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**PROFILE**

THE  
ACADEMICS  
OF  
CALIFORNIA  
RACING

# LARRY AND CAROLYN SAMOVAR

BY EMILY SHIELDS

Over the years, Academic Farms has had a parade of horses with a common naming theme: Lucky Student, Teachers Big Dream, and Wise Student. Perhaps the best of them was California-bred Easy Grader, a four-time winner on the Southern California circuit who earned \$175,733.

Enter Professors' Pride, who runs for the final remaining member of Academic Farms: Larry Samovar. The unbeaten Cal-bred daughter of Bayern—Last Resort, by Twirling Candy, recently won the \$101,500 Soviet Problem Stakes at Los Alamitos, sparking joy in the hearts



Carolyn and Larry Samovar after the Soviet Problem victory

of 86-year-old Larry and his 79-year-old wife, Carolyn.

Long before Professors' Pride burst onto the scene, three studious men started

Academic Farms with a common goal.

"One was a pediatrician, one was a professor of journalism, and I was a professor in intercultural communication," Larry said. "We each put in \$1,000 and bought a horse from John and Betty Mabee at Golden Eagle Farm. We didn't have any luck."

Horses got hurt; horses ran unsuccessfully.

"We went through a lot of different horses," Samovar said. "We claimed, bought in England. We had no luck at all.

"We decided we weren't claiming for enough money. We looked at a horse that had won her first race and was about to run in her second. We went from \$1,000 each to claiming for \$50,000."

The horse in question, Corissa's Birthday, scored to remain undefeated, winning at Del Mar on Aug. 22, 2001.

"We were jumping up and down excited," Samovar said.

But Samovar's trainer and dear friend Eddie Truman was shaking his head, watching the track.

"She was being loaded in an ambulance, and in those days if you claimed a horse, you claimed the horse," Samovar said.

Samovar had the Cal-bred Half Term filly shipped to his farm in Ramona. A local vet fashioned a crutch for the injured leg, and Corissa's Birthday survived to become an exceptional broodmare. She was responsible for seven winners from 10 foals to race, including Lucky



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Undefeated Professors' Pride captures the Soviet Problem for Larry and Carolyn Samovar's Academic Farms

Student, by Game Plan, who won 10 of 47 starts with 24 top-three efforts and earnings of \$260,733, and Our Road Scholar, by Mud Route, who only won six of her 43 starts but ran second 10 times and third eight times for earnings of \$203,124.

As the other Academic Farms partners aged and ultimately passed away, Samovar found himself the owner of nine horses. But when Corissa's Birthday was retired from breeding and the racehorses had gone on to other careers, Samovar was left without any.

Along with Carolyn, who was a history teacher at San Diego State University as well as the Academic Farms bookkeeper, Samovar approached bloodstock agent and longtime friend Gayle Van Leer for help.

**“In this game you mainly have to be lucky, or God has to say to you, ‘You’ve been at this long enough. It’s time to get you another good horse.’”**

— Larry Samovar

“Gayle got us our very first horse,” Larry recalled. “And I love running in Cal-bred races. So, I told her to try to find me a Cal-bred not located in California.”

Van Leer looked through more than 1,000 horses before settling on a quirky bay filly by Bayern. Professors' Pride, bred by Glen Hill Farm, required a bid of \$60,000 at the 2020 Fasig-Tipton Kentucky fall yearling sale.

“The very first bid was nearly all I was going to spend,” Larry said. “But Gayle said this is a very good horse.”

They sent their new filly to EA Ranches, where the trouble began.

“They alerted us that she’s a pain in



PHOTOS COURTESY OF LARRY AND CAROLYN SAMOVAR

**Top, the Samovars at their Academic Farms; above, Larry Samovar with the apple of his eye, Professors' Pride**

the butt,” Samovar said of Professors' Pride. “She’s a lot of trouble, she’s aloof. We sent her to Eddie Truman. He says she’s too immature and sends her back to the farm. They work on her a few months, and now she’s ready to race.”

Professors' Pride debuted at Del Mar Nov. 14, going off as the second choice in a field of seven. She won by a length.

“Juan Hernandez won sitting on her like he could have been writing a letter,” Samovar said. Though the offers started to trickle in on the exciting filly, Samovar turned them all down, explaining, “I’m too old and I’ve waited too long.”

Professors' Pride backed up that faith Dec. 10 in the Soviet Problem over a mile on the dirt. She defeated the well-regarded Big Novel and six other rivals, scoring by three lengths in 1:36.94.

“She won with ease,” Samovar said. “Now she gets to run on Cal Cup day in a \$200,000 race (the Leigh Ann Howard California Cup Oaks).”

After the Soviet Problem, Truman said that the Samovars “have been clients of mine for 40 years and friends and have kept me alive during the down times. It is so great to win for people like that who love the business so much and stuck with me through thick and thin.”

As talented as she is, Professors' Pride isn't the gentle, cuddly horse they had hoped she would be.

“It’s been sad that she’s so aloof,” Larry said. “She’s not interested in anybody; she looks off into space. In the mornings she’s not the easiest thing to deal with, but she’s beautiful. Gigantic. Gayle did a wonderful job picking her.”

Professors' Pride has earned \$102,000 with her two victories in two starts.

As the Samovars have gotten older, breeding has been something the couple has let slide. Their three paddocks at their Ramona property are empty, as Corissa's Birthday is living out her days at EA Ranches and other retired horses have passed away.

“We weren't ready to stop in racing, but wanted to stop breeding,” Larry said. “In this game you mainly have to be lucky, or God has to say to you, ‘You’ve been at this long enough. It’s time to get you another good horse.’”

With Professors' Pride, the Samovars are headed to the front of the class. **CTB**