

The CAMDEN HORSE™

Carolina Cup Edition



DONNA FREYER
with Minimambo







fw
fast women llc

In Fast Company

Story by Tom Didato
Photos by Melissa Young

Most horses who train in Camden go about their daily routine in relative obscurity other than being closely watched by their trainer and making sure they don't miss a stride by their exercise rider. At times, this can become routine for most young Thoroughbreds. You are saddled inside and led from your stall, boarded by your rider that morning, walked around a circle before being taken to hack in the woods or galloped around one of the nearby tracks at the Camden Training Center or on the Springdale Race Course property. Each Tuesday morning, however, Minimambo gets a break from the ordinary and gets the full-fledged star treatment, minus the red carpet. The 2-year-old chestnut filly goes about her ritual that day before a gallery of women who are also her owners. They watch every



Camden native and businesswoman Kay McKinney has ridden show horses and fox hunters but never imagined owning a race horse like she does now in Minimambo.

move she makes while listening to any and all comments from trainer Donna Freyer, owner of Custom Care Equine in Camden, on Mimimambo's movements.

When her training for the day is complete, Minimambo returns to the Blue Barn on Carter Street. There, she is petted by her all-female team of owners and poses for pictures with them.

Zenyatta probably never had it this good before she started turning heads on the race track. But Zenyatta never carried the hopes and dreams of an ownership syndicate made up entirely of females— 33 to be exact -- whose one horse stable goes by the name of Fast Women LLC.

"She loves the attention ... from day one," Freyer said with a smile about the 2-year-old filly whose stall is a few lengths from her trainer's office at Custom Care Equine. "We

would lead her out and most of (the women) would all come out and get their picture taken with her."

Most of the women in the group are taking their first plunge into the world of owning a horse. Almost all have seen a horse race either in person or on television while some, such as Camden's Sibby Wood, have owned or bred Thoroughbreds before. But this venture has energized both veterans and newcomers to the industry. And Mimimambo is still several months away from making her debut at the track.

One of the filly's part-owners is Kay McKinney. Camden born and raised, McKinney has nearly 30 years experience working at Camden Travel Service. Growing up, McKinney rode show horses and fox hunted, sometimes aboard retired Thoroughbreds who were converted to another genre.

Never, McKinney said, did she dream of becoming an owner of a race horse. But this venture was too good an opportunity to pass up.

"Donna and I have been longtime friends," she said, "and when I heard about it, I got very excited because I grew up in Camden riding, showing and fox hunting and going to the races, but never having been involved in the racing end of things. I thought it would be a wonderful way to still be connected to the horse world but not have to get on their backs."

Syndicates — where a group comes together to purchase and own a Thoroughbred -- is hardly new to the sport. Syndicates have helped Aiken-based Dogwood Stables become a leader in the business. The same goes for West Point Thoroughbreds which has a string of young runners trained in Camden by Kip Elser's Kirkwood Stables.

The difference between those syndicates and Fast Women is that the second part of their nickname is a statement for the entire operation. Minimambo's sire, Kitalpha, was trained and was owned by a woman in South Africa. Minimambo was selected and purchased at the Fasig-Tipton yearling sales in 2013 by two women, Freyer and Elser's wife, Helen Richards.

Kitalpha, an unraced full brother to stakes winner and super stallion Kingmambo, is a story unto itself as the South African-bred stallion was smuggled out of Zimbabwe during that country's civil unrest. He found his way to America and entered stud at War Horse Place in Lexington, Ky., which is part-owned by a woman, Dana Aschinger, and her husband Gerry.

The sire was twice honored as New Zealand's leading sire after having helped produced eight crops, including 19 black type (stakes) winners. Minimambo is the first foal from Quail Landing, a 9-year-old English-

bred which made four career starts with her best finish being a second at Wolverhampton Racecourse in Great Britain in 2008.

Minimambo, a name voted on by the group to reflect her lineage to Kingmambo and which was approved by the Jockey Club of America on Christmas Eve 2013, already has star power to her name. Kitalpha was named for the yellow subgiant star in the constellation Equuleus, aka, the horse constellation.

As she talked about Minimambo's path to her barn, Freyer said even she has been amazed with how smoothly the road has been to this point. Minimambo was Hip 1 at the Fasig-Tipton October sales, meaning she was the first of more than 1,000 horses to enter the sales ring over the course of the three-day sales.

"There was just a quality about her that we couldn't get out of our mind."

There is nothing regal as to Minimambo's cost. She was a \$7,000 purchase, but a filly whose conformation immediately drew the attention of both Freyer and Richards while strolling through the stables at the Fasig-Tipton sales.

"She was very well balanced. She had a pretty head. She wasn't all that big, but all the parts were there," Freyer said of the initial impression she and Richards came away with when first viewing Minimambo. "She had a great demeanor. She always



had a great demeanor. She always came out of her stall and walked and walked and never acted tired, which is a good sign at the sale.

“There was just a quality about her that we couldn’t get out of our mind.”

The two women tipped their collective hand as to which yearling interested them as they kept returning to take another look at Hip 1. “That’s a dead giveaway at a sale when you go back and look at a horse, more than three or four times,” Freyer said.

The Camden ladies did have a Plan B in case their initial favorite was out of their price range. But when the gavel came down and the bidding stopped, the first horse in the ring was exiting with, at the time, fewer than 10 owners.

Freyer, who stayed for the entire sale to select horses for her clients, said she never thought about what

“That’s a dead giveaway at a sale when you go back and look at a horse, more than three or four times,”

could have been after her purchase for a group which would expand after the filly arrived in Camden.

“We had other horses selected,” she admitted. “That’s why we hesitated a bit on the first one, thinking we might have missed one later one. We followed our picks through the sale

and they either went for too much money or, when we went back and looked at them again, we didn’t like them as much. There was no buyer’s remorse.”

Getting their first pick, the next step for Freyer and Richards was to sell the horse to prospective female investors around Camden. Much to their relief, the charming little filly was a hit with the ladies and before long, the syndicate grew to 33. Most of the group hails from Camden with three owners living in Charleston, two in New Jersey and another is a part-time Camden and Connecticut resident.

When Minimambo arrived in Camden, one of the first of the syndicate to lay eyes on their purchase was McKinney. It didn’t take her long to discern that her investment was a solid one.

“Just how perky she was,” McKinney answered when asked her first impressions of the then-still-unnamed filly, “how alert she was and that she had a good look about her



versus horses that hang their heads low and may look like they have a lot of energy. She just seemed alert and on the ball.”

From less than 10 shares sold on nothing more than a promise to deliver a filly, once Minimambo was showcased to prospective investors, the ownership group swelled more than threefold. Most of the news was spread by word of mouth. Then, Freyer set up weekly meetings and continued to invite women to attend. After the gatherings, the women retreated to the Springdale Hall Club for lunch. From that, the interest and the ownership grew.

“I think the amount of women that joined is staggering to most people in that we have more than 30 people in the syndicate,” McKinney said of Fast Women LLC. “That’s a phenomenal amount of ladies and about half

A fully tacked Minimambo acknowledges her team of owners before a Tuesday morning workout.



of them probably have never ridden a horse or may not know the front end from the back end, but they’re learning about it. And the excitement among the ladies is really wonderful to be around.”

And, as Freyer pointed out, there is always room for more women to get in on the fun and the equine action. “I kept it flexible and wide-open. We

kept accepting partners,” she said. “As I said to everybody, ‘This is the best deal you’re ever going to get as far as the ease of getting in and the way it’s set up.’”

Thus far, Minimambo has sailed through her initial tests, both on and off the course, to the point that Freyer, who is not superstitious, almost ————— See page 38



wants to knock on wood for luck when talking about the most-celebrated horse in her barn.

"She was easy to break. Everything has gone so smoothly that it's almost scary," she said with a smile. "We just X-rayed her knees for closure, which is something we do for babies to see how mature they are and she's an 'A'. She scoped 100 percent and her knees are closed.

"There's no reason to think that we won't have a 2-year-old running this year."

After being developed by Freyer, Minimambo will be sent to Maryland-based trainer Dove Houghton, who has a Camden connection; she is the daughter of Camden businesswoman Patricia Richardson. Houghton spent part of her developmental years living in Camden.

Although Minimambo has yet to be led into the starting gate, Freyer said, word has spread of the venture. It leads her to smile when talking about the popularity of the most pampered runner in her barn.

With owners coming from all walks of life, Freyer said, the partners have enjoyed meeting and bonding with one another each Tuesday. For a group of whom several had no idea as to the intri-

cacies of developing a race horse, Freyer said the women have a keen eye when it comes to their filly.

"They have all noticed the change in her physical appearance, the muscling up, and they notice how she's training and how competitive she's gotten," Freyer said. "They've noticed all the changes as she's gone along which is what I wanted them to see.

"They have watched her go from taking baby steps in the pen to watching us tacking her up in the stall. They saw the rider get on her for the first time. They've seen all the steps and they know what the progression is. They have seen how she's grown up and they have assessed all the changes, which is what I was amazed with."

With a client list stretching from coast to coast, this is uncharted territory for Freyer in the training of a horse whose ownership base is comprised of her friends and neighbors from Camden. Saying she doesn't feel any more pressure in getting Minimambo ready to run than she would any other horse, Freyer has had nothing but good news to report to the Fast Women. She hopes it stays that way.

"I hate giving bad news," she said with a

wry smile and a shake of the head. "Hopefully, I won't have to give them any bad news. We all might be a little spoiled so far."

Not one to believe in the supernatural, especially as it pertains to a race horse, even Freyer has to start thinking that maybe some other force is coming into play for Minimambo since so many good things have happened to this point.

In addition to her taking each step on the track with ease, there are other signs surrounding the horse whose silks will include stars down the sleeves in going with the Kitalpha theme. The Jockey Club approving the first name submitted and its relaying the news to Freyer on Dec. 24 is one such sign. "Who works on Christmas Eve?" she asked, almost incredulously. Then there was the immediate approval of the first design of the silks.

If this were all a dream, Donna Freyer wouldn't want to wake up from it. "The whole thing has sort of a karma feel to it," she said.

Once Freyer's work is done, Minimambo will be sent to Houghton's barn in Maryland. And the trainer will make the final decision as to when Minimambo will be ready to race and the jockey, it is hoped, will be a female. The filly will





Minimambo's race debut is slated for this summer. She is shown here with exercise rider George Harrison.

then return home to CCE in the winter months.

One area the group has not addressed is how many of them will fit in an owners' box at the track, along with who lines up where should a winners' circle photo need to be taken. Getting the group from Camden to whichever track she makes her debut will be where McKinney and her expertise in the travel industry comes into play as she will help make the arrangements for all the owners to get wherever they need to be going for the race.

That is the easy and fun part, said McKinney who has not pictured her colleagues and herself making their way to the winners' circle following the 2015 Kentucky Oaks. Instead, she said, she is soaking up this entire experience as it comes.

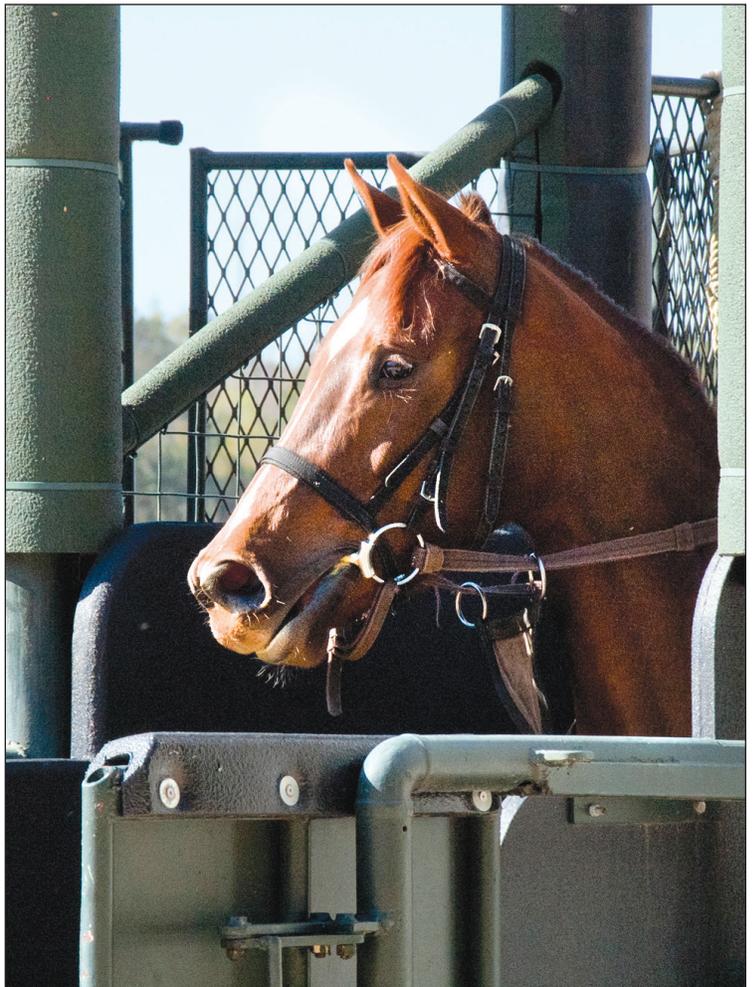
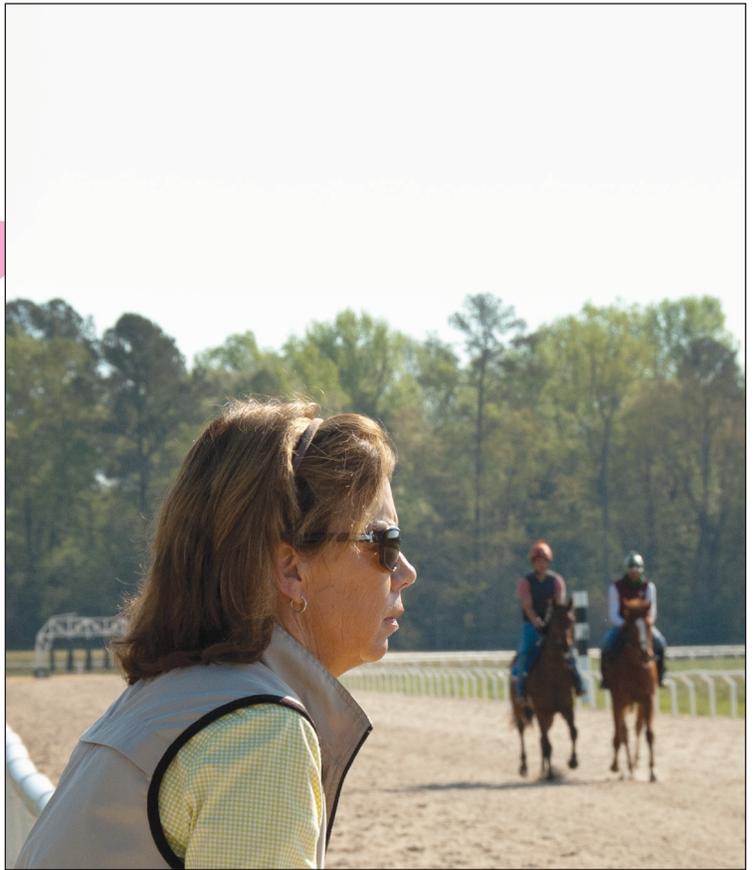
"I personally don't care if she ever makes it to the winners' circle, but this whole learning process has been the exciting part for me," said McKinney, who last September took a trip to the sales in Keeneland and came back amazed at how a horse is prepared before entering the sales ring. She hopes to get the rest of the Fast Women to go, en masse, to the sales in the future.

"I've enjoyed the intricacies of it and what goes on day-to-day ... it's been a learning process for everybody ... an exciting one, of course. I hope this is the first of many (horses running in Fast Women LLC's colors.)"

What Minimambo and Fast Women LLC will do in the future will be left to the racing gods. What the ladies have done for Donna Freyer is bring a new angle to a sport she has been involved with throughout her adult life.

"The best thing about it?" she said when asked her take on the first steps of this new and exciting venture. "I guess the camaraderie. As most trainers will tell you, when you are standing out there by yourself day to day, it can get lonely. Introducing people to the business is something you don't always get to do, but I think this is something (the equine industry) needs to do.

"To see people come in and enjoy the horses ... sometimes, you forget that. You forget the beauty of the horse. The women all talk about how beautiful (Minimambo) is. It's a very refreshing and a very rewarding experience. It makes you remember why you got into this business in the first place." U



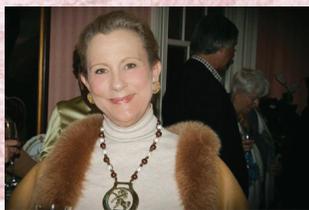
The faces of **F.A.S.T. WOMEN**



Photos by Melissa Young and Betsy Greenway



Bliss Watson



Dee Myers



Mary Elizabeth Boykin



Joy Scully



Mary Foster Cox



Louise Burns



Helen Richards



Missy McCutcheon



Linda Shaylor and Brenda Sullivan



Marlene Mischner, Sibby Wood, Linda Shaylor, Barbara Davis, Missy McCutcheon, Janice Moore, Hope Cooper, Harriet DuBose, Donna Freyer, Kay McKinney and Helen Richards



Sibby Wood and Hope Cooper



Marlene Mischner



Betsy Greenway



Harriet DuBose



Pat Watts



George Harrison on Minimambo, Lex Bomar with dog Phil, Harriet DuBose, Marlene Mischner, Betsy Greenway, Janice Moore, Bliss Watson, Missy McCutcheon, Helen Richards, Louise Burns, Sibby Wood and Brenda Sullivan



Cindi Prestage



Helen Richards, Polly Lampshire and Sibby Wood



Melissa Young



Hat's up

*Trish Noland
and
Kay McKinney*



Mary Elizabeth Boykin, Brenda Sullivan, Joy Scully, Linda Shaylor, Marlene Mischner, Donna Freyer, Melissa Young, Pat Watts, Janice Moore, Cindi Prestage, Missy McCutcheon, Paula Bowen and Harriet DuBose at the Camden Training Track