



Another Man's Treasure

by **MARCIE HEACOX**

California-bred stakes winner Top Money was free when breeders and owners Tom and Debi Stull of Tommy Town Thoroughbreds gave him to their daughter for retraining.

Since then, he's been worth much more.

"He's more athletic than any Thoroughbred I've ever had, by far," Shelly Stull said. "He jumps better than any horse my dad ever bought me."

Stull has been riding since she was seven years old. She rode in horse shows until she went to work at the track riding a pony for trainer Kristin Mulhall. In 2004, she began working for trainer Adam Kitchingman where she worked with Top Money.

For the past five years, Stull has been exercising horses six days a week for John Sadler. When she's finished riding, she performs EquiPulse therapy at the track and then rides Top Money and other horses at Bellavantage Farms in Covina. There are 13 horses in training on the five-acre property.

Top Money's dam Money for Madrid earned \$148,915 in a 40-race career. She is a half-sister to stakes winner Classic Playboy. Top Money became the first winner for his sire, Tommy Town Thoroughbreds' Old Topper, when he won his debut at the Del Mar Thoroughbred Club meet on July 29, 2004. Exactly four weeks later, the bay gelding won a \$40,000 allowance race.

The high point of his career came in the \$98,000 I'm Smokin Stakes going six furlongs at Del Mar on Sept. 6. As the 8-5 favorite, he defeated a field of four that included future millionaire and California champion Proud Tower Too.

Following his Del Mar dominance, Top Money sustained a tendon injury and was given a break for more than 20 months before returning under new trainer Kevin Lewis. In three sprints at the 2006 Hollywood Park summer meet, he ran seventh, fourth and second. Top

Worth The Money

Money was retired when he started to re-injure his tendon, ending his racing career with a 6-3-1-0 record and \$112,198 in earnings.

Stull knew she had an athlete on her hands when she got him. She said Top Money was tough to be around at the track, bucking and rearing, but that he had a lot of elasticity, an important trait for jumpers.

Stull also said she has had nothing but good experiences with off-track Thoroughbreds, partly due to the fact that she is able to first become familiar with them at the track. She ranks \$150,227-earner You Crack Me Up and the unraced Cal-bred Mr. Collector among her best jumpers. Also among her pupils is grade II winner Hasty Kris, who banked \$657,622 at the track.

When Stull first got Top Money, she gifted him to her friend, Sara Strobel. Strobel then gave him the nickname "Boo" because of his tendency to pause and look at jumps before going over them.

Stull usually gives retired racing Thoroughbreds a six-month break and trail riding to transition them to hunting and jumping, but Top Money had already been ridden by the time she began retraining him.

He just entered into serious jump training this past year. "He's one of those I start over little stuff, and he's just athletic and it's easy for him," Stull said, adding that four-foot-six-inch jumps are no problem for him.

Top Money went to four shows before the end of last season. In his first show, he won one class and placed third in another. He jumped up in class in the following shows, with respectable top-five placings.

Stull said they plan to campaign him in two shows per month this coming year. "I think this horse has no limits. . . no limits at all. I think this horse can go all the way up the ladder." 🐾



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I'm Smokin Stakes—September 6, 2004



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Bellavantage Farms—February 4, 2010

TOP MONEY