



# Big Town

Speightstown's quick son Bridgetown sets up shop at Questroyal North

BY EVAN HAMMONDS

**T**hese are heady days for breeders in New York: Growing purses at New York Racing Association tracks, growing breeders awards from the New York State Thoroughbred Breeding & Development Fund, and a growing base of New York-bred horses. Four new stallions have been added to the ranks for the 2014 breeding season, including the exciting Bridgetown.

Few horses make their way to the breeding shed having shown

both brilliance and durability, but Bridgetown certainly fits the bill. A son of 2004 champion sprinter Speightstown (by the undervalued Gone West), who also just so happens to be among the leading sires of 2013, Bridgetown was a stakes winner in four of five seasons while in training including a win in the Summer Stakes (Can-IIIIT) and a runner-up effort in the Breeders' Cup Juvenile Turf (gr. IIT) at 2.

Bridgetown, out of the Tabasco Cat mare Ellesmere, was bred and

raced by Eugene Melnyk, who, along with his wife, Laura, also raced mighty Speightstown. Ellesmere is out of the unraced Empress Aly, a full sister to 1991 Kentucky Derby (gr. I) winner Strike the Gold.

Melnyk, who has raced several top runners and stood horses such as Flower Alley and Graeme Hall, has reduced his equine holdings in his Thoroughbred portfolio of late but remains bullish on Bridgetown as he has retained six breeding rights in the promising stallion.

"I believe in Bridgetown, and I'm going to support him," Melnyk said. "Anytime you have a horse that is the fastest son of a leading sire, with a bottom line that includes a sister to a Kentucky Derby winner, you've got something exciting."

Clark Brewster, a trial lawyer based in Tulsa, Okla., heads the group that will stand Bridgetown at Barry Ostrager's 285-acre Questroyal North Farm near Stillwater.

Brewster has homes in Tulsa and in upstate New York, where he and his wife, Deborah, spend most of the summer. While they own a 4,200-acre cattle ranch in Oklahoma and got interested in racing at Oaklawn Park and later when Remington Park opened in 1989, the Brewsters have been active in trying to run horses at Saratoga and Belmont Park. Clark Brewster's runners landed five races at the Saratoga Race Course meet in 2013, which tied him for sixth in the meet standings.

"The last few years we've also sent mares to New York to be part of the program," he said. "This stallion might allow us to make a larger incursion into that."

Brewster stands stallions in Oklahoma, including one of the

state's leading sires, Omega Code, but saw promise and value in presenting Bridgetown in New York.

"He's such a great sire prospect, I thought New York would be better," Brewster said. "He would be exposed to a better pool of mares and have a better chance to be what he can be."

Melnyk, Brewster, and Ostrager—president of New York Thoroughbred Breeders—have the Thoroughbred business in their blood and share a common bond in the belief Bridgetown will help move the New York breeding program forward.

### Raising Bridgetown

Few people know Bridgetown better than Phil Hronec, farm manager at Melnyk's Winding Oaks Farm near Ocala, Fla. Hronec helped breed, raise, and break the colt at the farm, and he noted from the beginning that Bridgetown was an exceptionally fast horse.

"I've never trained a horse with such a high cruising speed," Hronec said. "You could work him and he'd be going in :12, :12, and :12, and then you'd ask him the last part...there were a couple of times I saw him go in :10 and change for the last eighth of a mile. He'd go in :36 and finish up in :46 and 4; just amazing."

On the track Bridgetown was precocious to say the least. He moved from maiden winner at Saratoga in August 2009 to graded stakes winner in Canada to Breeders' Cup-placed by early November while being trained by Kenny McPeck. In ensuing years, while under the



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care of Todd Pletcher, Bridgetown developed into one of the fastest and most consistent turf sprinters in the country from 2010-13.

Finding his niche at five and six furlongs on the turf, Bridgetown would win six more stakes and place in another seven in a 23-race career. He would earn \$993,700 and also set a course record of 1:00.67 for about 5½ furlongs on the turf at Monmouth Park at

3 in 2010.

At 6 in 2013, he made three starts, hitting the board in all three, but had slowed some.

"He had his aches and pains," Melnyk said. "He was running the best he could, but he was finishing second and third to horses he should have been beating. A bloodstock agent approached us about buying him, and he put a couple of proposals together. We took the one from Clark."

"Bridgetown looks a lot like Speightstown," Hronec said. "Bridgetown is about 15.3 (hands) and very well put together; he's correct. He reminds me a lot of City Zip. They are close physicals."

"I've seen a lot of Speightstowns; we've bred a lot of them. I've seen them come in all shapes and sizes but he does one thing: He throws runners."

Speightstown has sired 56 stakes winners to date and has 24 added-money winners in 2013. He has sired the winners of more than \$11.9 million this year with 154 winners. He stands at WinStar Farm in Kentucky where he'll command an \$80,000 stud fee in 2014. Bridgetown will stand at Questroyal for an introductory fee of \$4,500.



FASIG-TIPTON PHOTO

**Farm manager Phil Hronec on Bridgetown: "I've never trained a horse with such a high cruising speed."**



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“Bridgetown is a blazingly fast horse with a very good female line, and he’s the only son of Speights-town in New York for the 2014 season,” said Ostrager.

“We’ve gotten a phenomenal response to the horse. Immediately after it was announced in *The Blood-Horse*, people started calling and soon as TrueNicks became available, people started signing contracts to breed to him. He’s an A++ nick to a lot of Storm Cat-line stallions.”

Breeders in New York will do well with Bridgetown if they bring “the right kind of mare,” according to Hronec. “I know what works for Speightstown if you want a distance horse—a Deputy Minister mare, a Theatrical mare—stuff like that. Breed him to something that has a little bit of size.”

### A Bridge to the Future

Bridgetown’s arrival in New York, and at Questroyal North in particular, is another chapter in the revival of the breeding industry in the Empire State. Ostrager purchased the former Sez Who Farm a year and a half ago and poured a lot of time and money into refurbishing the facility. Ostrager reports the farm’s 120 stalls are completely filled.

“It’s all because of Gov. (Andrew) Cuomo’s commitment to allowing the New York state breeding industry to prosper with VLT (video lottery terminal) revenue and greatly increase breeder and stallion awards,” he said. “The farm, which at one point was the leading farm in New York five of the seven years it was operated by Mr. (Richard) Simon, is fully restored and



Clark Brewster

is a very active place, and getting Bridgetown will be a great complement to Courageous Cat and Boys At Tosconova.”

Jeffrey Cannizzo, executive director of New York Thoroughbred Breeders, concurs.

“Gov. Cuomo’s efforts to create an environment in which the New York Thoroughbred breeding industry will thrive and drive job creation and the economy in up-state New York is clearly evident at Questroyal North, where a previously abandoned 285-acre farm is now flourishing with fully occupied stalls and an exciting new stallion prospect like Bridgetown in the stallion barn.”

Adding exciting stallion prospects by prominent owners to the sire ranks in New York will only strengthen and help expand the program.

“Getting Mr. Melnyk to participate is further vindication of the attractiveness of the New York program,” Ostrager said. “It is really exciting to walk on the farm and see virtually every one of the paddocks filled with horses and see the stallion barn active during the breeding season and the scores of foals. It’s really quite exhilarating.” 🐾



Bridgetown won stakes in four consecutive seasons in training