



Before the Hammer

Presented by
KEENELAND 

Before the Hammer is a series presented by Keeneland that will spotlight consignors, their stories of success and their featured offerings at the upcoming Keeneland November Breeding Stock Sale.

EATON RIDES WEANLING WAVE INTO KEENOV

By Lucas Marquardt

Here's a surprising stat: in three of the last five years, from 2011-2015, the highest-priced unraced horse in North America didn't sell as a yearling or 2-year-old. It sold as a weanling.

Such has been the market for well-bred youngsters in recent years, and 12 months ago, it reached a pinnacle when Reiley McDonald's Eaton Sales sold a filly by War Front for a North American record \$3.2 million. Hammered down to Mandy Pope's Whisper Hill Farm, the filly is a daughter of Broodmare of



Reiley McDonald | Keeneland photo

the Year Take Charge Lady and a half-sister to the Grade I winners Will Take Charge (Unbridled's Song) and Take Charge Indy (A.P. Indy).

"We have found that, if you take high-quality weanlings into November, you can realize yearling prices," McDonald said.

And then some, it appears. Last year, six weanlings made seven figures. By way of comparison, from 2008 to 2010, only two weanlings sold for more than \$500,000 at the November

Sale. That isn't to say weanlings haven't sold well, and well into the seven figures. But it's certainly worth noting that three of the 15 top-priced weanling fillies ever to sell at the Keeneland November Sale came from Eaton's 2015 consignment.

Eaton Sales also sold a Tapit half-sister to the Grade I winners Executiveprivilege (First Samurai) and Hoppertunity (Any Given Saturday) for \$1.3 million; and a Galileo (Ire) half-sister to Bodemeister (Empire Maker) for \$1.2 million.

Asked what prompted the market's embrace of young prospects, McDonald said, "I think the only thing that has changed is that very few weanlings of that quality were offered

before. I don't think the market was ever tested, for the most part, until just recently."

He continued, "In the past, people tried to take forward foals to November that were well developed and had good conformation, and the pinhookers would give you a premium for the nice ones. But now, it's become more of an end-user market. So if you take a fairly unique weanling in there, you really can realize big numbers. We sold three last year for over a million dollars, and that bears out the trend we've been seeing."

McDonald hopes Eaton's momentum continues into the 2016 Keeneland November Sale (Nov. 8-20) with another draft of exceptionally bred weanlings. They include:

- [Hip 261](#), a Bernardini filly from the GI Juddmonte Spinster heroine Mushka (Empire Maker);
- [Hip 255](#), a Tapit filly out of the stakes winner Miss Empire (Empire Maker);
- [Hip 348](#), a Tapit half-sister to GSW Shumoos (Distorted Humor); and
- [Hip 354](#), a War Front full-brother to the English stakes performer Faydhan.

"We've got some outstanding foals that not only have huge pedigrees, but have the physicals to go with them," said McDonald.

One interesting Eaton-consigned weanling to take note of is [Hip 241](#), a colt from the first crop of Australia (GB). It's the lone foal from the dual Derby winner, himself a son of the great Ouija Board (GB), to be offered in North America this year.



Unrivald Belle sold for \$2.8 million at KEENOV in 2011 | Keeneland photo

Before the Hammer Cont.

Eaton isn't exactly hurting in the mare department, either. Among its offerings is the 2010 GI Breeders' Cup Ladies' Classic heroine Unrivaled Belle (Unbridled's Song), who sells as [Hip 336](#) on an early Feb. 20 cover to Tapit.

"Unrivaled Belle is the dam of a 2-year-old in California that people are talking about as being one of the best 2-year-old fillies out there, even though she's only had one start," said McDonald.

McDonald is referring to the Jerry Hollendorfer-trained Unique Bella (Tapit), who was bet down to 1-5 in her debut at Santa Anita in June. She was off a step slow, but rallied strongly to be second ([Video](#)). Unraced since but working up a storm, Unique Bella posted a best-of-49 drill going four panels in :46 flat earlier this month, and more recently went five furlongs in :59 3/5 on Oct. 20. Both works came at Santa Anita.

Eaton sold Unique Bella to Don Alberto Corp. for \$400,000 at the 2015 Keeneland September Sale.

Eaton brings to the November Sale another Breeders' Cup performer, the aforementioned Spinster winner Mushka, who ran second in the 2009 edition of the Ladies' Classic. Mushka goes as [Hip 260](#) and is another in foal to Tapit.



Mushka | Keeneland photo

American Pharoah sees his first in-foal mares hit the market--11 mares in foal to the Triple Crown hero have been cataloged at the November Sale--and Eaton has an attractive prospect in [Hip 347](#), the Storm Cat mare Wile Cat. Wile Cat is the dam of Shumoos and is a daughter of the GISW Strategic Maneuver (Cryptoclearance).

"And we have some really nice younger mares, so we have a little bit of everything," said McDonald.

Eaton has long been a major player at the Keeneland November Sale. The leading consignor in 2001 and again in 2009, Eaton has twice sold the auction's top-priced broodmare, and has three times sold November's highest-priced weanling. In 2009-10, Eaton handled the Overbook Farm dispersal that grossed over \$38 million. Some \$31 million came at the '09 November Sale.

Recent graduates from Eaton include the star filly Cavorting (Bernardini), a \$360,000 weanling in 2012 to the bid of



Cavorting | Chelsea Durand

Stonestreet Stables. Cavorting recently retired on a three-race winning skein that included the GI Personal Ensign S., the GI Ogden Phipps S. and the GI Ruffian S.

Eaton is coming off a strong September. It sold 105 yearlings for \$13.5 million, and McDonald is confident the strength of the yearling market will buoy the bloodstock sales.

"It's always a good predictor for the bloodstock sales, and Book 3 [at September] was maybe the strongest yearling sale I've seen in a long time," said McDonald. "And of course, the people that did well with their yearling pinhooks will come in super strong for weanlings at November. All that is a good prelude to the November Sale."



Click to listen to an interview with Reiley McDonald of Eaton Sales.

Keeneland photo