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## **Durability Rankings for Sires Lack Stars** **Data on percentage of starters released**

*By Gregory A. Hall*

LEXINGTON, Ky. -- The sires atop a new list aimed at producing more durable thoroughbreds are not the names most racing fans would expect to see as parents of next year's Kentucky Derby field.

Turbulent Kris, who stood for a \$1,500 fee this year, has had almost 89 percent of his offspring of racing age reach the starting gate, according to an industry group's initial statistics on durability.

The current statistics are the first released on durability as an outgrowth of last year's Welfare and Safety of the Racehorse Summit, sponsored by The Jockey Club and the Grayson-Jockey Club Research Foundation.

Ed Bowen, the foundation president and chairman of the committee working on the durability stats, said the information could be useful for people at the lower end of the thoroughbred market.

But he doesn't expect that the statistics in their current form will sway breeding decisions at the top of the market.

"We see it very much as an adjunct to what people are used to seeing, earnings of a sires progeny, stakes winners, all that stuff," he said.

With 30 percent of registered thoroughbreds never making it to the racetrack, Bowen said, the percentage of starters has merit.

"As a standalone factor, that doesn't tell you a lot, but it tells you a little," he said, "and as you put that into the other things you know about a stallion, I think that's highly significant."

The most recognizable sires near the top of the list could be 1995 Louisiana Derby winner Petionville -- who sired multiple Grade I winner Island Fashion and multiple graded stakes winner Runway Model -- and 1996 Jim Beam Stakes winner Roar.

Petionville stood at Crestwood Farm in Kentucky for \$15,000 while Roar stood for \$7,500. Both figures are well below the six-figure fees that top sires command.

Although the top names were not the most recognizable in breeding, three of the top five on the list are direct descendants of the late Mr. Prospector, one of the most dominant sires in racing.

The committee also released a list of average starts per starter for stallions' progeny that also didn't show the big names. Both lists excluded results from current 2-year-olds and used other restrictions aimed at obtaining a significant sample for stallions on the list.

Kentucky native Larry Jones, the trainer of this year's Kentucky Derby runner-up Hard Spun, said durability is important to him, although the buying market makes him wonder how much it is a factor overall.

"I sometimes wonder what others are looking at because I see them pay a lot of money for horses ... (from) a mare that's had 12 foals and three runners. Well, those I'm not interested in. ... It makes me think that they're not spending their own money."

Jones said trainers and other buyers anecdotally get a feel for general traits of stallions' offspring as they see them race.

"That's what I figure is part of my job trying to protect my owners, is to make my recommendations on that real quick and just try not to load the barn down with those kind of (problem) horses," he said.

Bowen and others in the industry said they aren't surprised by the absence of the big names from the top of the list.

Distorted Humor, the \$225,000-fee sire of 2003 Derby winner Funny Cide, was the only sire with a six-figure stud fee among the top horses on the list. Nearly 82 percent of Distorted Humor's runners reached the racetrack.

There "is a statistical prejudice we think against fashionable sires," Bowen said, because offspring of those stallions are more likely to be retired from racing sooner, especially fillies who are attractive broodmare prospects.

Dan Rosenberg, the president of Three Chimneys Farm in Woodford County, compared the results of the survey to a sports car being in the shop more often than other vehicles that don't go as fast.

"I think there is an inherent incompatibility between speed and durability," he said. "... When you're talking about leading sires, people want the horses that win the graded stakes. They're not trying to find the soundest horse. ... I think soundness has to be a factor in every mating decision, but if I breed a sound horse that can't win, I'm not accomplishing anything. So I mean there's a balance, but the primary thing we're looking for is the ability to win graded stakes."

Boyd Browning, Fasig-Tipton's executive vice president, said the higher-priced auction yearlings are more likely to be given a layoff with a less-serious injury than horses with a lower investment.

Because buyers are looking for stakes-level horses, Browning said he doesn't see the market being influenced much by the new numbers.

Bowen said a more comprehensive durability and soundness index is being developed -- for released late this year or early next year -- that he hopes will have a greater impact on the market. That index could weight a stallion's average yearling auction price to compensate for the initial numbers' bias against them.

It also could factor in durable sire lines -- the grandsires and beyond -- who have a history of producing sounder racehorses.