

# Want to buy a horse?



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*Tom Gallo, with his daughter Arianna and his wife, Mia. Gallo's Parting Glass Racing Partnerships are bringing new owners into Thoroughbred racing, with an emphasis on New York-breds.*

## Tom Gallo is using three decades of racing experience to bring new faces – and more fun – into the game

**By Glenye Cain**

Tom Gallo just might have the best job in the world. It definitely looked that way on a chill night in late December, when he arrived to lead a business meeting at the famous Parting Glass pub in Saratoga Springs, N.Y. Anyone who can make the Parting Glass part of their office hours has got to be having fun.

The occasion was the Parting Glass Racing Partnerships' monthly meeting, and the pub's back room was filling up with the new owners whom Gallo has introduced to Thoroughbred racing. Over Parting Glass pub specialties like

shepherd's pie and Guinness, with traditional Irish fiddle music playing in the background, about 75 enthusiastic owners talked about the racing season that had just ended and about their hopes for 2004.

In a small way, Gallo's Parting Glass partnerships are accomplishing what national groups like the Thoroughbred Owners and Breeders Association and the National Thoroughbred Racing Association have been proposing to do on a larger scale for years: bring new people to the game.

The keys, Gallo says, are simply to provide good customer service and an experience that lets people enjoy the fun that racing has to offer.

Gallo, 49, has been in the horse world for three decades, building a successful bloodstock and sales agency based at his Blue Stone Farm in Cambridge, N.Y. He is a familiar face at sales in New York and beyond – a regular seller at Fasig-Tipton's New York-bred auction in Saratoga and at auctions from the Mid-Atlantic states to Kentucky. He is a director of the New York Thoroughbred Breeders and has lobbied on behalf of the sport in Washington.

The Parting Glass partnerships, which he started in 2002, are the fastest-growing segment of Gallo's busi-

Gallo wanted the partnerships to be simple – “all they would have to do is sign up” – and fun. Holding meetings at an Irish pub was a good start.

ness. And it's probably the piece that's closest to his heart.

Bringing new owners into the game has always been a passion for Gallo, who fell into the horse business by a series of lucky accidents.

“I'm a first-generation horse person,” he said. “I had never been around horses before, except for riding a pony in Van Cortlandt Park south of Yonkers.”

Gallo grew up in Westchester County, where he worked part time in his father's linen service business and toyed with becoming a commercial photographer. He got his first real brush with racing after high school in 1973, when he was working construction in Pompano, Fla., during the condo boom.

“I was making a ton of money at it, but it was mind-numbing,” Gallo said. “It's all physical labor – there's no stimulation at all. After a while I was dreaming about shoveling sand every night.”

The idea of working at the racetrack came by accident, when another worker casually mentioned that Pompano's harness track might be a good place to meet women. “I thought, ‘Hey, the racetrack, maybe I could try that.’” Gallo said.

Another construction worker who had been a hot-walker told Gallo to show up at the stable gate at 5 a.m.,

say he was looking for a job, and wait until someone came along to hire him.

“So there I was at 5 a.m., and the guy says over the loudspeaker to the whole barn area, ‘I got an inexperienced groom here looking for work! Anybody wants an inexperienced groom, I got one up here.’” Gallo recalled. “I was so embarrassed!”

But someone did want one, and Gallo's unlikely new career was launched.

The path that took him from grabbing a Standardbred's lead shank at Pompano to selling and racing horses at Saratoga has been a long and interesting one. Gallo's résumé now includes stints in Kentucky with Spendthrift Farm, at Lee Eaton's famed sales-prep farm, and on the Keeneland backside. He also worked for a couple of years for Thomas Mellon Evans's Buckland Farm racing stable, first in Aiken, S.C., and then back in New York.

Gallo's professional development in the Thoroughbred business has been strongly influenced by his wife, Mia, a former show-jumping rider who turned her husband into a real horseman. It was Mia who taught Gallo how to groom a horse, which got him his first real Thoroughbred job at Tilly Foster Farms in Brewster, N.Y. Now defunct, the farm was then a thriving Thoroughbred operation, and Gallo's experience there gave him the foundation he needed to build a career in the Thoroughbred industry.

The story of Gallo's haphazard entry to racing has several morals that Gallo now lives by. One, casual fans can be converted to racehorse owners. Two, they need practical, honest guidance to do it. And, three, if you want them to stay in the game, you have to make it fun.

Which is how Tom Gallo ended up holding racehorse-ownership meetings at the Parting Glass.

At many of his partnerships' monthly get-togethers, Gallo brings in celebrity speakers like New York-based jockey Richard Migliore and Hall of Fame trainer John Veitch, who talked to a rapt audience about Alydar. And Gallo has worked to make the business of owning racehorses as hassle-free as possible.

“I wanted it to be very user-friendly, where all they would have to do is sign up,” Gallo said of the Parting Glass partnerships. “We try to cut through the red tape. They pay a one-time, up-front fee for expenses. We handle paying all the expenses out of the office, and we only pay what we're billed. That way they don't have to deal with bills every month. At the end of the year – or anytime, if they want it – they get a detailed statement showing where all the money was spent. If there's a surplus after those expenses, it rolls forward into the following year.”

Making ownership simpler doesn't make it less risky, Gallo said. “They know it's a high-risk venture,” he said. “We tell them that right up front, that they shouldn't put money into it that they can't afford to lose.”

The price of admission to Gallo's racing partnerships, not including annual expenses, ranges from \$5,000 to \$30,000 a share.

“About 90 percent of the partners are absolutely new to the ownership game,” Gallo said. “But a lot of our people are handicappers, people who are already familiar with the odds against them.”

The horses are all New York-breds, making them eligible for healthy statebred bonuses, and they are with different trainers from Finger Lakes to Maryland, including Pat Kelly, Joe Orseno, Barclay Tagg, Mary Eppler, and Mike Ferraro. The eight-horse stable already has enjoyed some success. The best runner so far is the 3-year-old colt Bubba Sparks, who has earned \$39,640 from five starts. Other promising prospects are Mikethemoondog, a 3-year-old Belong to Me colt who is a half-brother to four

there are a lot of New York stallions I like. Those are the mares who go to the \$20,000-and-under sires.”

Gallo believes that slots will provide another benefit to New York’s Thoroughbred industry in the form of new fans. The task will be to keep their interest in racing once they’ve gotten to the track.

“I think VLT’s would be a great thing, because they’ll bring new people into the empty seats at the racetrack,” he said. “Once you get them there, don’t make them pay for parking. Give them food at a reasonable price. Get them interested and keep them there.”

The same kind of hassle-free customer service that Gallo applies to his racing partnerships should also work at the track, Gallo said, and he points to Las Vegas casinos as an example.

“I just got back from Las Vegas, and I am in a very enlightened state,” he said. “Everyone in racing administration ought to go there to see how it’s done. Free valet parking, super-good food, and everyone telling you, ‘Have a lucky day!’ They can’t do enough for you out there, everyone from the busboys and waitresses to the concierge to the guy who’s getting your car – they all smile. They’ve got it down, and they’re making money to the point where they make all their money off the gambling. They’re so successful at their primary product, which is the gambling.

“I think racetracks are good, and they’re getting better, but you can take anyone to Las Vegas to see how it’s really done. When you go out there to a sports book, you’re waited on hand and foot. It’s not rocket science. They want to keep those guys on the floor gambling, and when they’re on the floor, they don’t want them to get up.”

Gallo is passionate on this subject, and he bubbles over with ideas designed to make it easy to be a racing fan. “How about a bus service, like the one Trump has had such success with going to Atlantic City? How about buses every Saturday and Sunday to Belmont and Aqueduct with a tour of the backstretch and then free admission to the track, sponsored by the New York Racing Association, *Daily Racing Form*, the New York Thoroughbred Horsemen’s Association, and the New York Thoroughbred Breeders? How about doing more than putting VLT’s in – how about turning the track into a multi-attraction area that can also give visitors’ kids their first exposure to horses?

“MGM Grand has a theme park in Vegas that uses their mascot, lions,” Gallo continued. “Attracting kids and their parents to horses by exposing them to horses in a theme park with ‘Harry the Horse’ or whatever is a great way to get more people involved for the future of racing. The future of any sports industry lies in getting those kids interested early.”

And some of those people might make their way to a horse sale or into one of Gallo’s Parting Glass partnerships. That’s Gallo’s view of things. On that chill night last December, as the Parting Glass chairs filled up with new owners conversing enthusiastically about the horses they own together, it was hard to argue with his logic. ■

Gallo bubbles over with ideas on how to draw in new racing fans – from buses to backstretch tours to a kiddie theme park featuring “Harry the Horse.”

stakes-winners, including Gazelle Handicap winner Buy the Sport; and Hidden Curves, a 3-year-old Mt. Livermore half-sister to stakes-winner Sweet Baby James.

Not surprisingly, given the Parting Glass partnerships’ New York-bred emphasis, Gallo looks forward to the advent of video lottery terminals, or slot machines, at the state’s racetracks. Slots-fattened purses would make the partnerships’ victories more valuable, but they would also help boost the value of Gallo’s other horses.

In addition to running the racing partnerships, Gallo sells about 55 yearlings annually at auctions in New York, Maryland, and Kentucky. The Gallos also own six mares in partnership at their 80-acre Blue Stone Farm, and the New York-bred foals they produce would likely bring in more money at auction or on the racetrack if New York’s purses go up.

The Blue Stone mares are in foal both to New York sires and to Kentucky stallions, but all will foal in New York to earn the coveted New York-bred designation for their foals.

“The mares on my farm right now are, on average, in foal to a \$40,000 or \$45,000 stallion,” Gallo said. “We have mares this year in foal to Cherokee Run, Hennessy, Tale of the Cat, Victory Gallop. I have a couple of mares who stay in New York and breed to New York stallions, and