

SOUTHWEST SPOTLIGHT LEADING STUD FARMS

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A&A Ranch tops in New Mexico

Home to Desert God, sire of state-bred phenom Peppers Pride, leads the way

by Liane Crossley

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Regional sensation: Peppers Pride, daughter of New Mexico sire Desert God, retires with a record 19 consecutive victories

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Desert God has long been a popular regional sire from limited opportunity. After siring an average of 11.2 foals in his first 13 crops, Desert God has gained a following and is expected to be bred to 40 mares this year, according to Fred Alexander, who owns and operates A&A with his wife, Linda.

"There has been more interest from outside the state," Fred Alexander said. "In the state, the interest has been about the same. He had been a secret around here. Nobody paid attention to his pedigree until his offspring started to race around here."

Desert God sports some of the bluest blood in the stud book punctuated by his half sister Better Than Honour, who produced back-to-back Belmont Stakes (G1) winners in Jazil and champion Rags to Riches and sold for a record \$14-million at the Fasig Tipton Kentucky selected fall mixed sale.

About half of Desert God's mares will be supplied by his owners, Ron Allen, Ph.D., the head of the University of Arizona's Animal Sciences Department, and his cousin Joe Allen, owner and breeder of Peppers Pride. Alexander said Desert God's book is being limited because of age and fertility issues.

Desert God shares breeding duties with four other stallions at A&A, where they will be bred to a total of approximately 250 mares in 2009. About 75 of those mares reside on the ranch on a year-round basis.

A&A is a 45-acre spread in Anthony, a 20-mile drive north on Interstate 10 from El Paso, Texas. Despite its close proximity to a thriving metropolitan area, rural Anthony is nestled amid pecan orchards, cotton fields, and horse ranches with scenic views of mountainous desert amplified by dazzling sunsets.

A&A originally was developed in the 1960s as a Quarter Horse operation, and Alexander's father bought it in the 1970s. Fred Alexander shifted the focus to Thoroughbreds a dozen years ago and made it a commercial operation seven years ago. The rich purses and breeders' bonuses available to New Mexico-breds sparked a renewed interest in producing horses for the track in an ideal area for raising runners.

“I’d have to say that the availability of quality alfalfa hay and the climate are two of the reasons this area is good for raising horses.” Alexander said. “There are no harsh winters, and the horses seem to do well in the winter, and the babies grow well in the winter.”