



CTBA Member
PROFILE

AMERICAN
DREAM
COMES
TRUE IN
WINNER'S
CIRCLES

K. B. SAREEN

BY EMILY SHIELDS

Kulbhushan Sareen—known to all as K. B.—never would have guessed he would end up breeding horses. In fact, his route to California from his boyhood in Calcutta was so circuitous that it's a surprise he is in the sport at all. But through all of his global travels, a love of horse racing has endured.

"It was destiny," Sareen said.

After his father passed away when he was an infant, Sareen grew up in a poor family led by a single mother with five children.

"My childhood wasn't very pleasant," Sareen admitted, "and I never had any money on me."

But he became good at

scraping together 40 rupees to take to the Royal Calcutta Turf Club on Saturdays, earning enough back with his wagering selections to buy a week of room and board.

"I was pretty lucky," he said.

He eventually made enough to go to university, achieving a bachelor's degree in four years. He still used his racetrack winnings to "pay for my entertainment and to take girls out to dinner."

But a degree couldn't secure him a job in India. Sareen went to Iran to work for Toshiba International, but was thrown out in 1979 by the Islamic Republic as it removed foreigners from the country.

"Instead of going home to India, I bought a one-way

ticket to America," he said.

In December 1980, Sareen arrived in America on a tourist visa and was "determined to make it." He started by washing dishes in Los Angeles, then moved up through the ranks to busboy, waiter, and bartender. He couldn't believe his fortune, making \$300 in tips in a single night.

"I thought this was the ultimate, but it wasn't why I came to America," he said. "I became an insurance salesman and made my own success."

Sareen became friends with Selwyn Touber, who owned a Thoroughbred mare with little value.

"I asked him why he didn't just breed her," Sareen said. "We became partners."

The winning True Knight mare, Never Bend True, produced an Expressman filly for them in 1991. That became Noori, who broke her maiden in her debut by 6½ lengths for the partners and trainer Dan Hendricks. She ultimately won four of 25 starts and earned \$27,334.

From there Sareen dabbled in the game.

"I would buy this or that, but nothing was very serious," he said.

Enter Om. By Munnings out of the Tabasco Cat mare Rare Cat, Om was a \$125,000 purchase at the 2014 Barretts March select 2-year-old sale. The notoriously hot-tempered colt broke his maiden by 7¼ lengths in his second start at odds of 22-1, handing 2015 Triple Crown winner American Pharoah what would be the first of only two defeats.



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Reaching the Del Mar winner's circle from his boyhood in India has been an interesting journey for California owner/breeder K. B. Sareen, center left



Om went on to be a multiple graded stakes winner of \$1,355,082 and ran second in the Breeders' Cup twice.

Om was best in the summer and fall of 2015, winning the \$250,000 Del Mar Derby (G2T) at Del Mar and the \$200,750 Twilight Derby (G2T) at Santa Anita. Those memories are still clear to Sareen, whose son, United States Major Taj Sareen, brought his whole squadron into the winner's circle for the Del Mar Derby.

"It was a lot of fun," Sareen said. "The whole family was there, and the whole squadron."

But Sareen's personal life took a turn when his son was killed in an F-18 crash near London while deployed for the third time. He was 34. Just three days later Om won the Twilight Derby.

"My son had asked me to give him Om," Sareen said. "I had done it orally, but we hadn't done any transfers yet when he was deployed. He was a family favorite, so I could never sell him or give him away to anyone."

Om ran second by a nose in the \$920,000 Breeders' Cup Turf Sprint (G1T) in 2016. He also finished second in the same race last year after being transferred from the Hendricks barn to that of trainer Peter Miller. Om retired with seven wins, seven seconds, and six thirds in 32 starts. He now stands stud at Harris Farms in Coalinga.

Sareen is planning on supporting Om with three current broodmares and one mare on the track. He



Sareen congratulates jockey Gary Stevens for the winning ride on Om in the Del Mar Derby

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The Sareen family's pride and joy, Om, following his victory in the grade 2 Del Mar Derby

has an Uncle Mo mare named Savera being bred to him this spring, and his Bernstein mare Nice Meidel is currently at Lane's End Farm in Kentucky with a Liam's Map colt, after producing a Bayern colt last year. She will return to California to visit Om next season. Sareen claimed the winning Stormy Atlantic mare Classy Atlantic out of a Feb. 28 race at Santa Anita solely because she nicks well with Om.

"I'll continue to race her this year, then send her to Om when she retires," Sareen said.

Sareen joked that his wife has put a stop on him adding more horses to the band—"I'm 77 and if something happened to me, she wouldn't be able to handle it." But he does have two horses currently on the track. One of them is four-time winner Major Cabbie, named after his beloved son.

The \$260,000 juvenile purchase broke his maiden in his second start in 2017, and went on to add three allowance optional claiming races. He was fifth in the \$600,000 Clark Stakes (G1) at Churchill Downs

in November, and has been working at Oaklawn Park for his return to the races. The other runner is two-time winner Grand Meister, a son of Bode-meister who was last seen winning at Turfway Park in December.

"I've gone deeper into it than I ever thought I would like to," Sareen said, "but it's been exciting."

And with Om's first foals slated to be born in 2021, it can only get more exhilarating. **CTB**