

Heavy Medal

Medaglia d'Oro's stud career shows depth beyond Rachel Alexandra

BY EVAN I. HAMMONDS

In the warm sunshine of a May afternoon, Medaglia d'Oro dries off after a post-breeding-session bath. His dappled dark bay coat stands in stark contrast to the lush green paddock and brilliant blue sky offered before him on this late spring day in Woodford County, Ky.

To get a good look at one of the hottest stallions on the planet from stem to stern, one has to take a step or two back. His large, 16.2-hand frame and commanding presence demand it.

While his attention is immediately focused on the crinkling sound of a peppermint being unwrapped before him, he quickly turns his head to the right, following the sight and sound of a horse trailer leaving Stonewall Stallions onto Midway Road. He may have already had a long day, and a long breeding season, but the 10-year-old stallion—like he was in his youth on the racetrack—is ready for more.

Medaglia d'Oro has been a success in the breeding shed from the get-go, and today breeders clamor for his services for a fee that has risen from \$40,000 to \$60,000 this season—one of only a handful of stud fees that has escalated in testing economic times.



SIZE PICOU-OLDHAM

So far, the leading second-crop sire is represented by seven stakes winners—all fillies—and a total of 13 stakes horses from his first crop of foals, now 3-year-olds of 2009. None is more popular than BlackBerry Preakness (gr. I) winner Rachel Alexandra. The Amazonian filly who has taken the racing world—and sporting public—by storm is a result of the mating with Dolphus Morrison's stakes-winning mare Lotta Kim. That came while Medaglia d'Oro was standing at John Sikura's Hill 'n' Dale Farms near Lexington, where the "big horse" stood his first season.

Purchased from owner Edmund Gann by Richard Haisfield following his racing career, Medaglia d'Oro was moved after that first season to Audrey Haisfield's newly built Stonewall Stallions where he has stood since his second season in 2006.

There, the son of El Prado, out of the stakes-winning Bailjumper mare Cappucino Bay, displays his large scope, deep shoulder, short cannon bone, and powerful hindquarters in perfect symmetry.

"He's like a Super Bowl quarterback," said Suzie Oldham, who is in charge of stallion season sales at Stonewall Stallions. "He's got a great disposition, and when he walks, that rhythm makes music."

MAN AMONG BOYS

Medaglia d'Oro was bred in Kentucky by Albert and Joyce Bell. Based in Montana, the Bells put the colt under the care of Midwestern trainer David Vance. After a runner-up effort in his debut at Turfway Park in December of his 2-year-old year, the youngster caught the attention of bloodstock agents the following February with a 4¼-length romp going six furlongs against maiden company at Oaklawn Park. Mark Reid, on behalf of Gann, was rebuffed by the Bells with his initial offer, but a second call secured the stakes prospect.

Sent to trainer Bobby Frankel in Southern California, the colt immediately returned dividends while winning the 1¼-mile San Felipe (gr. II). From then on, Medaglia d'Oro would only see grade I and grade II company.

Hustled onto the Triple Crown trail, he shipped east to run in the Wood Memorial (gr. I). He lost by a head to Buddha. In a 17-race career, he would finish first or second in 15 starts. The two off-the-board efforts came in the wake of War Emblem's early front-running assault on the 2002 Triple Crown in the Kentucky Derby (gr. I), where Medaglia d'Oro was fourth, and the Preakness (gr. I), which resulted in a disappointing eighth-place finish. He would rebound in the 12-furlong Belmont Stakes (gr. I) but come up a half-length short to 70-1 shot Sarava.

"How good was he? He was very, very good," Frankel said.

He rounded out his 3-year-old year by crushing fellow sophomores in the Jim Dandy (gr. II) at Saratoga by 13¾ lengths, and taking the Travers (gr. I) by a half-length over Repent in the slop.

Sent off the favorite in the Breeders' Cup Classic (gr. I) in his 3-year-old finale, he ran second to 43-1 longshot Volponi.

"He was an easy horse to train; a beautiful horse," Frankel said. "I remember taking him to the paddock for the Travers and believe me, he looked like a man among boys."

Indeed, time would prove Medaglia d'Oro to be the man for the season. Buddha, the Wood winner, never made another start. Sarava and Volponi would each make eight more starts in their careers after they defeated Medaglia d'Oro, and never win again.

At 4 and 5, Medaglia d'Oro would win four of seven starts, but his three losses, all second-place finishes, came in the Pacific

MEDAGLIA D'ORO

EL PRADO (Ire)	SADLER'S WELLS	NORTHERN DANCER	NEARCTIC
		FAIRY BRIDGE	NATALMA
	LADY CAPULET	SIR IVOR	BOLD REASON
		CAP AND BELLS	SPECIAL
CAPPUCINO BAY	BAILJUMPER	DAMASCUS	SIR GAYLORD
		COURT CIRCUIT	ATTICA
	DUBBED IN	SILENT SCREEN	TOM FOOL
		SOCIETY SINGER	GHAZNI
			SWORD DANCER
		KERALA	
		ROYAL VALE	
		CYCLE	
		PRINCE JOHN	
		PRAYER BELL	
		RESTLESS WIND	
		SOCIAL POSITION	

Classic (gr. I), Breeders' Cup Classic (as the favorite a second time), and Dubai World Cup (UAE-I).

"He was an unlucky horse," Frankel said of Medaglia d'Oro, whose seven second-place finishes included six in grade I races. "With a little luck, he could have earned \$8 or \$9 million. It was just the little things; like if he was ridden a little differently in a few races, it would have made a huge difference in what he accomplished."

What he accomplished was \$5.7 million in earnings and the distinction that if a little racing luck had gone his way, he may have been considered among the top racehorses of all-time, not just one of the decade's best.

CHANGING GEARS

At the time Medaglia d'Oro was competing, Haisfield and his wife, Audrey, were getting involved in the Thoroughbred industry. Intrigued by the magnificence of the breed, Richard Haisfield said, "There are a lot of other horses out there. You look at another horse and 'a horse is a horse.' You look at a Thoroughbred and your heart beats."



Oaks and Preakness winner Rachel Alexandra



Payton d'Oro, winner of the grade II Black-Eyed Susan Stakes



Haisfield purchased Medaglia d'Oro and Doneraile Court for stud duty and was involved with Candy Ride, who was also standing his first season at Hill 'n' Dale.

"The credit goes to Richard Haisfield," Sikura said of Medaglia d'Oro's success. "He put up the money and bought the horse."

Medaglia d'Oro entered stud in the early winter of 2005 with a \$35,000 fee, comparable with other first-year stallions Pleasantly Perfect and Speightstown at \$40,000 and Lion Heart and Strong Hope at \$30,000. Smarty Jones was the highest-priced member of that freshman class at \$100,000.

"There are a few things we do consistently when we're standing a new horse," Sikura said. "We stand the horse at an attractive stud fee. When your horses are good value, you tend to breed a better quality of mare than when you are push-

ing the envelope, because everybody appreciates value."

From that first group of matings, Medaglia d'Oro has 150 registered foals.

Sikura's philosophy is "it's important a first-year horse breeds a large, varied, and diverse book of mares. To project the success of a horse, you expose them to as many different mares as possible. You have no idea, other than just presumption, what will work. The more exposure to various pedigrees, states, and regions, the better chance you have."

The following year, 77 yearlings from his first crop were reported as sold at public auction for an average of \$119,957. Six of those yearlings sold for \$300,000 or more.

Following Medaglia d'Oro's first season at stud, the Haisfields opened Stonewall Stallions and put in place a unique breeders' incentive program.

"The farm did not have a significant broodmare band; how do you attract broodmares to this magnificent stallion?" Richard Haisfield asked. "That was the basis of the breeders' incentive plan."

Starting in 2006 and continuing through the 2007 and 2008 breeding seasons, mares that were grade I or grade II producers, 15-years-old or younger, or grade I or grade II-winning mares, 10-years-old or younger, received a complimentary season.

The program boosted the quality of Medaglia d'Oro's book in seasons two, three, and four, which are the toughest ones for young stallions and their managers to overcome.

"He's one of the rare stallions who got a very, very nice book his first year and it didn't drop off," Haisfield said.

According to Stonewall general manager/pedigree analyst Clark Shepherd, the class production index of the mares from his second book scored an 83% increase over his initial crop.

"We're pretty fine-tuned into making pedigrees work together to produce racehorses first, but when you satisfy that with a good commercial page, and you actually get that product to the market, you're checking all the boxes," he said.



SUEZ PICOU-OLDHAM

Medaglia d'Oro

Dark bay or brown colt, foaled 1999

El Prado—Cappucino Bay, by Bailjumper

Stud Fee:

\$35,000 (2005-06);
\$40,000 (2007-08);
\$60,000 (2009)

Yearling Avg:

2007-\$119,957 (77 sold);
2008-\$134,470 (49)

Weaning Avg:

2006-\$187,477 (21 sold);
2007-\$56,700 (10);
2008-\$98,834

2-Year-Old Avg:

2008-\$182,235 (23 sold);
2009-\$268,083 (12)

Stakes winners:

Rachel Alexandra (gr. I),
Payton d'Oro (gr. II), C. S. Silk
(gr. III), Gabby's Golden Gal,
Renda, She's Our Annie,
Retraceable

Sires by North American Earnings

The leaders are arranged by North American progeny earnings through May 25, 2009 as supplied to *The Blood-Horse*.
Categorical leaders are in bold.

Rank	Stallion (Foreign foaled), (YOB, Sire), Where Stands	2009 Stud Fee	Runners Dom/All	Winners Dom/All	Stakes Wnrs Dom/All	(Chief Earner, Earnings)	2009 Dom Earnings	% of All 2009 Earnings
1	DISTORTED HUMOR , (93, Forty Niner), WinStar Farm, KY	\$150,000	182/200	73/78	6/7	(Buddy's Humor, \$130,000)	\$3,247,299	71%
2	MEDAGLIA D'ORO , (99, El Prado), Stonewall Farm Stallions, KY	\$40,000	75/81	27/27	4/4	(Rachel Alexandra, \$1,416,914)	\$3,084,919	100%
3	GIANT'S CAUSEWAY , (97, Storm Cat), Ashford Stud, KY	\$125,000	107/210	41/70	7/11	(Hold Me Back, \$432,000)	\$2,985,804	77%
4	SMART STRIKE , (92, Mr. Prospector), Lane's End Farm, KY	\$125,000	158/175	43/51	5/7	(Papa Clem, \$860,000)	\$2,912,978	94%
5	UNBRIDLED'S SONG , (93, Unbridled), Taylor Made Stallions, KY	\$125,000	113/125	40/42	8/8	(Old Fashioned, \$410,000)	\$2,802,934	100%
6	A.P. INDY , (89, Seattle Slew), Lane's End Farm, KY	\$250,000	101/106	39/41	5/5	(Friesan Fire, \$540,000)	\$2,458,531	100%
7	EMPIRE MAKER , (00, Unbridled), Juddmonte Farms, KY	\$75,000	77/90	30/34	2/2	(Pioneerof the Nile, \$1,090,000)	\$2,428,395	98%
8	STORMY ATLANTIC , (94, Storm Cat), Hill 'n' Dale Farms, KY	\$45,000	175/180	61/61	6/6	(Superior Storm, \$254,000)	\$2,413,990	100%
9	UNUSUAL HEAT , (90, Nureyev), Old English Rancho, CA	\$20,000	101/102	42/42	6/6	(Beltene, \$185,308)	\$2,372,892	100%
10	YES IT'S TRUE , (96, Is It True), Three Chimneys Farm, KY	\$22,500	178/184	76/78	2/2	(Half Metal Jacket, \$92,240)	\$2,306,805	100%

Medaglia d'Oro

Own: Gann Edmund A

Dk. b or b. h. 5 (Apr)
Sire: El Prado 'Ire (Sadler's Wells) \$75,000
Dam: Cappuccino Bay (Bailjumper)
Br: Albert Bell & Joyce Bell (Ky)
Tr: Frankel Robert J (0 0 0 0 .00) 2004:(0 0 .00)

Life	17	8	7	0	\$5,754,720	120	D.Fst	16	7	7	0	\$5,154,720	120
2004	2	1	1	0	\$1,500,000	117	Wet(338)	1	1	0	0	\$60,000	113
2003	5	3	2	0	\$1,990,000	119	Synth	0	0	0	0	\$0	-
	0	0	0	0	\$0	-	Turf(310)	0	0	0	0	\$0	-
							Dst(0)	0	0	0	0	\$0	-

27Mar04	Nad Al Sheba (UAE)	ft	1¼	LH 2:00	3+ Dubai World Cup-G1	2½	Bailey J D	126	-	Pleasantly Perfect126½	Medaglia d'Oro126½	Victory Moon126½	12											
7Feb04	10GP	fst	1½	:471.11	1:35.9	1:47.3	3+ DonnH-G1	117	3	2nd	2½	2½	13	14½	Bailey J D	L122	*.60	101-09	Medaglia d'Oro122¾	Seattle Fitz113¾	Funny Cide119¾	In tight 1st turn 8		
25Oct03	9SA	fst	1¼	:461.1	1:101	1:341	1:594	3+ BCClastic-G1	117	8	1st	2½	2½	2nd	21½	Bailey J D	LB126	*2.60	104-07	PleasantlyPerfect126½	MedgidOro126½	Dynever121nk	Bumped brk, gamely 10	
24Aug03	5Dmr	fst	1¼	:464.1	1:104	1:343	1:59	3+ PacificCl-G1	118	2	1	1½	1st	21	23½	Bailey J D	LB124	*.60	101-02	CndyRide124¾	MedgidOro1247	FleetstrDncr1242	Speed,inside,2nd best 4	
2Aug03	9Sar	fst	1½	:464.1	1:102	1:344	1:47.3	3+ WhitneyH-G1	114	5	2½	21½	2nd	1½	11	Bailey J D	L123	*.80	97-11	Medaglia d'Oro1231	Volponi1201½	Evening Attire118nk	Pace, gamely, clear 7	
5Apr03	110P	fst	1½	:474.1	1:12	1:354	1:47.3	4+ OaklawnH-G2	111	1	11	1½	1½	11½	12¾	Bailey J D	L122	*.10	102-11	Medaglia d'Oro122¾	Slider112nd	Kudos1174	Comfortable pace 5	
1Feb03	9SA	fst	1½	:454.1	1:094	1:344	1:48	Strub-G2	119	6	11	11	13	15	17	Bailey J D	LB123	*.40	94-16	Medaglia d'Oro1237	Olmodavor117½	Tracemark1177	Inside, ridden out 6	
26Oct02	10AP	fst	1¼	:463.1	1:101	1:352	2:011	3+ BCClastic-G1	106	7	33	42	1st	22½	26½	Bailey J D	L121	*2.70	90	-	Volponi1266½	MedagliaOro121nk	MilwaukeBrew1263	4 wide bid, 2nd best 12
24Aug02	10Sar	slv	1¼	:464.1	1:112	1:37	2:022	Travers-G1	113	5	2nd	1½	11½	11	13	Bailey J D	L126	*.75	93-18	Medaglia d'Oro126½	Repent1267½	Nothing Flat126¾	Determined, driving 9	
4Aug02	9Sar	fst	1½	:463.1	1:103	1:35	1:474	JimDandy-G2	120	6	1½	1½	11	18	11¾	Bailey J D	L121	*.65	100	-	Medaglia d'Oro1211¾	Quest115¾	Gold Dollar1151½	Wrapped up wire 9
8Jun02	10Bel	fst	1½	:48	1:121	2:032	2:293	Belmont-G1	104	7	2½	1st	1½	2½	2½	Desormeaux K J	L126	16.00	83-12	Sarava126½	Medaglia d'Oro126¾	Sunday Break1261	Dueled, game 11	
18May02	12Pim	fst	1¾	:46	1:103	1:36	1:561	Preaknes-G1	82	5	31	31	51¾	714	817½	Bailey J D	L126	3.00	73-14	WrEmblem126¾	MgicWisnr126¾	ProudCitizn1261½	Between foes, faltered 13	
4May02	9CD	fst	1¼	:47	1:113	1:36	2:01	KyDerby-G1	102	9	95½	73½	85½	66	48	Pincay L Jr	L126	6.90	86-05	WarEmblem1264	ProudCitizen126¾	PerfectDrift126¾	Bobble bmp start 18	
13Apr02	8Aqu	fst	1½	:464.1	1:10	1:35	1:48.3	WoodMem-G1	105	4	11	1st	1st	2nd	2nd	Pincay L Jr	L123	*2.00	93-09	Buddha123rd	Medaglia d'Oro123¾	Evening Break123¾	Pace between rivals 8	
17Mar02	7SA	fst	1¾	:23	.464	1:103	1:414	SnFelipe-G2	107	2	1½	1st	3½	2nd	12½	Pincay L Jr	LB116	8.50	95-14	Medaglia d'Oro116¾	U SSTinosa116¾	Siphonic122¾	Re-bid rail, led, clear 6	
9Feb02	20P	fst	6f	:214	.46	:582	1:104	3+ Md Sp Wt 26k	101	4	2	21½	2½	1st	14½	Lopez J	L117	*.60	86-20	MedgidOro1174½	TiltestTimber1237	GuppiesSecret117½	Stalked, drove clear 10	
7Dec01	6TP	fst	6f	:221	.452	:574	1:11	Md Sp Wt 20k	81	12	6	31	¾	22	22¾	Lopez J	L121	5.30	83-18	SpicyMarcloud121¾	MedagliaOro1214	BertsNicky121¼	4 wide, 2nd best 12	

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That second crop of yearlings produced a yearling average of \$134,470 in 2008, including a \$1.1-million filly out of the Forty Niner mare Amizette that sold at the Keeneland September yearling sale. As sale 2-year-olds this year, Medaglia d'Oro sired Cup o' Joe, a half-brother to grade I winner Midas Eyes, who topped the Fasig-Tipton Calder sale at \$1.6 million. Another colt topped the Tattersalls Craven Breeze-Up sale at Newmarket in England at 260,000 guineas (\$409,434). For the juvenile sale season, Medaglia d'Oro ranks fifth with an average of \$268,083 for 12 sold.

"We're as excited about his 2-year-old crop as we are about the current 3-year-old crop," Shepherd said. "Physically, the first crop of yearlings we saw, the fillies looked more like the colts than the colts themselves. If he has a filly on the ground, they tend to resemble him more so as opposed to if you have a colt on the ground. The colt is going to look more like the mare or the broodmare sire for that matter. Which, again, brings in the importance of bringing in good mares."

ON TRACK

Perception is not always reality. Because Medaglia d'Oro is a sizable horse who was a two-turn star later in his career, most figured his offspring would come to hand later. However, once Medaglia d'Oro's first crop got to the track last summer, they hit the ground running.

"Everybody thought initially Medaglia d'Oro as a stallion you were going to have to wait on, but the fillies proved them wrong," Shepherd said.

Renda, who broke her maiden first-out in late May, became Medaglia d'Oro's first stakes winner when she took the one-mile Junior Champion Stakes Aug. 23 at Monmouth and the Sept. 27 Brave Raj Stakes at Calder. C. S. Silk won the Sept. 6 Arlington-Washington Lassie Stakes (gr. III) and ran in the Bessemer Trust Breeders' Cup

Juvenile Fillies (gr. I). Retraceable, who was his leading earner for 2008, won the Princess Elizabeth Stakes in Canada. And then came Rachel Alexandra, who took the Nov. 29 Golden Rod Stakes (gr. II) at Churchill Downs to start her six-stakes winning streak.

"They all have heart and they all display ability," Oldham said. "They might not all be as beautiful as Rachel Alexandra, but they all display ability. They have a big wind pipe and plenty of circulation in there."

Another thing they show is their best running style resembles their sire. His most successful runners are on-the-lead or pressing-the-pace types. Like Medaglia d'Oro, they gallop the competition into the ground.

Medaglia d'Oro had 18 winners, four stakes winners, and finished fourth on the first-crop sire list in 2008. His early runners drew the interest of stallion investors, and in August of last year Richard Santulli and Barry Weisbord purchased a 20% stake in the stallion.

"This horse was in the top of his class in many different categories," Weisbord said. "He got a good book of mares for a \$35,000 horse, and he was a multiple grade I winner. He ran in the very best races with lots of consistency and lots of starts."

"Any way you look at it, he wasn't the No. 1 choice to come up with July 2-year-olds," Weisbord said. "Yet the horses that were making it to the track were running well. That increased our awareness; then an opportunity presented itself. It's worked out way better than we ever would have imagined."

This year, the hits, and fillies, have kept coming. Kentucky Oaks (gr. I) and Preakness winner Rachel Alexandra obviously leads the way, but Medaglia d'Oro has also sired Black-Eyed Susan (gr. II) winner Payton d'Oro, She's Our Annie, and Gabby's Golden Gal. With mainly 3-year-olds on

the track, Medaglia d'Oro amazingly ranks second on the leading sire list by North American earnings, showing substantial depth beyond the classic winner.

Medaglia d'Oro's prowess has not gone unnoticed by other breeding powerhouses in Central Kentucky. Earlier this year WinStar Farm bought a package of lifetime breeding rights in him.

"Not many sires get a Preakness winner in their first crop," said Doug Cauthen, president of WinStar. "He's one of the real up-and-coming sires and we've bred some really good mares to him (for 2010)."

One of those mares is Awesome Humor, WinStar's grade I-winning daughter of Distorted Humor.

"Not only is she a heck of a prospect, we think a lot of her foals," Cauthen said. "It's really a great cross because that Forty Niner (sire of Distorted Humor) cross is the same cross as Rachel Alexandra."

With 13 stakes horses from his first crop and with a top crew of 2-year-olds in the pipeline, Medaglia d'Oro's stud career hold great promise.

"There were doubters, too," Sikura said. "He's out of a Bailjumper mare; 'He wasn't a 2-year-old.' The only way to know he's an important sire is when his progeny runs. Everything prior to that is just opinion. More often than not, those opinions are wrong. He's one of the fortunate ones to have made it. He's an exciting young horse and off to a great start."

That start should see his fee increase for 2010.

"He's doing enough to be considered at the elite level of our sport," Weisbord said. "He gets a good sales type. They have good size, good structure, and good muscling."

Through the aggressive business plan following his first season, there is ample reason to believe Medaglia d'Oro will continue to ascend the leading sire lists.

The brilliant blue sky just might be the limit. **U**