

Colin Davis – Apricot Valley Thoroughbreds

Colin Davis entered Thoroughbred racing a bit differently than most people. The Oshawa-born IT expert and animal lover didn't claim a ready-to-run horse or buy a yearling, he went straight to a breeding sale and bought two mares.

Last year, one of the first foals born at his Apricot Valley farm in Cold Springs, Ontario, Nata Trouble, not only won a \$96,000 maiden special weight race, she placed in two stakes races for her owners, Tequesta Racing and MACS Stables.

“When Nata Trouble won her maiden, I watched from Kentucky,” said Davis. “It was incredible, I bawled my eyes out.”

A former Junior A hockey player, Davis took technology in school and now works in IT in the health care system. He and his wife, Anne, and their children, Rowan, Josephine and Felicity, do all of the farm work themselves on their 53-acre farm, as well as vanning the horses. In addition to their horses, the animal-loving family has hundreds of Runner ducks which Davis has bred for years.

“I don't come from money, so we couldn't afford to do this any other way,” explained Davis of the family effort while he was driving home from a trip to Kentucky. “A lot of people tried to pressure me to board in Kentucky, but we couldn't afford to. We foaled our first two mares at Northern Dawn and learned as much as we could, and we just had to figure out how to make it work from there. It's a family effort and everyone pitches in. My eight-year-old daughter sweeps and even my mother comes and feeds when needed.”

Davis's earliest memory of horses was feeding carrots to his great uncle's draft horse in Renfrew as a child. Later, he frequented the Standardbred races at Kawartha Downs with his mother. His love of horses endured and he eventually adopted some retired horses and dabbled in shared ownership.

“On our second date I took my [now] wife to see my horses,” explained Davis of his passion. “If she didn't like my horses that was going to be our last date, but thankfully she liked them!”

In the four years since entering the Thoroughbred breeding business, Davis has seen a tremendous opportunity to collect a small broodmare band and sell the Ontario-bred offspring, taking advantage of the lucrative Ontario Bred program.

“This has been a fun and terrifying experience,” Davis said of his decision to become a Thoroughbred breeder. “I would love for there to be more people like me. I was always captivated by horses and how majestic they are.”

Davis credits the popular Mare Purchase Program from Ontario Racing with getting him started.

“All the Americans I tell about the Mare Purchase Program are in awe. Without that program I would not have been able to afford the horses. We have the farm and the labour with the family.”

It was a visit to a racehorse ownership seminar put on by Ontario Racing that launched the Davis family's boutique breeding operation. He spent time learning as much as he could and surrounding himself with people who knew a lot about breeding and had been successful. Then, with advice from top bloodstock agent Murette Farrell, Davis headed to Kentucky where he purchased Renata, by Medaglia D'Oro, for \$90,000 in foal to Grade 1 sprint star World of Trouble at the 2021 Keeneland November sale. He added another mare, Johansson, by Pioneer of the Nile, in foal to Global Campaign for \$50,000.

Along the way, Davis met successful Canadian trainer Catherine Day Phillips and bought into a three-pack of horses that included eventual champion older mare of 2023, Millie Girl, who sold for \$450,000 at the Fasig-Tipton December Digital Sale.

"I wanted to take on a challenge because I'm captivated by things that are challenging and foreign," said Davis of his start in the business of breeding racehorses. "You may have some highs and lows in this business, but with the law of averages on my side the business will produce good income at the end of the day. The more horses we have, we can make the business end profitable. Our number to be self-sustainable is eight to ten horses, which we are at, but without the Mare Purchase Program I wouldn't have been able to afford it."

As for the first foals born at Apricot Valley, Davis and family quickly found out it was hard to part with their horses at auction. This was especially true of Nata Trouble, Renata's offspring, who only brought \$3,000 at the 2023 CTHS yearling sale.

"I wanted to keep her when she didn't sell well, but she has gone on to be so important for us. She has helped our farm and from her success we got some unexpected breeders' awards that really help." Nata Trouble hit the board in four of five starts in 2024, with earnings over \$100,000 CDN.

Sadly, Johansson's foal, who was sold for \$60,000 (US) at the 2023 Fasig-Tipton October yearling sale, was fatally injured last summer while in training.

"We certainly had the highs and the lows last year," said Davis.

For 2025, Davis is excited about how Nata Trouble will do in the Canadian-bred three-year-old filly division and watching a couple of now two-year-olds make their debut.

The family is also looking forward to watching other horses they have bred that went through the sales ring perform. Sovereign Award-winning owner Gary Barber co-owns a Blame colt from their mare Tiptoe that Barber purchased for \$45,000 at last fall's Keeneland September sale. Another set of top owners, Al and Bill Ulwelling, own a Hard Spun colt out of Johansson that they purchased at Keeneland for \$60,000. A Midshipman yearling colt from Turning Point that the family became really attached to was bought for \$55,000 by Arion Co. for Korean interests. "That was tough," said Davis. "We want to be able to keep track of our horses."

The Apricot Valley broodmare band has increased from two to eight, with seven mares expecting foals this spring.

Last fall Davis added a Nyquist mare, Shannon, in foal to Kentucky Derby winner Mage, for \$75,000 and Classy Ruler, by Empire Maker, for \$80,000 in foal to Honor A.P.

So far, the Davis family has resisted keeping any of their horses for racing. “We had wins with Millie Girl and a couple of others we owned a piece of. Those are great, but to watch a horse that you foaled and bonded with, that is a totally different feeling.”

Davis hopes to have six yearlings for sale this fall and perhaps one or two more for 2026.

“We are right where we want to be, horse number-wise. We love all our horses and we're pretty happy how things have started.”