



EYE OF THE TIGER

SPICED PERFECTION WINS GRADE 1 AT KEENELAND

BY EMILY SHIELDS

A field of sprint stars—including a reigning Breeders' Cup champion—wasn't enough to stop Spiced Perfection from winning her second grade 1 race, the \$300,000 Madison Stakes at Keeneland April 6.

The gutsy California-bred filly duelled with pacesetter Amy's Challenge throughout, and the two of them threw down the gauntlet in the lane, with Spiced Perfection edging ahead, Amy's Challenge coming back to put her nose in front, and Spiced Perfection finally, resolutely turning her away at the wire. Behind them, by 6¾ lengths, toiled the likes of six-time stakes winner Late Night Pow Wow in third and 2018 Breeders' Cup Filly and



ANNE M. EBERHARDT

Cal-bred Spiced Perfection, outside, betters Amy's Challenge in Keeneland's grade 1 Madison Stakes

Mare Sprint (G1) winner Shamrock Rose, who ran fifth.

The speed and grit Spiced Perfection showed are now becoming synonymous with her sire, Smiling Tiger, who stands at Harris Farms in Coalinga. A multiple grade 1-winning sprinter, Smiling Tiger now has four champions to his name in just two crops to race.

Philip Lebherz and Alan Klein's Smiling Tiger, a son of Hold That Tiger—Shandra Smiles, by Cahill Road, was a \$40,000 purchase by trainer Jeff Bonde at the Washington Thoroughbred Breeders Association summer yearling sale in 2008. With \$1,480,704 in career earnings, Smiling Tiger has paid for himself and more.

He was always a class act for his connections, breaking his maiden at Golden

Gate Fields first out on May 1, 2009, despite a rocky trip to the gate where he threw his rider several times and ran loose on the course. Despite the antics, Smiling Tiger won by six lengths.

From there, the rangy chestnut won the Lost in the Fog Stakes and finished third in the grade 1 Del Mar Futurity before going to the sidelines. He returned to win the Lazaro Barrera Memorial (G3) before defeating older horses in the \$250,000 Bing Crosby Stakes (G1) at Del Mar. Smiling Tiger proved himself a standout in the local sprinting division by finishing third in the \$298,000 Pat O'Brien Stakes (G1) before winning the \$245,000 Ancient Title Stakes (G1) at Santa Anita. Smiling Tiger was third in that year's Sentient Jet Breeders' Cup Sprint (G1).

After running second by just a nose in

the Malibu Stakes (G1), Smiling Tiger kept right on ticking. He won the San Carlos Handicap (G2) at Santa Anita, the Count Fleet Handicap (G3) at Oaklawn Park, and the Triple Bend Handicap (G1) at Hollywood Park in a 4½-month span. He slowed a bit after that, but still finished third in the 2012 Xpressbet Breeders' Cup Sprint after a layoff disrupted his 4- and 5-year-old seasons. Smiling Tiger finished his racing career with a win in the \$100,000 Vernon O. Underwood Stakes (G3).

With nine wins and 19 top three finishes in 23 starts, Smiling Tiger had the speed and class to be a sought-after sire in Kentucky.

"The truth is that that all happened around the time of the recession," Lebherz said. "I thought everyone had their hands in their pockets because they were worried about the economy. I get it. But I didn't crash; I was doing just fine. So, I thought I'll prove this guy myself."

Smiling Tiger stood at Premier Thoroughbreds in Oakdale for the 2014 season, then moved to Harris Farms for 2015.

"He wasn't my first try at standing stallions," Lebherz said. "I did Sway Away (now at stud in New Mexico), I did Epic Honor. I sold Distinctivpassion as a stallion. I didn't go big on them, though. But Smiling Tiger had so much



COURTESY RON MESAROS/ PREMIER EQUINE CENTER

California's leading third-crop stallion, Smiling Tiger sired Spiced Perfection, 2018 Cal-bred Horse of the Year

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— Philip Lebherz

with his great pedigree.”

The stallion's sire, Hold That Tiger, was a group 1-winning son of Storm Cat trained by Aidan O'Brien in Europe. The winning Cahill Road dam, Shandra Smiles, has had six winners from 10 starters to date, including grade 1 and Eclipse Award winner

She's a Tiger and stakes winner Smiling Causeway. She's a Tiger, a three-quarter sister to Smiling Tiger with sire Tale of the Cat also being by Storm Cat, finished first in the 2013 Breeders' Cup Juvenile Fillies (G1), but was disqualified and placed second.

In order to facilitate his plans for Smiling Tiger, Lebherz purchased a 40-acre farm in Oakdale: Premier Thoroughbreds.

"It was all set up already," the owner said.

Half of the property is leased to Pat Grohl for his booming Premier Equine Center, a rehabilitation facility. Dennis

Yokum now manages the other half, full of mares and foals, and he is tasked with finding even more mares for Smiling Tiger.

"We got a pretty diverse group pedigree wise," Yokum said of the mares purchased for Smiling Tiger. "When I buy broodmares, I really like a good broodmare sire. I want a correct mare with a good hip and topline and enough length to carry a foal, which is what everyone is looking for. I look for mares with quality, which is difficult to define."

Some of the mares Yokum has gathered for Smiling Tiger are by such sires as Smart Strike, Speightstown, Malibu Moon, and Unbridled's Song.

"I know what kind of mare is ideal in my mind," Yokum said. "I'm not a nicking guy, but you do have to pay attention to it. I just think it becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. I'm not sure I would recommend too close of inbreeding to Storm Cat, like a 3x3, but Smiling Tiger is such a young stallion that the book is still being written on him. Phil and Alan have been very supportive, and are willing to get him a good roster of mares."

Lebherz knows what type of mare he's after.

"I'm always looking for speed on speed," he said. "I don't like the really big mares because really big babies a lot of times get hurt. I love Spiced Perfection's size, because she's small and they can stay healthier."

Early results from Lebherz' selections have been phenomenal. Although live cover at the Premier property proved to



KEENELAND PHOTO

Owned by Pantofel Stable, Wachtel Stable, and Peter Deutsch, Spiced Perfection provided her connections, including trainer Peter Miller, fourth right, a jubilant Keeneland winner's circle presentation



Madison Stakes

be “hairy,” according to Lebherz, Spiced Perfection was conceived even before Smiling Tiger made the transition to Harris Farms.

“We saw results even in his very first crop, which is mind blowing,” Lebherz said. “The horse’s numbers are just unbelievable.”

Smiling Tiger already has 41 winners, 14 2-year-old winners, seven stakes winners, and progeny earnings of more than \$3.3 million. And then there are his four champions.

Initially owned by the Dare To Dream Stable, Spiced Perfection won the \$98,000 Generous Portion Stakes at Del Mar in 2017, then added the \$200,000 La Brea Stakes (G1), the \$200,000 Evening Jewel Stakes, and the \$100,690 Betty Grable Stakes last year. Those exploits earned her the honor of being California’s Horse of the Year, champion 3-year-old filly, and champion sprinter.

So far in 2019, Spiced Perfection has run second by a head in the \$250,000 Barbara Fritchie Stakes (G3) at Laurel Park before winning the Madison. Brian Koriner trained the filly for Dare To Dream, and Peter Miller trains her for current owners Pantofel Stable, Wachtel Stable, and Peter Deutsch. Spiced Perfection has seven wins, five seconds, and two thirds in 16 starts and earnings of \$852,405.

From the same crop came Ace Korea, who was named South Korea’s champion 3-year-old male for 2018. The bay colt is out of the Broken Vow mare Queen Rolex, and he has won six of 15 starts to date for earnings of the U.S. equivalent of \$466,834.

With two juvenile champions in 2018, Smiling Tiger is proving himself a sire of precocious horses, too. His unbeaten colt Baja Sur won the King County Express Stakes July 15 at Emerald Downs and was named Washington’s champion 2-year-old



Spiced Perfection wins the Evening Jewel on her way to a first grade 1 victory



Spiced Perfection takes the Generous Portion Stakes as a juvenile, racing for Dare To Dream Stable

male. Cal-bred Cruel Intention, by Smiling Tiger out of the Pleasantly Perfect mare Perfect Feat, is also unbeaten in two starts after breaking his maiden first out Oct. 13. He then won the \$196,000 Golden State Juvenile by a neck over Galilean Nov. 3; the two colts were 16 lengths clear of the third-place runner.

Deceased Perfect Feat was named California’s Broodmare of the Year. The stallion’s books have been strong. Mourette, a multiple stakes-placed daughter of Smart Strike and the dam of grade 3 winner Sir Anthony, saw Smiling Tiger for a 2018 filly.

“I bought her when she was open,” Yokum said. “Everyone is a fan of Smart Strike as a broodmare sire.”

Yokum bought Belvedera, the dam of 2019 UAE Derby (G2) winner Plus Que Parfait, in foal to Super Saver in 2017. She

is currently in foal to Flatter but could see Smiling Tiger in the future.

Lebherz has been happy with the stallion’s books but caused a bit of mayhem for himself when he ran a special promotion last year.

“I put an ad out in the fall saying that if you booked to Smiling Tiger before Jan. 1, you could get him for \$5,000 instead of \$6,500,” Lebherz said. “Then Spiced Perfection won the grade 1 at Santa Anita on Dec. 26. I must have got 50 mares to him in just those last few days of the year.”

With his four champions, 64% winners from starters, and average earnings of \$52,415 per starter, Smiling Tiger is now standing for \$7,500. He also has a stakes winner in Naughty Tiger, a 3-year-old filly who won the California Thoroughbred Breeders’ Association Stakes at Del Mar last summer and placed third in the Barretts Debutante

Stakes at Los Alamitos. Smiling Tigress, a three-time winner, was third in Spiced Perfection’s Evening Jewel win last year, and Jacks Masterpiece finished third in the Everett Nevin at the Oak Tree at Pleasanton meet in 2017.

“We will have 115 mares to him this year,” Lebherz said. “It’s hard to get people to stay excited in your stallion’s fourth year, but he’s darn good.”

Smiling Tiger, who was California’s leading freshman sire in 2017, is a nationally ranked third-crop sire, sitting at #17 in earnings. His progeny earned \$2.2 million in 2018, and he had 25% stakes winners from starters in his second crop. He is California’s leading third-crop sire.

“This is a California success story,” Lebherz said. “Anybody who was paying attention saw that this was an amazing horse.” **CTB**