



CTBA Member
PROFILE

LOVE AT
FIRST SIGHT

NORM TAVARES

BY EMILY SHIELDS

Norm Tavares was getting good at piecing together work—so good, in fact, that his accountant told him to find a way to write some of his earnings off.

“He said I’m working too many jobs,” Tavares recalled.

One of those jobs was selling copies of *Daily Racing Form*. A friend suggested Tavares get involved in racehorse ownership and introduced him to David and Dennis Landucci, who owned horses on the Northern California circuit.

“Bless them, they took good care of me,” Tavares said. “They helped me get in and learn about the business.”

Tavares ultimately branched off to have his own string of runners with trainer Greg Gilchrist.

“He was a super guy, and I was sad when he retired,” Tavares said. “We claimed some; we bought some. But then things got a little hairy, and I decided to get out of the business.”

Years passed without a Tavares runner on the track, but before long he felt the itch again.

“I decided to buy a couple of horses and went to the Northern California sale. Then I got involved with Little Red Feather, with (managing partner) Gary Fenton.”

One of the horses that Tavares was involved in was Marckie’s Water, a California-bred gelding by Tribal Rule—Russian River, by Stravinsky. The chestnut was always classy, winning the 2017 Snow Chief Stakes at 11-1 odds and running third in the 2019 San Luis Rey Stakes (G2T).

He defeated the likes of United and Ashleyvssugar when he won the \$200,702 Charles Whittingham Stakes (G2T) at Santa Anita in 2019. United went on to finish second by a head in that year’s Breeders’ Cup Turf (G1T). The ownership group eventually lost Marckie’s Water for a \$40,000 tag. The consistent gelding has a record of seven wins, a second, and two thirds in 24 starts for earnings of \$543,634.

Around the time Marckie’s Water was winning on the track, Tavares was becoming interested in the breeding end of the operation.

“I got a couple mares that just weren’t going to run, and figured I would breed them,” he said. “But it didn’t pan out.”

Tavares was frustrated at the amount he was spending in stud fees to get decent stock off quality mares. Enter Rumpus Cat.

A 2015 son of Kentucky Derby (G1) and Breeders’ Cup Juvenile (G1) hero



Rumpus Cat drew Norm Tavares back into the horse business

YOUJENG WANG

Street Sense, Rumpus Cat is out of the millionaire and Breeders' Cup Juvenile Fillies (G1) winner Sweet Catomine. In addition to her Breeders' Cup score, that strapping Eclipse Award-winning filly won the Del Mar Debutante (G1), Santa Anita Oaks (G1), and two other graded stakes before her retirement in the spring of 2005.

Rumpus Cat, a Pam and Martin Wygod homebred, couldn't get out of his own way at first. He ran in five maiden races before being dropped in for a tag and claimed by Slam Dunk Racing in 2018. He finally broke his maiden at Del Mar at the \$62,500 level, then added a starter allowance at Santa Anita over some remarkably talented horses, including future graded winners Acclimate and Blitzkrieg. Rumpus Cat was claimed for \$35,000 in May 2019, and Norm Tavares fell in love.

"I saw this horse at the barn," Tavares said. "With his looks and breeding? I had to have this horse, so I bought him."

Rumpus Cat was the solution to Tavares' dilemma.

"I decided to take a crack at breeding him," the owner said. "There was a big write-up in *The Blood-Horse* about him when he retired, basically saying that he had one of the best pedigrees in North America. I have to admit I puffed my chest out a little bit at that."

Tavares kept Rumpus Cat at the late Joe Daehling's Daehling Ranch in Elk Grove.

"Joe, bless his soul, was so very kind," Tavares said. "He offered for me to stand Rumpus at his ranch and got me started owning my first stallion."

After Daehling died, his daughter and son-in-law, Justin and Julia Old-



COURTESY OF DAEHLING RANCH/FROM MESAROS

Norm Tavares' well-bred stallion Rumpus Cat stands at Daehling Ranch

pus Cat weanlings. Of the original 15 mares bred, 13 produced live foals.

"We have some outstanding youngsters on the ground," Tavares said. "I'm a little excited. From my perspective, the people who don't breed to him now are going to want to give him a shot one day."

Tavares has 13 mares—including two entered for the California Thoroughbred Breeders Association January mixed sale—and is constantly looking to improve his

stock for Rumpus Cat.

"I do go to the sales in Kentucky to find mares in foal, so that they can then be bred to Rumpus," he said

Although his basic goals of improving his stock and making his stallion are common, Tavares has an added twist to his story. He has been battling cancer for more than two decades.

"I want to live life to the fullest," the 81-year-old breeder said. "I'm just a little guy, but I figure if Rancho San Miguel can do it and Harris Farms can do it, why can't I do it?"

Tavares has had plenty of help and is grateful for it.

"Linda Madsen from Milky Way has been a really big helper for me," he said. "I call her to pick her brain all the time. Sue Greene of Woodbridge Farm gave me a lot of pointers. Gayle Van Leer purchased a lot of horses for me and gave me plenty of advice."

With Rumpus Cat, who stands for \$2,500, set to have first crop of yearlings next year, Tavares certainly has something to look forward toward.

"Horses are my whole life," he said. "I'm forced to live day to day, but my horses make up for that." **CTB**

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— Norm Tavares

field, took over.

"They are very kind, very helpful," Tavares said.

Rumpus Cat stood his first season in 2020, covering just 15 mares, including stakes winner Fairway Road, dam of graded stakes winner Just Grazed Me.

"I bought that mare (Fairway Road) off Nick Alexander," Tavares said, "But I didn't want to keep her because she didn't match perfectly with Rumpus. I didn't want to go out and have to pay the stud fee on just that one mare."

Tavares has eight of his own Rum-