

# STILL KICKING AT 26



**CLEVER TREVOR CAPTURES THE INAUGURAL REMINGTON PARK DERBY (NOW THE OKLAHOMA DERBY) IN 1989, AND HE NOW HAS A STAKES RACE NAMED IN HIS HONOR AT THE OKLAHOMA CITY TRACK.**

Courtesy Remington Park

**By Shelby O'Neill**

**The connections of Oklahoma-bred Clever Trevor, one of the best sophomores of 1989, keep him happy, healthy and home**

When it comes to memorable Triple Crown seasons, 1989 ranks near the top thanks to those epic duels between Sunday Silence and Easy Goer. When the racing careers of those two superstars ended, they embarked on second gigs as high-profile stallions and were eventually both inducted into the National Museum of Racing and Hall of Fame.

While Sunday Silence and Easy Goer are now off in that great big paddock in the sky, another Kentucky Derby (G1) starter from 1989 is currently celebrating his 20th year of happy retirement in the same Sooner State pasture and with the same equine best friend he's had for the past two decades.

Clever Trevor, a 26-year-old son of Slewacide out of the Twice Bold mare Little Mary Beans, was born in Oklahoma in 1986. The gelding's breeder and owner, Don McNeill of Edmond, Oklahoma, tends to run everything he breeds, but from early on, McNeill and trainer Donnie Von Hemel knew Clever Trevor was different.



**A 2-year-old Clever Trevor wins the Blue Ribbon Downs Laddie Futurity in Sallisaw, Oklahoma.**

track, the gelding finished 13th to Sunday Silence in the Kentucky Derby, but his trajectory continued onward and upward, including victories in the Arlington Classic (G1) in Illinois and St. Paul Derby (G2) in Minnesota. And just a few months after the Kentucky Derby, Clever Trevor finished an impressive

second to Easy Goer in the Travers Stakes (G1).

On September 12, 1992, Clever Trevor made the final start of his career, just missing the victory in the Washington Park Handicap (G2) at Arlington Park. He retired with a record of 15 wins, nine of which came in stakes, from 30 starts, total earnings of \$1,388,841 and a legacy as the first big horse for his owner/breeder.

**Good things come to those who wait**

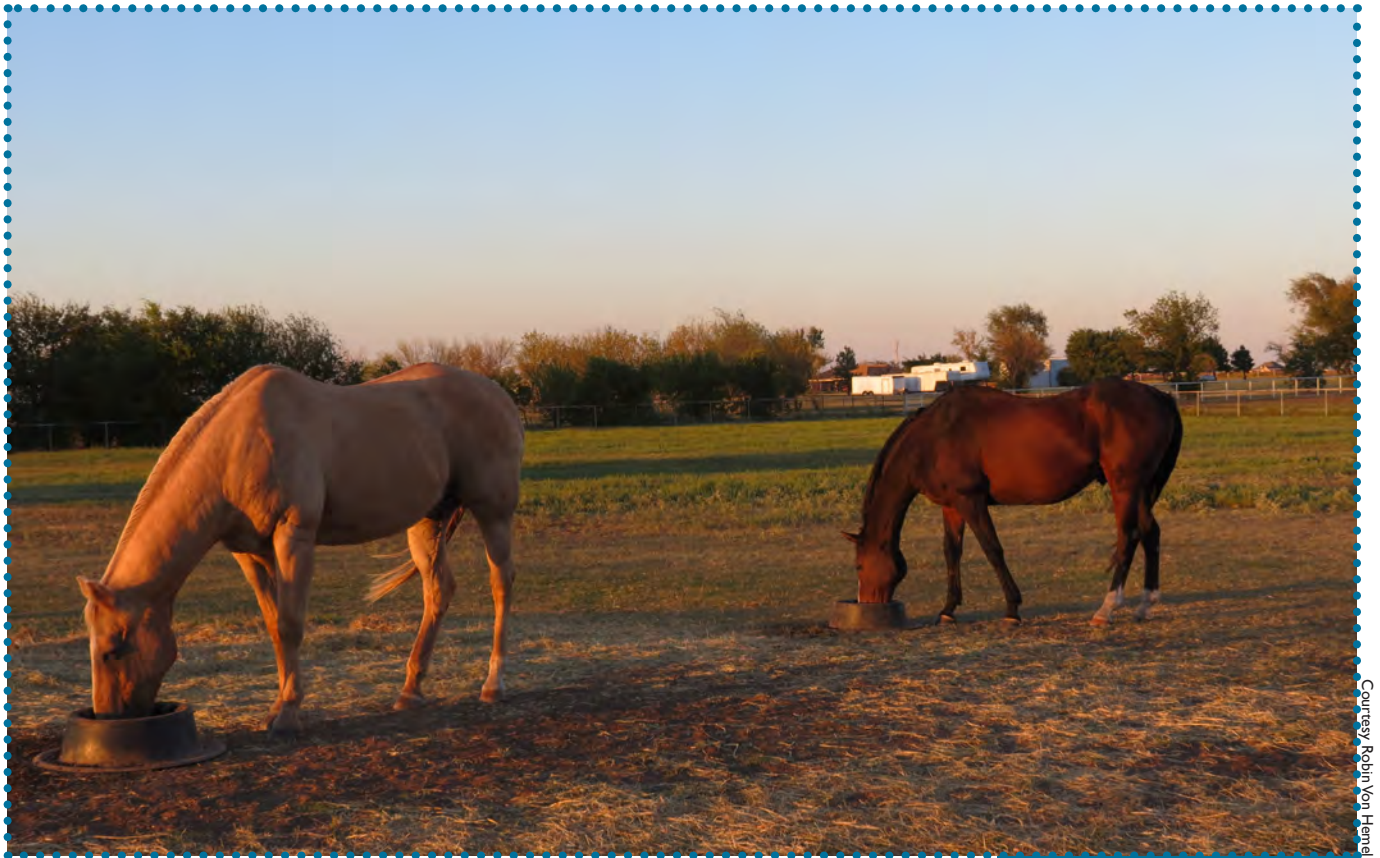
Don McNeill's horse racing story is one of faith. When his father returned from serving in World War II, he began breeding and racing Thoroughbreds, and by the late 1940s, the older McNeill had

“When he was two, I sent him to Donnie early that summer, and he called me and said, ‘I think you sent us a 3-year-old and the wrong papers,’” McNeill recalled. “I checked and said, ‘No, that’s the right horse.’ He was very well-built and powerful-looking. His legs weren’t perfect, but he was very athletic and not slight at all. He just advanced so quickly after Donnie got him that I think he was outworking everything in the barn. Donnie got a good feeling he was going to win his first race, and he had never told me that on any horse.”

Donnie’s prediction proved to be correct when Clever Trevor broke his maiden by five lengths at Ak-Sar-Ben in Omaha in his first try. While he had initially been positioned as a sprinter, Clever Trevor soon showed he could sustain his speed around two turns when he won the inaugural Remington Park (now Oklahoma) Derby in Oklahoma City and then finished second in the Arkansas Derby (G2). From there, Clever Trevor ended up taking his connections all the way to Churchill Downs on the first Saturday in May. Faced with a slow, muddy



**Millionaire Clever Trevor is still enjoying his retirement after 20 years at Donnie and Robin Von Hemel’s farm outside of Oklahoma City.**



Courtesy Robin Von Hemel

two stallions and around 30 mares. His father would regularly bring his son to the farm, but when McNeill was only 14, his father died in a plane crash and all of the horses were sold. Three years later, the 17-year-old McNeill bought his first broodmare and has bred Thoroughbreds ever since. The size of his operation has waxed and waned over the years, but almost everything he's ever raced has been a homebred.

"I like the mares and the babies, but also, over time, I'd see all the smart people trying to buy a perfect horse at the sales, and I figured they were better horsemen at picking out horses," McNeill said. "When I tried it, they always looked good, but they never did much. I've just had better luck racing everything and trying to keep decent mares. I didn't breed to commercial stallions and instead picked proven racehorses to get good racehorses. I bred to race. I gave them all a chance; some worked out, and some didn't. With my best horses, I wouldn't have bought them at a sale,

because at a sale, there's always a reason not to buy one."

McNeill had been committed to his homebred program for more than 20 years before that dedication

paid off in the form of his first stakes winner, Little Performer, a half brother to Clever Trevor. Then Clever Trevor himself came along, fulfilling every owner's dream of having a horse in the Kentucky Derby. But McNeill had to wait 10 years to capture lightning in a bottle again, this time with Oklahoma-bred Mr Ross, another Slewacide gelding who won multiple Grade 3 races and earned \$1,091,046 before retiring to McNeill's farm.

Another 10 years passed, and McNeill was getting discouraged, but his faith would soon be restored because of his biggest horse ever, Caleb's Posse. Out of the Oklahoma-bred Slewacide mare Abbey's Missy, Caleb's Posse is a fourth-generation homebred who won two Grade 1 races, including the 2011 Breeders' Cup Dirt Mile (G1) against older horses while still a 3-year-old. Sired by Posse and foaled in Kentucky, his career bankroll checks in at \$1,423,379 with eight wins in 19 starts including a victory in, perfectly enough, the Clever

**Clever Trevor and his good friend Nick, the Palomino Quarter Horse, will both turn 27 years young soon.**

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Trevor Stakes at Remington. Unlike geldings Mr Ross and Clever Trevor, Caleb's Posse remained in tact and will begin his stud career in 2013 at Three Chimneys Farm in Midway, Kentucky.

Hot on the heels of Caleb's Posse's retirement, McNeill received an honor of his own when it was announced that he would be inducted into the Oklahoma Horse Racing Hall of Fame in 2012 as part of a class that includes such racing luminaries as trainer Steve Asmussen and all-time leading Oklahoma-bred earner Kip Deville. McNeill joins fellow Hall of Famers Clever Trevor and Von Hemel.

"I was proud and thrilled," McNeill said of his induction into the Hall, "but I realized it was the horses' accomplishments. It wasn't mine. People a lot smarter who work a lot harder and are better horsemen haven't had the kind of horses I've had. I've been blessed. The only character quality I had anything to do with is perseverance."

That perseverance, not to mention his obvious humility, no doubt played a role in making sure that when Clever Trevor's racing days proved to be behind him, McNeill's top priority was making sure the gelding had a good home.

### Best friends forever

After Clever Trevor ran his final race in 1992, he was track fit and needed to be let down slowly. McNeill and Von Hemel knew the perfect person for the job—Von Hemel's wife, Robin.

"She worried about him like she did her own baby," McNeill said. "She got in a routine of how to take care of him. Not many places nor I could spend that much time on his routine."

McNeill got into a routine of his own, heading out to the Von Hemel's farm in Piedmont, just outside of Oklahoma City, with

his kids nearly every Sunday to visit Clever Trevor. Eventually his kids (including Clever Trevor's namesake, Trevor McNeill) grew up, left home and had families of their own. These days, McNeill takes his grandchildren out to visit Clever Trevor whenever he can.

"I love having Robin take care of him," he said. "It just never made sense to move him."

And if he did, he would be facing some very strong objections from Clever Trevor's pasture mate and best friend of the past 20

years, a Palomino Quarter Horse named Nick.

"They're inseparable," Robin Von Hemel said. "They're together when they're grazing, and they're together all the time. If one comes in the barn to have their feet done, the other has to come too. But Trevor's the boss."

Von Hemel cops to spoiling the 26-year-old gelding by giving him treats every day and says that when the McNeills come visit him that they're always armed with carrots. And Clever Trevor clearly deserves it.

"We always like to say that he took us to a lot of fun places," she said. "He was the reason we got to go do so many fun things, and he created a lot of fun memories for our families. I was around Don's kids when they were young.

Now they're married with kids, and thanks to Caleb's Posse, a whole generation has gotten to do it again."

In January, Clever Trevor and his best buddy Nick will both turn 27 and hopefully the pair has many more birthdays to go.

"Knock on wood, he's doing well," Von Hemel said. "He's been happy just getting to be a horse, and we're grateful for him every day." ★

## CLEVER TREVOR

1986 gelding by Slewacide out of Little Mary Beans, by Twice Bold

Year	Starts	Wins	2nds	3rds	Earnings
1988	7	6	0	0	\$111,817
1989	10	4	3	0	\$910,470
1990	3	2	0	0	\$49,800
1991	6	2	1	1	\$236,538
1992	4	1	1	1	\$80,216
<b>Career:</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>\$1,388,841</b>

1st: Arlington Classic (G1), GMC-St. Paul Derby (G2), Blue Ribbon Downs Laddie Futurity, Oklahoma Thoroughbred Association Futurity, Budweiser Stakes, Remington Park Derby, Ak-Sar-Ben Handicap, Finger Lakes Budweiser Breeders' Cup Handicap, Governor's Handicap

2nd: Travers Stakes (G1), Arkansas Derby (G2), Washington Park Handicap (G2), Frank J. De Francis Memorial Dash, Great West Stakes

3rd: Forego Handicap (G2), Thistledown Budweiser Breeders' Cup Handicap



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