



Noteworthy, by Darley's Midshipman, showed off his barrel racing skills at the 2024 Thoroughbred Makeover

Second Acts

Champions *for the Breed*

COOLMORE AND GODOLPHIN LEAD
THE WAY FOR STALLION FARMS
VIA MAKEOVER CHAMPIONS

By **KRISTEN KOVATCH BENTLEY**

SCROLL BACK ON Darley's Facebook page to the month of September, and you'll find something a little bit unusual: a post that not only listed Frosted's 2024 stakes horses and career graded stakes winners, but also the number of horses that would be embarking on their careers beyond racing at the upcoming Thoroughbred Makeover Oct. 9-12 at the Kentucky Horse Park.

If Facebook isn't your speed, head over to X, and take a look at Coolmore America's account. In the mix of congratulatory posts highlighting the offspring of Coolmore America's stallion lineup, you'll find footage from the Thoroughbred Makeover, highlighting offspring of American Pharoah and Justify finding success in the barrel racing pen and the show jumping prowess of a graded stakes-winning son of Munnings.

Through the Retired Racehorse Project's Makeover Champions initiative, these two cornerstone stallion farms of the breeding industry are leading the way to fully embrace the Thoroughbred as an athlete, no matter the track or the arena.

MAKEOVER CHAMPIONS

The concept for Makeover Champions, a formalized outreach program by the Retired Racehorse Project for the 2024 Thoroughbred Makeover and National Symposium, presented by Thoroughbred Charities of America, was born from discussion in the RRP's Industry Outreach Committee, consisting of individuals representing multiple branches of the racing and bloodstock industries. The program was announced publicly in early August, and a grassroots invitation outreach fueled by committee members' personal networks took place throughout August and September. By the Thoroughbred Makeover in early October, a total of 29 former connections, including breeders, former owners, former trainers, stallion farms standing the sires, and others, had formally committed to sharing their public support for their horses at the Thoroughbred Makeover on their web and social platforms.

"We're really trying to normalize the narrative that life beyond the racing and bloodstock industries isn't a failure by any stretch of the imagination," said RRP executive director Kirsten Green. "In all equine sports, it's incredibly normal to move a horse on to an

PHOTOS COURTESY OF ERIN GILMORE PHOTOGRAPHY

activity that they're better suited for, sometimes several times over the course of their lives, and that's what 'aftercare' really boils down to. Those that bred, raised, raced, and retired these horses should be proud to highlight what they're doing beyond racing, rather than viewing it as something that diminishes value."

BLAZING NEW TRAILS FOR STALLION FARMS

Stallion marketing typically focuses on a stallion's success at siring sales toppers or stakes winners, not what their offspring might be doing post-racing. Looking at the stallions from the angle of their post-racing offspring success was an outside-the-box approach.

"The initial reaction in the office was 'This is so cool; how has no one thought of this before?'" said Katelyn Morgan, racing and nominations assistant at Godolphin. "The team was really excited—I started with the marketing department who I work with to get posts out about Godolphin Lifetime Care, and eventually all the way up to Michael Banahan, director of bloodstock. The answer to 'Is this something we're all for?' was always 'Of course.'"

Godolphin's Lifetime Care program allows the breeder/owner to keep close tabs on its retirees already, and keeps aftercare forefront to the global organization's operations. This program also directly sponsors five Makeover-bound horses annually, covering entry fees and providing trainers with swag. Godolphin was already associated with eight entries at the Thoroughbred Makeover as the breeder and former owner; by also championing the offspring of Darley stallions, that list of connected horses grew to 18.

"Adding the opportunity to support those horses by our stallions is amazing," added Morgan. "Do I think it's a



Just So, a son of Coolmore's Justify, might be the best-stamped offspring to compete at this year's Makeover

selling point for those breeding race-horses? No, not necessarily, but it's an added emphasis. We're not breeding sport horses and we're not standing the stallions to warmblood mares—that's not the goal. But if we can put a highlight on that sport career after racing, that's a really nice bonus.

"Ultimately, we are breeding athletes, and many of them will need a career off the track—that needs to be emphasized more."

CONNECTING IN PERSON

Multiple Makeover Champions were able to attend the Thoroughbred Makeover in person to celebrate their connected horses: representatives of Bourbon Lane Stable, Little Red Feather Racing, Wasabi Ventures Stables/Wasabi Aftercare Fund, West Point Thoroughbreds, and others all cheered their horses home during preliminary competition. Morgan, as well as Coolmore's digital marketing specialist Emily Duncan, were ringside as well.

"We watched Thoroughbreds compete in a variety of disciplines, from field hunting to show jumping, dressage, competitive trail, and barrel racing," shared Duncan, who caught up with as many of the 11 Coolmore-sired Makeover horses as she could. "It was wonderful to meet the trainers and new owners of horses sired by our stallions and to hear their inspiring stories about their retraining."

Morgan similarly connected with as many of the 18 Godolphin/Darley-associated horses as she could, meeting trainers and hearing about their process. She was also competing her own entry Case Study, by Frosted, in two disciplines. Morgan sent out updates on the associated horses to Godolphin's global staff email list, inviting any local staff to come out to meet horses. Several took the invitation, visiting with trainers and sharing insight such as foal photos.

The in-person connections went two ways as well: Makeover trainers historically enjoy taking stallion farm tours while they're in town for the competition, often specifically seeking out the sires of their sport horses. Many Makeover trainers also add a trip to Keeneland to their itineraries, attending afternoon racing as well as morning works to get a better understanding of where their horses came from.

"We had a few opportunities to share our stallions with some of the competitors when they came out to the farm for a tour of our stallion division," detailed Duncan. "It was amazing to see how quickly the owners were able to recognize the stallion in their horse, both in stature and temperament."

SOCIAL SUPPORT

As for the cornerstone of the Makeover Champions program—sharing messages of support and updates about Makeover entries on web or

social platforms—both Coolmore and Godolphin/Darley noticed increased interactions from followers when posting about offspring at the Makeover.

“The response from followers and fans was just overwhelming,” shared Morgan. “I noticed the racing trainers getting involved too—Brad Cox and Mike Stidham. Seeing other people get involved meant a lot.”

Coolmore experienced a similar result: “Our social media followers loved the chance to engage with the content we shared during the Thoroughbred Makeover,” added Duncan. “The excitement and enthusiasm



Trending, by Coolmore’s Uncle Mo, was laser-focused while competing in the Field Hunter division

from the event resonated with our community, and we received wonderful feedback on the stories and videos highlighting the achievements of these talented horses.”

As these stallion farms discovered, support of Thoroughbreds beyond

racing doesn’t lessen the value of their sires—in fact, showing this public support enhances the farms’ standings in the eyes of the public for getting behind all of their stallions’ offspring, even the ones that may not be as successful in the most traditional racing industry definition. The athleticism and versatility of the Thoroughbred, and its ability to step so easily into new careers beyond racing, is a boon to the racing industry,

and a story that’s waiting to be celebrated on a bigger scale. Makeover Champions provided the perfect opportunity for connections to do exactly that.

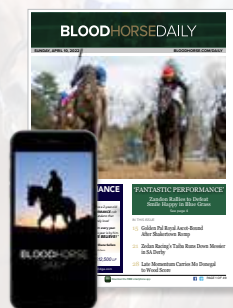
Makeover Champions will return for 2025; please watch the RRP.org for more information in August. **BH**

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