stable and to do a lot of claiming."

But it was Jim and Juanita Winn whose Proper Reality was a top-notch horse in 1988 and 1989 and earned more than \$1.7 million who really helped him achieve prominence. And then training Lawyer Ron brought him back into prominence last year.

Proper Reality and Lawyer Ron have been the best horses he's trained. Proper Reality won the 1988 Arkansas Derby (G1), ran fourth in the Kentucky Derby, and won the Metropolitan (G1) and Iselin handicaps (G1) the following year.

Last year, Lawyer Ron won four stakes, including the Arkansas Derby (G2), Rebel (G3) and the Risen Star (G3).

Holthus trained some of the sons and daughter of Proper Reality for several years and developed several into stakes winners,

including Proper Banner and Proper Performer. "We've had several that were decent, but they were never top horses."

The highlights of Holthus' career to date have been provided by Proper Reality and Lawyer Ron, especially their victories in the Arkansas Derby, "because it was home."

Now the veteran Midwestern trainer stands Proper Reality at his Kilkerry Farm in Royal, Arkansas. The full-service training center occupies 160 acres. Also standing at Kilkerry is A.V. Eight, with whom Holthus won the 1995 Bashford Manor Stakes at Churchill. Joining them are Skeet, Proudest Romeo and Stark Ridge.

Proper Reality had stood at Kilkerry for a while in the 1990s and was returned there in time for the 2002 breeding season. "I think Bob really loves having him there," said Thomas Orr, who manages the syndicate for the stallion.

In explaining the decision that prompted buying Kilkerry, Holthus said: "We just needed someplace to keep a large number of horses." The number increases to about 60 horses in training during the winter time, he said.

Other top horses Holthus has trained include Mama's Pro, Top Avenger, winner of the Churchill Downs Handicap, talented sprinter Dave's Friend and Talent Show.

Holthus has been making successful forays to Keeneland for several decades, recording his initial stakes victory here in 1966 when C.O. Viar's Bay Phantom (whom he claimed for \$7,500) won the six-furlong Phoenix Handicap in 1:10 flat. He also won the 1976 Lafayette Stakes with United Holme, who stood at Kilkerry Farm before he died, and most recently, the 1998 Indian Summer Stakes with Kerry and Linda Ozment's The Happy Hopper.

Holthus keeps some 50 horses at the track on average and has a slate of 2-year-olds being readied to join him. He buys horses at the Keeneland September yearling sale as well as 2-year-old in training sales. Known for operating a claiming stable earlier in his career,

when he might have claimed 35-40 horses in a single year, he now claims very few.

When asked what has been the secret of his success, he jokes: "Longevity." Then he added: "I've been blessed with good owners. I've had a lot of luck. I've had good key employees and I've been able to have a large string of horses."

Holthus has been coming to Keeneland regularly for more than 10 years. "I always thoroughly enjoy racing there," he says. "We look forward to coming back."

His 2000 stakes successes included Ruby Surprise, who won the Humana Distaff Handicap (G2) at Churchill Downs, and Afternoon Affair, who won the Southwest Stakes at Oaklawn.

In 2001, he won five stakes at Oaklawn Park, including the Southwest with Son of Rocket, two at Arlington Park, including the Safely Kept with The Happy Hopper, and one each at Ellis Park (Debutante) and Turfway Park (Kentucky Cup Juvenile Fillies) with Playing 'n Gold. Aug. 18 turned out to be a big day for Holthus as he won both the Safely Kept Stakes and Ellis Park Debutante.

In 2002, he won the King Cotton with Kings Command; the Pippin with Red n'Gold; the Rainbow with Perfect Fantasy; and the Althea with Sweet Sixteen, all at Oaklawn, which honored him during the meet for 50 years of winning races there.

The following season, Holthus won stakes at Fair Grounds, Oaklawn and Arlington.

His stable has had particularly good years the last three—2004, 72 races won and earnings of \$2,635,551; 2005, 68 victories and earnings of \$2,672,562; and last year, 53 races won and earnings of \$3,303,696 to rank 33rd.

Holthus won the training title at Turfway Park in the fall of 2004. Included among the stable's 12 stakes victories that year were Greater Good's triumphs in the Kentucky Jockey Club Stakes (G2) and Kentucky Cup Juvenile Stakes (G3) and Level Playingfield's win in the Kentucky Cup Sprint Stakes (G3).

Greater Good continued his winning ways in 2005 in the Rebel (G3) and the Southwest Stakes before running 13th in the Kentucky Derby. Joining him at the stakes-winning level were Pirates Bite, Red Raymond, Beau Dare (Kentucky Cup Juvenile Fillies), Level Playingfield and Lawyer Ron.

He returned to the Kentucky Derby last year with Lawyer Ron, who had won four stakes beforehand and added another one afterward. He also won two stakes with Officer Rocket (GB), including the Arlington-Washington Breeders' Cup Futurity (G3) in a deadheat, and stakes with Level Playingfield and Tax Refund. Perhaps Officer Rocket will get him in the Derby hunt again this year.

Through 2006, Holthus had won 2,739 races with earnings of nearly \$41.5 million. Equineline.com credited him with 76 stakes winners between 1976 and Jan. 9, 2007.