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Catherine French photo

South Carolina offers variety of opportunities

Aiken, Camden areas feature plenty of training centers, options for breaking and layup facilities by Ben Baugh

THE Palmetto State has seen its share of successful racehorses, and the Thoroughbred training centers and operations based in South Carolina continue to produce graded stakes winners and talented runners.

South Carolina has a richly endowed place in the industry, and the list of stakes winners and champions who have been conditioned in the state reads like a virtual who's who in racing. The names include Secretariat, Ruffian, Kelso, Forego, Gamely, Seeking the Gold, Damascus, Forty Niner, Summer Squall, Pleasant Colony, Relaxing, Hoist the Flag, Halo, Mr. Leader, Fit to Fight, Stage Door Johnny, Devil Diver, Lamb Chop, Conquistador Cielo, Christmas Past, Candy Eclair, Java Gold, Shuvee, *Hawaii, Storm Song, Sea Hero, Tom Fool, Tom Rolfe, Langfuhr, Wando, Chilukki, Congaree, War Emblem, and, most recently, Jazil.

Aiken and Ellore conduct trial races each spring, and the Kings Tree trials in Kingstree are run in the fall to showcase the talents of racehorses that have trained in the state.

South Carolina is not solely a proving ground and starting point for many top racehorses, as many of the country's leading jockeys developed skills in the state.

The Ellore Training Center is where jockeys Chris Antley, Ryan Fogelsonger, Mark Rosenthal, and current leading apprentice rider Malcolm Franklin developed skills. The Ellore Training Center also stands four stallions—Ride the Storm, Cat in Town, Stormville, and Just a Miner.

Aiken launches website

The Aiken Training Track recently launched a website, www.theaikentrainingtrack.com. The site contains news and information about Aiken's Thoroughbred racing community, the Aiken Trials, and the history of the track itself.

Early lessons
Shadwell Stable's Jazil, who received early training in South Carolina, outruns Bluegrass Cat to capture the 2006 Belmont Stakes

Horsemen based in South Carolina provide plenty of reasons when asked what is appealing about the state, from the climate, to the soil, to the amount of overall space.

"It's always been said the winter climate in South Carolina has been conducive to horses; they put on a good winter coat," said Franklin Smith, president of the Ellore Training Center. "The soil is a sandy loam. It's a good soil for horses that are maturing. It's good, rich land."

Kip Elser operates the successful Kirkwood Stables operation that prepares horses for the sales ring and for the racetrack, and he agrees with Smith's assessment.



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"I came to Camden in the late 1960s and just love the place; it's a great place to train," Elser said. "One of the advantages to training in Camden is the Camden Training Center. There's so much land around the facility, and there are so many places to train a horse, you also have the option to train

over different surfaces.

"It's a great place for babies, and tremendous for freshening older horses that have a lot of miles underneath them. There are so many places to train them where they'll

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never see a rail. We're also able to approximate the conditions for horses that will be sent to Europe. I don't know of many training areas that have as many choices as Camden. Jeff Teter is one of the best training center managers imaginable."

Elser sold a colt by Fusaichi Pega-



Photo by Z

Strong seller
Kirkwood Stables owner Kip Elser says South Carolina's moderate climate provides a setting that is a "great place for babies, and tremendous for freshening older horses"

sus for \$4.5-million at the 2004 Fasig-Tipton Calder selected two-year-olds in training sale and has watched other graduates of his program go on to successful careers, including Alphabet Soup, Smoke Glacken, Royal Anthem, Gal in a Ruckus, Keeper Hill, Sharp Cat, Memories of Silver, Soaring Softly, Wonder Again, and Cete-wayo.

"There have been a lot of good horses and fun stuff over the years," Elser said.

Webb Carroll, who operates the Webb Carroll Training Center in St. Matthews, got his start in South Carolina at a young age by helping his father work with Racing Hall of Fame trainer Max Hirsch at the Fairgrounds in Columbia during the winter months.

"Mr. Hirsch used to winter at the Fairgrounds; Woody Stephens and Cain Hoy Stables also were based there in the 1950s and early '60s," Carroll said. "Daddy knew them, it was home to me. We would race in New

England and New Orleans. They wintered in Columbia because of the climate and the conditions.

"The climate is very conducive to those horses that have run in the Northeast and the Midwest. Horses acclimate very well to the climate of the Midlands of South Carolina. The horses winter in a relatively cool climate and adapt well to the north when they return in March and April."

Jane Dunn also has had a lot of success breaking and training horses at the Holly Hill Training Center. She conditions horses for two of Thoroughbred racing's most prominent names, Claiborne Farm and Pin Oak Stable.

"I've been very fortunate to have good horses and good owners," Dunn said. "For me personally, we have a good training surface. It was a good training surface when I first came to Holly Hill. At my facility, I'm fortunate to be able to turn the horses out. All my young horses are able to go out for a couple of hours each day.

"The environment is very relaxed as compared to life at the racetrack, where the horses spend most of their life in a stall. The fact that the horses have the opportunity to be turned out makes a significant difference. Owners are inclined to find a place they're comfortable with, especially if it works. There's a change in seasons and cooler temperatures, so the horses have to pick things up a little. The climate seems to be beneficial, especially for horses coming in from Kentucky."

Mild climate

Teter manages Springdale Race Course in Camden and is an accomplished horseman in his own right.

A three-time leading National Steeplechase Association jockey, Teter points squarely to the mild winter weather as one of South Carolina's main selling points.

"One of the primary reasons we see a number of different outfits coming to South Carolina to train for the winter is the mild climate," Teter said. "The climate is mild enough, but there's still a change in seasons. You have a taste of winter, but you don't lose any days because you're still able to train. Camden's blessed with sandy soil; it's very forgiving to train on. We're blessed with three or four steeplechase tracks, and Camden is very inviting for steeplechase people.



Photo courtesy of Fenwick Farm

Successful switch
Wilhelmina McEwan, who made the transfer from the show horse world to Thoroughbred racing, leads a string on the track at Fenwick Farm and Training Center

There's steeplechase racing in the spring in Camden and Aiken, and to train in South Carolina for the winter serves as a great starting point."

Dogwood Stable, which claims 1990 Preakness Stakes (G1) winner Summer Squall and champion Storm Song among its more than 70 stakes winners, is based in Aiken, and Dogwood President Cot Campbell sees the benefits in both the area's weather and location.

"South Carolina has the perfect climate; you don't miss many days on the racetrack," Campbell said. "We have a change of seasons, the horses benefit from it. Aiken and South Carolina are conveniently located shipping-wise, not too far from Miami, Lexington, New Orleans, and New York. Aiken has a personality, reputation, and tradition that has been known through the years. Many great horses have come through here with spring in mind."

Regional pulse

The training centers are the heart and soul of the Thoroughbred industry in South Carolina, according to South Carolina Thoroughbred Owners' and Breeders' Association President Lee Christian.

"The climate's moderate, and the

Top manager
Former three-time National Steeplechase Association leading jockey Jeff Teter manages Springdale Race Course in Camden and says South Carolina is inviting for steeplechase people

setting isn't as busy as it is in Ocala," Christian said. "It's a great place to train a horse."

The training centers include the Camden Training Center, which is owned by Stuart Grant and features a one-mile dirt track, seven-furlong turf course, starting gate, five-furlong dirt track, woods track, and turnout paddocks.

Other training tracks in the state include Springdale, which offers a one-mile dirt track, five-furlong dirt track, two-mile European-style turf course, trails, steeplechase schooling fences, seven-furlong turf course, and turnout paddocks. The Aiken Training Track has a mile track with a clay base and a sandy-loam cushion and a five-furlong sand track. A new 59-stall barn is currently being built.

Another operation based in Aiken



Catherine French photo

is W. C. "Mike" and Iris Freeman's Chime Bell Farm, which offers training and layup services.

"This is a great climate for horses to winter in," said Jill Thomas, Chime Bell's layup manager. "The horses feel the tension of the racetrack and will get stressed. This is a great place for the horses to freshen themselves both mentally and physically."

The McCutchen Training Center in Kingstree is owned by R. B. and Deborah McCutchen, and they recognize the variables that make South Carolina the ideal place to train and rehabilitate horses.

"Thoroughbred racehorses have been trained in South Carolina for a long time," Deborah McCutchen said. "There's still a vibrant Thoroughbred industry in South Carolina. We have a great climate. It's not as hot as Florida, and it's a more relaxed environment for the horses. South Carolina is an ideal distance from Kentucky, New York, and New Jersey. Geography is definitely a factor. Our operation is only about an hour from Myrtle Beach. It's a great location for someone who might be interested in playing a round of golf and wants to check on their horses."

Wilhelmina McEwan operates the Fenwick Farm Training Center in Rembert with her brother, Fred, and she made the transition from the world of show jumpers to the Thoroughbred industry.

Fenwick Farm is also unique because it is the only training facility in the area that is approved as a United States Department of Agriculture quarantine facility, Wilhelmina McEwan said.

The farm offers a six-furlong uphill turf gallop and a 1½-mile turf gallop for horses going to race in Europe.

"This is a family-operated business; we do it the old-fashioned way and take our time," McEwan said. "We have great owners and have a lot of fun. We get a lot of fillies at the facility. We broke the dams of Peaks and Valleys, Benny the Dip, Dixie Brass, Swain (Ire), and now Chace City. We don't train for the two-year-old in training sales. We have 30 to 40 horses at the facility, and we train primarily for breeders." *

Ben Baugh is a staff writer for the Aiken (South Carolina) Standard.

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