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PROFILE

THE WORLD
IS THEIR
OYSTER

PERRY AND DENISE MARTIN

BY EMILY SHIELDS

When California Chrome was just an unassuming, leggy chestnut foal, Perry and Denise Martin could never have guessed that their first-ever homebred would take them on such a wild ride. Nine years and numerous stakes wins later, California Chrome's legacy is at the heart of everything the Martins are doing in the racing industry. As they expand their reach both domestically, with breeding operations in Wyoming and Louisiana, as well as internationally, with horses in Japan and England, it is California Chrome who

continues to fuel their obvious passion for the sport.

The California Chrome story quickly became racing lore, beginning with Love the Chase, a broodmare who earned just \$7,020 on the track and cost Martin and his business partner, Steve Coburn, \$8,000. They bred her to \$2,500 stallion Lucky Pulpit and got \$14,752,650-earner California Chrome, who won four Eclipse Awards including two Horse of the Year titles. His grade 1 wins include the Kentucky Derby, Preakness Stakes, Dubai World Cup, and Pacific Classic.

But it's what happened next

that propelled the Martins further into the game. They first met in Chicago, going on dates at tracks such as Maywood Park, Sportsman's Park, and Hawthorne. Once their children were grown, Perry Martin noted that "we started to dabble in horse partnerships with Blinkers On. The story from there is fairly well known. We partnered to purchase Love the Chase, bred her to Lucky Pulpit, and experienced the ride of a lifetime as the first horse we ever bred won the 2014 Kentucky Derby!"

Although California-bred California Chrome became a wildly popular runner, it wasn't the dazzling victories that the Martins remember best.

"With Chrome, we have had a lot of thrills and a few heartbreaks," Martin said. "But what we really enjoyed the most was our Harris Farms visits when Chrome was a youngster. Being able to bond with him and witness firsthand how he was growing up to become a special athlete is probably the main reason we have stayed with Chrome and supported him so heavily in the breeding shed."

California Chrome retired to stud in Kentucky in 2017, but before his first crop took to the track earlier this year, he was sold to Japan's JS Company. The move simply made sense: Japanese interests have done a superb job with American exports, such as Sunday Silence. Just because he moved, however, doesn't mean the Martins let him slip away entirely.

"We received five lifetime breeding rights so that we



COURTESY OF PERRY AND DENISE MARTIN

Perry and Denise Martin are thinking both locally and globally for the Cal-bred program

could continue to support Chrome and be a part of his ongoing adventures,” Martin said. “We exported five of our best mares to Japan and, with guidance from our good friend Mr. Keisuke Onishi (the owner of JS Company), we are hoping to race and sell Chrome offspring in Japan.”

Among the five mares were Wildcat Lily, dam of top California Chrome 2-year-old California Lily (who won on debut at Woodbine by 5½ lengths), and stakes-placed winner Decennial, who was pregnant to California Chrome at the time of her export, “so we already have our first Japan-born foal.”

The Martins are thriving with the new experience.

“We have begun the long process to register as racehorse owners in Japan,” said Perry. “We will interview trainers on our next visit.”

In addition, the Martins are gaining interest in the United Kingdom, as well.

“Berryessa is a mare who, under our colors, has won on two continents,” Martin said. “She raced in England trained by Rae Guest and in California trained by Steve Sherman. We have promised to send Rae our 2020 Chrome—Berryessa filly to train and race in England, and Steve will get her first Faversham foal to train.”

Faversham, California Chrome’s only full brother, will stand the 2021 breeding season at Daehling Ranch in Elk Grove, Calif. Despite a history of tendon trouble, he won on two different surfaces.

“Because he retired from racing in the middle of the 2020 breeding season, an inopportune time of year to promote any stallion to breeders, we decided to give Faversham plenty of time to let



The Martins' handsome weanling colt by their pride and joy California Chrome

down from the track and to cover a small group of test mares privately in late spring at Daehling,” Martin said. “Three of those four mares have been pronounced in foal, so we are excited to see his first babies next year.”

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— Perry Martin

The Martins will be supporting Faversham with their own top-quality mares, such as Cal-bred graded stakes-placed stakes winner Cuddle Alert, who earned \$391,514. With Faversham in California, the Martins also purchased and relocated classly Golden State stallion Peppered Cat to Clear Creek Stud in Louisiana and will stand Lucky Pulpit’s stakes-placed half brother Lucky Bode, by Bodemeister, in Wyoming next year.

California Chrome has done very well in 2020, with eight winners from 33 2-year-olds to race in a year when many juveniles missed training time due to issues with the COVID-19 pandemic. His daughter Cilla was grade 1-placed at Belmont Park Oct. 10.

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That belief in the Golden State industry is what spurred the California Chrome foal share program for the 2019 breeding season, which resulted in 13 Cal-bred foals by California Chrome in 2020. Most of the foals are out of black-type runners or producers, such as Special Smoke, the dam of \$545,947-earner and 2015 champion Cal-bred 2-year-old male Smokey Image.

While the Martins wait for their plans to take root around the world, they have some 2020 runners performing well on the track.

“Our top earner this year is our homebred 3-year-old colt Mo Mosa, by Uncle Mo,” Martin said. “He recently placed second in the grade 3 Oklahoma Derby after a very poor start.” They are also waiting on the debut of juvenile filly Antecedence, who is by 2010 Kentucky Derby winner Super Saver and out of California Chrome’s full sister Hope’s Love.

When they themselves aren’t racing, the Martins have plenty of Chrome offspring to watch.

“We love following their progress,” said Perry, “and it’s very rewarding to see Chrome is doing well with his first crop to race.” **CTB**