



Taylor Made for SUCCESS

Brothers "Stick Together" To Scale Market Heights

By Michele MacDonald | Photos by Lee Thomas



Joe Taylor

The late Joe Taylor taught his tribe of sons many lessons, molding them into men who, long before they had finished their traditional schooling, could harvest tobacco, haul cattle to market, fix a tractor, or handle an unruly horse.

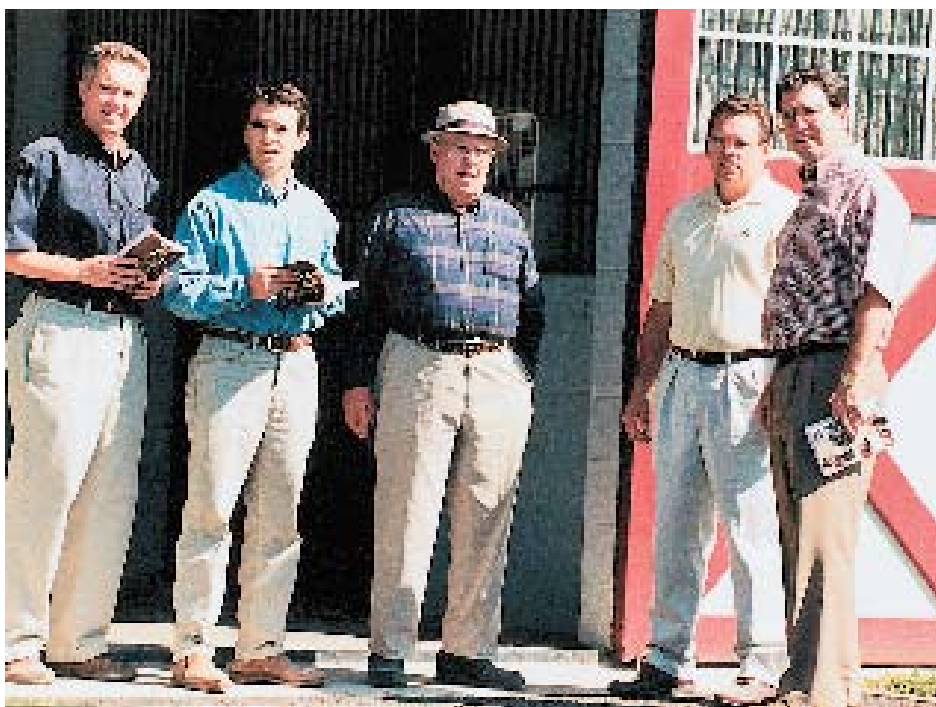
But perhaps the most significant wisdom he imparted was the value of getting along with each other.

Holding on to that tenet of their practical education while working together has been a primary reason that Duncan, Ben, Frank, and Mark Taylor have been able to build their Taylor Made Sales Agency into one of the world's most successful Thoroughbred operations, spanning boarding and breeding, stallion management, private sales and acquisitions, and public auctions.

Having labored shoulder to shoulder over the past three decades, they can measure their success in many ways, but probably none so universally acknowledged as dollars. Last year Taylor Made sold 861 horses at Keeneland auctions for a total of \$120,399,000 to rank as the overall leading consignor by far.

Taylor Made has set the pace for all other consignors for the past 10 Keeneland sales of yearlings and breeding stock, extending back to 2003, and the agency

Clockwise from top: popular stallion Unbridled's Song; the Taylor Made sales crew; Frank Taylor with mare and foal



Father knows best: the late Joe Taylor flanked by sons Ben and Mark on his left and Frank and Duncan on his right.

broke world records with its 2005 Keeneland September and November consignments, each surpassing \$60 million in gross. Altogether, the company has sold more than \$1 billion worth of horseflesh since Duncan Taylor founded it as a college student in 1976.

But neither the money nor the glamour associated with breeding, raising, or selling some of the world's best horses for and to some of the world's wealthiest people obscures what the Taylors learned as youngsters from their father.

"I can remember my dad, from the time I was two or three

years old, saying, 'You've got to stick together,' " recalls Mark Taylor, the youngest of the brothers at 38 and vice president of the family's public sales wing. "If one of us was mad and cussing the other one, that was always the thing he wouldn't tolerate. He'd say, 'OK, get it off your chest and then you need to make up and get along.' This was his quote: 'You all will accomplish a lot more together than you will independently.' "

So, in this close-knit, dynamic family, where the man reverently referred to as "Daddy Joe" lives through his teachings, what is a typical day like at the Taylor Made office in Nicholasville?

"Hell," Mark answers without hesitating, a grin breaking like a wave across his face and splashing on to his brothers, who guffaw in unison.

What is not typical is having all four brothers sitting down in one room,

notes Patrick Payne, Taylor Made's director of private sales who went to first grade with Duncan at Christ the King Catholic school and has been practically a member of the family ever since, absorbing, as Mark jokes, "the tall gene and the bald gene." The reason the brothers don't often huddle in one place, at least not with anyone who can't discuss meaningful business, is that each is consumed with handling his specific duties. But when they do come together, the conversation is lively and punctuated by convivial laughter and some table pounding for emphasis.

TAYLOR MADE MEASUREMENTS

Principals: Five — Duncan, Ben, Frank and Mark Taylor, and Patrick Payne

Acres: 1,600

Barns: 31

Horses (average monthly boarding count): 800

Stallions: Six at the farm — Unbridled's Song, Forestry, Forest Danger, Southern Image, Northern Afleet, and Officer; three at WinStar Farm as part of a joint venture — Tiznow, Speightstown, and Sharp Humor; one, Wildcat Heir, in Florida in a partnership with WinStar and New Farm; and four associate stallions at other farms in Kentucky, Florida, New York, and California.

Employees: About 150, with another 100 during major sales

Grade I winners sold: 55

Total dollar amount of horses sold: More than \$1 billion

Breeders' Cup winners sold: 11

Taylor sisters: two, Mary Joe, who has helped with sales for two decades, and Emily, who has overseen the farm's international internship program

Taylor grandchildren: 20; two great-grandchildren to date



ANNE M. EBERHARDT



Taylor Made is home to approximately 800 horses.

"It's definitely not one of those library-type atmospheres," Mark says of the Taylor Made environment. "It's a high-energy place to work."

"We are constant and non-stop," adds Ben, vice president of Taylor Made Stallions. "If something pops up, whether it's buying a horse or selling a horse or something on the farm, we're all here all the time, hands on, to give it attention."

Attending to details is another maxim the brothers learned before the ambitious 20-year-old Duncan, with the help of Texas horseman Bradley (Mike) Shannon, established Taylor Made as a small broodmare boarding operation. Joe Taylor frequently assigned his sons basic old-fashioned farming responsibilities with the tobacco and cattle business he ran in addition to managing Gainesway Farm, and those challenges taught them how to be resilient and resourceful.

"You got a lot more experience if it was up to you to get those things done," Duncan says, remembering how as a teenager he drove an old truck, pulling trailers full of cows and worrying about the clutch if he had to stop in Lexington.

Ben vividly remembers the days he, as a 15-year-old, would be dispatched to hire farm employees. Although he had to be driven by a handyman, he was expected to sift through "45- to 50-year-olds who often had been drinking" and find the best workers.

This bold, unyielding work ethic served the Taylors well in their transition to Thoroughbreds.

Frank Taylor, vice president of Taylor Made boarding services, which encompasses about 800 horses over the farm's sprawling 1,600 acres, recalls that the family really had to hustle just to get anyone to entrust a horse to them in the early days. Many people would barely acknowledge him when he made farm calls because most had already committed to consignor Lee Eaton. Frank's mettle in wooing Florida's BryLynn Farm is emblematic of the spirit the brothers employed.

"I stopped at BryLynn to try to get a meeting, and the guy that runs it, Bobby Jones, was in there mucking stalls," Frank relates. "He said he had too much to do to talk with me. So, I grabbed a pitchfork and started cleaning stalls, and I could clean stalls good, so I rolled right through there and cleaned

TAYLOR MADE TIMELINE

1952—**Joe Taylor** is hired at Gainesway Farm and soon becomes manager.



1956—Duncan Taylor is born to Joe and his wife, Mary Emily Taylor. Brothers Ben, Frank, and Mark follow approximately three, six, and 12 years later, respectively.

1963—Gainesway switches from breeding Standardbreds to Thoroughbreds, eventually becoming one of the world's most successful and innovative Thoroughbred stallion stations under the direction of Joe Taylor, whose sons spend much of their formative years on the farm learning about horses.

1976—College student Duncan Taylor founds Taylor Made Farm as a small broodmare boarding operation with financial help from Texas horseman Bradley (Mike) Shannon; teenaged brothers Ben and Frank join in the operation, and Gainesway owner John Gaines refers clients to them.

1978—Taylor Made sells mares for Hall of Fame trainer **John Nerud** at Keeneland, beginning the company's trademark business.



1981—A Drone colt consigned to the 1981 Keeneland September yearling sale sells for \$37,000 but goes on to become the first grade/group I winner sold by the Taylors when he wins the 1983 King's Stand Stakes in England. There have been 54 other grade/group I winners, including

11 winners of Breeders' Cup races, since then (through mid-July).
1982—Three Taylor Made-consigned mares — Pass a Glance, Pearl Necklace, and Exit Smiling — bring more than \$1 million each at the Keeneland November sale, lifting the company to the top of the industry.

1983—A Riverman colt out of Pass a Glance becomes the first Taylor Made-consigned yearling to sell for more than \$1 million when he brings \$2.5 million from James Delahooke, agent, at the Keeneland July selected sale.

1985—The Taylors launch their now-famous internship program, Taylor Made's Unbridled Opportunity, which has drawn participants from all over the world, including trainers Christophe and Nicholas Clement, Eoin Hart, David Carroll, and Satish Seemar.

1986—The Taylors buy out Shannon's interest, making Taylor Made entirely family owned.

1989—A fleet, 1987 Canadian Horse of the Year and third in the '88 Breeders' Cup Sprint, is retired by the Taylors, who are co-owners, to Gainesway, where he becomes the first stallion they manage. A leading sire in the United States in 1996 and '97, after his sale to Japan, A fleet has also been a leading sire there.

1990—Tiffany Lass sells for \$2.3 million from the Taylor Made Keeneland November consignment, becoming the year's highest-priced broodmare sold at auction.

1994—Mark Taylor joins his brothers fulltime after considering a career as a trainer.

1995—Taylor Made sells Unbridled's

Song for \$1.4 million, highest price ever for a two-year-old in training, at the Barretts March sale.

1997—Taylor Made Stallions is launched, with the help of Joe Taylor, who retired from Gainesway in 1990, and **Unbridled's Song**, who had won the Breeders' Cup Juvenile, becomes the first stallion resident at the farm.



TONY LEONARD

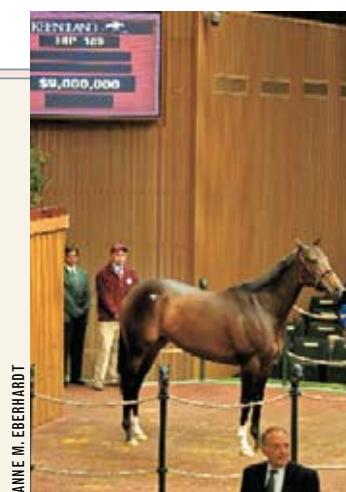
2000—Taylor Made consigns the sale toppers to both the Keeneland July select yearling sale and the Fasig-Tipton Saratoga yearling sale: Born

Perfect, for \$3.6 million, and Distinction, \$4.2 million, respectively.

2001—Tiznow retires to WinStar Farm as the first stallion in a Taylor Made/WinStar joint venture. Speightstown, champion sprinter of 2004, also stands there for both groups.

2003—Taylor Made consigns 1999 Breeders' Cup Juvenile Fillies winner Cash Run to the Keeneland November sale, and she sets a world record for a broodmare when John Magnier buys her for \$7.1 million.

2005—Taylor Made establishes consecutive world records for a consignor, with its Keeneland September yearling sale consignment grossing \$60,997,400 and its November breeding stock sale contingent bringing \$63,615,700. At the November sale Taylor Made-consigned champion **Ashado** sets a world record when



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selling for \$9 million as a broodmare prospect. Taylor Made had sold Ashado and Speightstown as yearlings on behalf of breeders Aaron and Marie Jones for \$170,000 and \$2 million, respectively.

2006—Longtime staffer and family friend **Patrick Payne**, who guides private sales for Taylor Made, buys into the operation as a partner. Taylor

Made leads all consignors at the Keeneland September sale for the third consecutive year and takes honors as top consignor by gross in each of the six sales in which it participates. Half Ours, consigned by Taylor Made, sets a Keeneland record for a horse sold in training when **Aaron Jones** bids \$6.1 million, highest price of the November sale. Taylor Made also consigns the highest-priced offering at Fasig-Tipton's November sale, Sharp Lisa, who sells for \$3.4 million. Those two horses become Taylor Made's 26th and 27th sale toppers since 1990.



FRANK WITH AARON JONES

about 15 stalls. I didn't say a word to him, and I got to the end and he says, 'At least you can clean a stall.' "

Jones agreed to bring BryLynn owner Joe Bryant to a dinner meeting that night, "and they've been very instrumental in us getting a lot of business ever since," Frank says. "We all got close and started doing business, and we've been doing business for more than 20 years."

To this day, even though their operation has grown into the largest of its kind, the Taylors still concentrate on providing services to clients and helping them achieve their goals. "Where our customers' success is our primary focus" is Taylor Made's motto.



Duncan Taylor

When family members work together, senses of humor and respect often are needed in equal doses. Both seem to be in ample supply at Taylor Made, where the brothers joke frequently but also are quick to praise. Their estimations of each other's skills reveal much about how they run their business although each can be involved in any facet of the operation at any time.

As Mark describes the family leader, "Duncan is the detail person. He really thrives on things that most people don't thrive on — the details, the minutiae, getting the t's crossed and i's dotted. And that's really been our saving grace because in a lot of horse operations, people might be really good at raising and selling a horse but not so good when it comes to the business practices and principles, and writing out goals and

having a good business and marketing plan and an organizational chart and benefits packages. He handles the lion's share of that stuff and holds us accountable."

A University of Kentucky graduate and the father of five, Duncan, 50, also "sets a very high standard of honesty and integrity," Frank emphasizes. "He draws a line and right's right and wrong's wrong. That's his ideal."

Serving as president of Taylor Made, Duncan is usually the first to arrive each day and the last to leave, observes Payne, who after working with the family for years, bought into the operation as a partner in 2006.

But even though Duncan is the leader, that doesn't stop the others from good-naturedly kidding him about his dogged determination to surge ahead with new, and at times unusual, marketing and promotional ideas, including what they refer to as the "infamous" aerial ads at the 1997 Keeneland November sale that riled some due to the chugging airplane noise. Duncan's other ideas can be seen everywhere, even on Equibase results, of which Taylor Made is a sponsor.

"Duncan is the innovator; he's always the one ready to take the first step of change," Payne says. "Ben and I have a tendency to sit back and say, 'That's not going to work. That damn Duncan!' But a lot of times what he comes up with succeeds."

Laughing, Mark admits he might emphatically declare about 50 times each year that "Duncan is out of his mind!" "But most of the time Duncan has a pretty good strike rate with his ideas," he says.

"And when he gets an idea, he doesn't stop," adds Ben.

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Unbridled's Song with (from left) Ben Taylor, stallion division manager Gilberto Terrazas, and director of stallion operations Byron Rogers.



Ben Taylor

While Duncan is the idea man, Ben plays devil's advocate. More reserved than his siblings, "he won't say as much, while Frank and Duncan and I talk all the time," Mark says. "But at the end of the day, he'll have one sentence that will blow a hole in everything we've been talking about or he'll see a different opportunity. He is always analyzing, and he has good insight. He's more of a realist while Frank and I definitely are optimists — we love doing deals, and we need some checks and balances that Ben provides."

Duncan chuckles, and sparks more laughter in the room, as he contemplates the impact of Ben, 47, who attended UK and is the father of three.

"One of the things he brings to the table that drives me crazy is that I will be sitting there saying, 'This is an opportunity; this is great; we've got to do this.' And he'll ask every question with the opposite point of view, and finally you admit that the idea won't work. But then he'll say, 'Well, I don't know about that.'

"It's a very good thing to have; it's the greatest," Duncan adds seriously. "It makes you keep re-examining what you're doing."

Ben is the only brother who didn't always know he wanted to be involved in the Thoroughbred business. But when older brother Chris died suddenly, he had to dedicate himself to keeping the operation going and "then, before I knew it, it was five years later" and he was entrenched.

The tragic death of Chris, who was shot in 1981 by a housekeeper's relative, as well as the fatal car crash that claimed another brother, Danny, the eldest of the group, in 1968, solidified the bonds among the surviving brothers, Duncan says. If they were separated and asked to make a major decision today, they would probably come up with extremely similar plans, Ben says.



Frank Taylor

Frank, 44, is what Mark calls the "rainmaker," the brother who has cajoled many of Taylor Made's customers into serious business deals with his down-to-earth manner and dedication to hard work. Frank was the connection with prominent owners Aaron and Marie Jones, who partnered with Taylor Made on the late stallion Saint Ballado and currently stands Forestry at the farm; the Joneses also raised and sold



Frank Taylor with prized mares Silken Cat (left) and Goulash

champions Ashado and Speightstown through Taylor Made.

“When Frank gets zeroed in on a project, it’s just like an obsession,” Mark says. “He’s just a great salesman. He does a lot of other things, too, but that’s his specialty.”

Frank is modest when talking about his skills, which he began cultivating at an early age.

“When I went to school, I never was smart enough to be real successful, so I just figured if the teacher really liked you and you did a lot of stuff for her, maybe they would promote you on,” he says. “It just seems like I get hooked being with a few

big people, and if you do them a real good job, then they’re always connected with other influential people, and it just keeps networking and spreading.”

The father of five, Frank attended the University of Dallas. He and his family raise champion miniature horses, and he eloquently echoes his father’s written creed that “life around horses is its own reward.”

“I’ve had a lot of great things happen to me in my life, but there’s nothing like having a great horse,” Frank says. “When you get a great one, I don’t care who you are, the first thing you think about in the morning when you get up and the last thing you think about when you go to bed is what his next race is going to be or what’s being written about him. That’s what makes this business tick — people love having a great horse.”

Mark Taylor

As the youngest of Joe Taylor’s sons, Mark remembers riding ponies around Gainesway in his youth but then worrying whether there would be any room for him at Taylor Made. Yet when as a 16-year-old he filled in on a night shift mucking stalls, he discovered that Duncan already had provided him a share in the company. “That’s pretty amazing that they were generous enough to say, ‘He’s a brother. We don’t know what he’s going to be able to do, but let’s go ahead and get him set up in the infrastructure of the company.’ That kind of gives you an idea of the mindset here,” says Mark.



After graduating from Clemson University, Mark pondered the possibility of training racehorses and worked with Hall of Fame trainer Ron McAnally in California as well as with Satish Seemar in Dubai but returned to the farm in 1994.

“One of the things Mark contributes is that he is more well-balanced than the rest of us,” Duncan observes.

“Mark has got all the skills. And everybody likes Mark. He’s just a great people person and a good horseman,” adds Frank.

The father of two boys, including one named after Joe Taylor, Mark has become so adept at running Taylor Made’s public sales that Ben notes buyers at sales “line up” to consult with him about potentially astute purchases.

“One thing I try to do is practice diplomacy,” says Mark, who has devised a program for this year’s Keeneland September yearling sale in which Taylor Made customers can win prizes when checking in at the sale barns.

Patrick Payne

For diplomatic skills the brothers also rely on Payne, whom Mark refers to as “the field marshal” because “just turn him loose and he’ll find a deal.”



“Pat is a people person and sometimes isn’t as over-the-top competitive as we are,” Mark explains. “I think he’s helped our relationships across the board with a lot of different people that maybe we hadn’t been doing business with before he came on board.”

Just as the Taylor brothers do, Payne — who helped Duncan plant the first tree on the Taylor Made property and also vanned the first mares to the farm — credits Joe Taylor for giving him the guidelines that have shaped his life in the horse business.

“He had no enemies, and that’s always the philosophy I’ve tried to have,” Payne says.

Taylors in the Future

Looking to the future, the Taylors know rivals grumble that their business has grown too large and speculate whether they can continue to serve clients well. The brothers maintain that the size of Taylor Made works to their clients’ advantage, and they are determined to seek new ways to serve customers and expand Taylor Made even further.

Ben foresees Taylor Made’s stallion roster growing from six to possibly eight to 10 by next season, and the farm will continue to explore building relationships with other breeders and finding niche markets for horses in other states.

The stallions the Taylors currently manage at their farm or help manage in a venture with WinStar Farm, including Unbridled’s Song, Forestry, Tiznow, and Speightstown, combined with their mare base and the 10 account managers on staff who are always talking to key buyers about those sires’ offspring “create a ripple effect covering the entire industry

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that's really powerful," observes Mark.

"And having a really good, well-trained boarding division that can raise every one of the babies the best possible way and give it every chance to be a good racehorse and a good sales horse, all those things have a cumulative effect on stallion promotion. So, obviously there's people out there who have more capital than we do, but they may not have the ability to influence the market like we do," he adds.

Plus, Taylor Made's size gives it an unexpected agility. Since the agency will sell 80 to 100 horses in the first book of the Keeneland September sale, the Taylors can immediately spot trends that might lead to changes in strategy.

"A lot of times we'll see something within two hours of the sale starting, and we can react quickly before the end of the day to change the way we're marketing our horses behind the ring or change our reserve settings," Mark says.

"Underneath all this stuff that has enabled us to get to where we are is the idea that the most important horse is the one getting ready to walk through the ring," he notes. "When those horses are going through the ring, I stress out. When I think about the board bills the customer has paid, the vet bills, and the stud fees — and my involvement to get him into it — I'm like, 'Come on! Let's get this thing sold for the most money we can; let's try to get him a positive result.' In the future, we've got to stay true to that philosophy and continue to instill that in all our people, and if we do that, I think we're going to continue to thrive."

The Taylor Made principals also expect to be joined one day by some members of the younger generation, although Joe Taylor's 20 grandchildren, including the children of the brothers' sisters Mary Joe and Emily, and two great-grandchildren must first work in another Thoroughbred business for two years under a rule established by Duncan.

"I'm sure there are people out there thinking, 'Man, there are a bunch more Taylors coming along!'" says Payne with a laugh. "That's the future." 🐾