



## Larry Melancon

**Born:** Aug. 7, 1955 in Breaux Bridge, La.  
**Resident:** Louisville, Ky.  
**Family:** Becky (wife), Lance (son), Heather (daughter).

**Larry Melancon's record at Keeneland**  
**Total wins:** 191  
**Stakes wins:** (9)

- Country's leading apprentice in 1972 with 182 wins.
- Leading rider at Kentucky Downs in 2006.
- Ranks second by career stakes wins at Churchill Downs.
- Won seven stakes at Fair Grounds during 1999-2000 meet.
- Won the Blue Grass Stakes in 1986 with Bachelor Beau.
- Rode five winners at Churchill Downs twice, on June 11, 1977, and on July 2, 1988.
- Won four graded stakes aboard Guided Tour in 2001.
- Won four races from six mounts at Churchill on May 24, 2001.

Veteran rider Larry Melancon won five stakes in 2006—the American Derby (G2) aboard Union Avenue, the Kentucky Cup Turf (G3) on Embossed (Ire), the Anna M. Fisher Debutante with Cowgirls Don't Cry, the Instant Racing Breeders' Cup on Gasia and the Louisiana Champions Day Ladies Stakes on Blueyed Lass.

The previous year he won the Mineshaft Handicap (G3) on Wanderin Boy, the Taylor's Special Handicap with Wrzeszcz and the Turfway Breeders' Cup Stakes (G3) on Miss Fortunata.

"I was just getting by," he said in late 2005. "It was an up and down year. A lot of the trainers I ride for didn't have a lot of horses."

As far as Melancon is concerned, racing is a family affair. His mother, Winona, trained horses in Louisiana before she died in 2003, and his stepfather, Carroll Champagne, taught him how to ride quarter horses when he was young. He began riding when he was nine years old and weighed just 45 pounds.

One of the biggest thrills of his career was riding Kazliv to victory in the \$125,000-guaranteed Gentilly Handicap at Fair Grounds in 1999 for his mother. "I said, 'Mom, this is your Derby.' She didn't get horses of that caliber."

His wife Becky's father, the late Dr. Carl J. Udouj, was also a prominent owner-breeder in Arkansas.

"As soon as I turned 16, I took out my license and began riding the recognized tracks," he recalls. He won his first official race on Sept. 28, 1971, at Jefferson Downs, on a horse named Norman Bodet Sir. At the time, he still attended school and exercised horses before school and rode at Jefferson Downs at night.

He told *Daily Racing Form*: "After I rode my fifth winner, I decided that I ought to devote full time to my riding career and got an agent.

"We went to the Fair Grounds in November and I had quite a bit of success, winning 50 races and leading all apprentice riders. I

won my first stakes there, the Fair Grounds Oaks for Larry Robideaux. Her name was My Charmer and she turned out to be the dam of Seattle Slew."

From there he went to Chicago and continued winning races. In 1972, he was the nation's leading apprentice with 182 victories.

He came to Kentucky to ride at Churchill Downs for the first time in 1973 and has been a regular since. He had his first mount in the Kentucky Derby in 1976 on 55-1 Amano, who finished a very respectable fourth.

Since then he's ridden many good horses, including champion sprinter Gallant Bob, Withholding, Tricky Creek, Rapid Gray, and Bachelor Beau on whom he won the 1986 Blue Grass Stakes.

Bachelor Beau went off at 19-1 in the Blue Grass. "It was a surprise that day, but it was no surprise to me," said Melancon. "It was his first time with blinkers, and I thought it would help him. He drew the inside, and he set his own pace. When they came up to me, I had a lot of horse left and he went on."

During the 1999-2000 Fair Grounds meet, he won seven stakes, including the Mardi Gras Handicap for trainer W.G. "Blackie" Huffman. "It was a really good meet," he commented.

"Larry is cool," Louisville native Huffman told *The Blood-Horse*. "He doesn't make many mistakes. Dirt or grass, short or long, young horse or older, he is one of those riders you can't put in any one category. I don't give Larry instructions. When the gates open, nobody sees a race unfold better than Larry Melancon."

Trainer Lynn Whiting once told *The Courier-Journal*: "What I respect most is he's a very good horseman. I use him on a lot of young horses because his opinion is valid.

"I've had 'name' riders get off a horse who went five-eighths in 1:05 and they'd tell me how good he was. Some of them don't have a clue. Larry has a very good opinion."

Then Whiting said: "He doesn't have the name that (former riders) Pat Day and Shane

Sellers have got, but Larry is very selective who he rides for, kind of chooses his mounts and he does well. He doesn't follow an empty wagon. He doesn't want to ride a bad horse."

He won 17 stakes in 2001 at 11 racetracks and 88 races overall as his mounts earned \$5,954,704. His big horse was Guided Tour on whom he won four stakes for trainer Niall O'Callaghan, all Grade 2s—the San Antonio Handicap at Santa Anita, the Stephen Foster Handicap at Churchill Downs, the Washington Park Handicap at Arlington Park and the Kentucky Cup Classic Handicap at Turfway Park.

He also rode Guided Tour in successive runnings of the Breeders' Cup Classic, finishing 11th in 2000 and fifth in 2001.

Other victories in '01 included the Coolmore Lexington Stakes (G2) with Keats and three Grade 3 races—the Regret Stakes on Casual Feat, the Sixty Sails Handicap on License Fee and the Arlington Matron Handicap on Humble Clerk.

In 2002, his mounts earned more than \$3.3 million as he won stakes races at six different tracks, including the Kentucky Jockey Club Stakes (G2) aboard Soto and the Delaware Oaks (G3) on Allamericanbertie. He also recorded his ninth stakes success at Keeneland, with Lapuma in the Dowager Stakes.

During 2003, Melancon won the Louisiana Handicap aboard Connected and the Edgewood Stakes with Forest Shadows. The latter moved him into a tie for second with Don Brumfield for stakes victories at Churchill with 46. He also won the Miller Genuine Draft Cradle Stakes on Tiger Hunt. "That was the last race my mother saw when I won the Cradle for Elliott Walden," he said. "She had cancer."

In 2004, he won the Open Mind Stakes on Anna Em, the Ellis Park Breeders' Cup Stakes with Molto Vita and the Louisiana Futurity aboard Witness to a Fight. The win in the Open Mind Stakes moved him into sole possession of second behind Pat Day for all-time stakes victories with 47. For the year, he won 85 of 619 races and his mounts earned \$3,019,547.

"I have ridden some outstanding horses in my career," says the Louisiana native who turns 52 in August. He'd still like to win the Kentucky Derby and a Breeders' Cup race. "I'll keep riding as long as the Lord provides for me. I like what I'm doing. I've been riding for going on 35 years. I don't know what God has in store for me next."

A couple of years ago, he said: "I plan to stay riding as long as I can. My weight is good. There are a lot more headaches with training. But maybe I will turn to training."

He told Pohla Smith in an article in the fall 2001 Keeneland program: "The Lord has blessed me. I haven't had a lot of horses, but I've had a lot of quality horses."

