



# RON CLARKSON

## ROLLING RIDGE FARM

It may have been the end of February and winter still had a firm grip on Ontario, but that didn't stop 87-year-old Ron Clarkson from heading out to Curraghmore Farm in Waterdown with his daughter Debra, eager to see his mare's latest foal.

Tap Dance Fever, a stakes winner by Tapiture, had just produced a filly by multiple Grade 1 winner Taiba, an exciting young Kentucky sire by the great Gun Runner. It is the second foal for Tap Dance Fever, whom Clarkson splurged on in 2024, purchasing her for \$170,000 (US) at the Keeneland November Breeding Stock Sale. Her first foal, a filly by Gunite, another son of Gun Runner, is now a yearling.

Clarkson has only ever kept one or two mares at a time in more than six decades of raising horses, but he has an uncanny knack for breeding a talented runner. In 2019, a sleek dark bay colt born on Clarkson's Rolling Ridge Farm, One Bad Boy, became very good indeed, winning the greatest Canadian race of them all, the Queen's Plate.

Clarkson recently sold Rolling Ridge, but he still lives close to Curraghmore, one of Ontario's most successful breeding operations, owned by Vera Simpson and Michael Dube. This year also marks his

64th as a member of the Canadian Thoroughbred Horse Society's Ontario division, longer than anyone else in the organization.

"The thrill of seeing your foal arrive never grows old," said Clarkson. "There is nothing like the Thoroughbred breeding business, trying to find that perfect match of sire and broodmare. Sometimes it just works and you have the next great runner."

Clarkson worked in his father's fruit and vegetable business as a young man, but horses were always his true passion.

For many years his breeding program remained a small side venture, selling one or two yearlings each fall at the Woodbine sale. That changed when he left the family business in his 50s and devoted himself fully to raising Thoroughbreds. Not long afterward, a brilliant chestnut colt was born on his farm to his mare Sandhill Charm.

It was 2001, and the colt by Kentucky stallion Distorted Humor, not yet the champion sire he would become, helped put Clarkson firmly on the map among Ontario breeders.

Named Twisted Wit, the colt was purchased by trainer Robert Tiller for owner Rolph Davis for just over \$32,000. From the moment he stepped onto the racetrack, he was special, winning his first three starts including two stakes races. Twisted Wit quickly became a fan favourite at Woodbine, making nearly 50 starts before eventually continuing his career in the United States.

He retired with more than \$944,000 (US) in earnings after 15 wins in 72 starts and today still enjoys life in retirement, roaming a paddock at his home in Michigan. Sandhill Charm produced several other winners as well, including the \$260,000 earner Subzero Plus.

Another Clarkson mare, Sunset Cocktail, produced stakes winner Phil's Cocktail.

In 2013 Clarkson purchased the mare Cumulonimble, a daughter of Stormy Atlantic, for \$60,000 at the Keeneland November sale. The story goes that he had barely looked at the mare but knew the moment he saw her that he wanted her.

Cumulonimble rewarded that instinct handsomely. Her son One Bad Boy, by Twirling Candy, raced in California before returning to Ontario to capture the Queen's Plate. His older half-sister Ms Bad Behaviour became a top turf mare at the same time, earning more than half a million dollars and later producing Group 1 Australian star and stallion Switzerland.

It was Ehrat who attended the 2024 Keeneland sale on her father's behalf with one clear instruction: buy Tap Dance Fever.

"He sent me for one horse, that was her," said Ehrat. "He wanted a stakes-winning mare carrying her first foal, the same recipe he used when he bought Cumulonimble."

Last fall at the CTHS Yearling Sale, Clarkson sold a Souper Speedy filly out of Sunset Cocktail for \$50,000. For perhaps the first time ever, he had given the filly a name.

“He named her Vivian C., after Vivian Creighton, who sold him his first mare.”

This spring Tap Dance Fever is scheduled to visit the stallion Azul Coast, who stands at T.C. Westmeath Stud owned by Clarkson’s friend John Carey.

“Dad is very grateful to everyone who has helped him in the industry and he’s a big supporter of John,” said Ehrat. “He wants to support the Ontario industry. He knows we need horses here.”

To support the future of the industry, Clarkson would like to see industry funding be more supportive of all levels of breeders.

“SARP once gave breeders the confidence to invest because there were rewards at every level,” he said. “With today’s decreased funding, incentives are increasingly focused on the upper echelon, and as a result more people are leaving the industry. It’s critical that we revisit the awards policy and invest in breeders at every level. Right now, a lot of smaller participants are being left out, and the base of the industry is eroding quickly.”

For now, Clarkson enjoys spending time with his young horses and with his daughter, who now has two horses in training.

“His two are the most sparkly chestnut fillies,” said Ehrat. “These are our happiest days together, when we go see the horses.”

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