

# AFIRES HEIR

BREATHING RAREFIED AIR

by MARY KIRKMAN

Guests at Kiesner Training Center might be forgiven for thinking they haven't seen Afires Heir yet. Sure, they saw a dark bay horse in a paddock. When he was turned out, they saw him bolt away from the gate, full gallop, then slow into a fluid trot, shaking his head and flinging his mane, snorting his happiness. He's handsome, full of motion and charisma—perhaps an Afires Heir son? Maybe 4 years old or so? No, they're told, that's Afires Heir. Himself. He's 22. The brightness in his eyes, in his attitude, laughs at them.

Joe Kinnarney, his owner, and Joel Kiesner, his trainer, are as amazed as anyone. "When he's out in front of people, he's always loved to show," Joel offers, and adds, recalling the stallion's ring career, "When the gate opened, I was just along for the ride."

It was some ride. The last time Captain, as the stallion is known, was in the show ring was 2010, when he won the fourth of his unanimous U.S. national championships in English Pleasure, three in open and one in junior horse. In fact, he won every class he was ever in, and when facing three judges, did it unanimously (including two Scottsdale open championships).

Since then, his team has focused on his breeding career. Two decades into it, his market remains steady, fueled by the number of major champions he sires every year. "He's still at the top of all the lists," Joel reports, "still killing it."



Of the top five sires of U.S. National Champions in English Pleasure Open—an iconic group of headliners—Afires Heir is the only one still alive. In fact, he is going strong: in 2023, AHT's List of Leading Sires in Saddle Seat at the national shows saw Afires Heir named Overall Leading Arabian Sire by number of winning get and number of wins.

Add to that, the list of winners of AEPA classes from the program's inception in 2007 through 2023 reveals that he is the leading purebred sire by both number of winners (62) and by payout (\$534,000).

He's running out of things to do, except to keep it up. And that, says Joel Kiesner, is the point. He's doing that too.

"When I think of who the horse is, what he has done, and how old he is—and then I look at the [cover] picture that was taken a few weeks ago—I think, 'Oh my god, look at the healthiness of this stallion,'" Joe Kinnarney says.

As a veterinarian as well as a breeder and exhibitor, he pays particular attention to equine health and recognizes the role genetics play. "Breeding is not about breeding just a horse who's going to win titles. That's part of it, obviously, but healthiness, soundness, longevity, all of that, is something breeders need to be doing."

What Afires Heir is accomplishing, he adds, is something golden when you're looking at the whole picture.

And there is another critical factor. "Afires Heir foals are lovely animals to ride and train, haul, show, clip ..." Joel notes, and refers back to the sire. "It doesn't matter what you ask of that horse, it's, 'yep, no problem, got it.'"

So, back to that list of most successful sires of English Pleasure horses at the U.S. Nationals, where Afires Heir just cruises along, building on his record. He's earned his high ranking on a total get of perhaps half that of his sire, who is second on the list, behind only the renowned \*Bask. For now, he still has his work to do, and he's offering semen that Kiesner calls "as strong as any horse here."

For Joe, who admired Captain long before he had the opportunity to purchase him, there is now a satisfaction in ownership. He'll never forget when he rode Afires Heir last year; the stallion was a handful of horsepower then, just out in the pasture. And there is a personal rapport. "If he were at my house and I could walk out in the morning, throw a saddle on him and take him for a trail ride, I think we'd both love it," he says. "He's the kind of horse that would be like, 'yes, I like the attention, I like to be out.'" It's that bright, life-affirming demeanor that is so addicting.



"His presence is just 'oh wow,'" Joe laughs, and admits to thinking, "I own that?" Then he adds more seriously, "How do you own the GOAT? He's like a home run, or the Super Bowl ... At least for me, when I think of the Thoroughbred racing industry, I think of Secretariat. When I look at Arabian English stallions, I think of Afires Heir."

Captain has long qualified for the title of "legend," Joel reflects, adding that unlike the sires before him, he lives not in the mists of the past, but here and now. It's heady company; he's breathing rarefied air. "We are just so grateful. We were grateful when he came into our lives 20 years ago as a long 2-year-old, and we still are."

