

WARREN STUTE

Shortly after his 80th birthday a few years ago, trainer Warren Stute agreed to stop galloping his horses. "I could still do it, but I promised my family so they would stop worrying," the wiry old-timer confided begrudgingly to a Hollywood Park publicist in his gruff voice after being slowed by a minor stroke.

By Steve Schuelein

That was vintage Warren Stute, a tough-talking conditioner who spent nearly seven decades on horseback before passing away in Arcadia at age 85 on August 9.

Stute, the senior half of the most famous brother training act in Southern California history with 80-year-old Melvin, left vivid memories as a top horseman with uncompromising standards. Stute was not the easiest man to get along with, but he was respected by all and beloved by many, as several attested during a memorial service in the Del Mar Thoroughbred Club paddock attended by about 300 on August 13.

"Warren was tough, ornery and opinionated, but was the most lovable guy," said Joe Harper, Del Mar president and CEO. He recalled his "introduction" to Stute in 1967 as a neophyte track cameraman nearly trampled by a horse Stute was exercising. Harper would spend many mornings in the stable cafeteria at a table including the Stute brothers and the late Clement Hirsch, a track executive and owner who had horses with Warren for 50 years. "I cherished those mornings, listening to him and his suggestions at the coffee klatch," said Harper.

Although an outspoken right-wing conservative and anti-feminist, Stute nevertheless earned admiration from a centrist veterinarian and a female trainer.

"We first saw each other in 1971—I can't say met, because all he did was scowl," recalled track veterinarian Rick Arthur. "The next year he wanted me fired because he said I was a hippie. He could only say liberal with disgust. I considered myself a moderate, but he thought that was liberal. He was gruff, had a temper and wouldn't talk to you—some for hours, some for life—but for all his gruffness, he had a real kind heart," said Arthur. "He helped his grooms when they got in trouble with the stewards and security and bailed one out of jail. He thought grooms should park in a lot near the Del Mar backside instead of owners, for which it was reserved."

I turned a horse I owned named

Guillermo over to him when he was 77 or 78 with the condition he couldn't gallop him," recalled Arthur of the Real Good Deal Stakes winner. "He got on him anyway and said he was the only one who could handle him.

"In 30 years, I can't remember ever putting a horse trained by Warren down in a race," added Arthur. "Warren knew when to stop. He didn't try to get one more race out of a horse. We lost a good old-school trainer."

Trainer Jenine Sahadi, no shrinking violet herself, remembered a friendly truce with Stute. "He was my neighbor for 17 years (at Santa Anita)," said Sahadi. "He wanted to know why I wasn't making eggs and bacon.

"One morning, I told Warren I was jogging a horse, and he said, 'If you want to jog those SOB's, take them to Yonkers (a harness track).' He said you gallop and work thoroughbreds."

Octogenarian Jack Robbins, a retired veterinarian and president of the Oak Tree Racing Association, began on the track around the same time as Stute. "He didn't have a lot of tolerance for owners," said Robbins. "If anyone told him how to train, out he went."

Yet a few owners maintained long alliances with Stute, none longer than Clement Hirsch. "As far as loyalty, if you were his friend, he was the best friend you could ever have," said Bo Hirsch, Clement's son who continued the family affiliation by keeping horses with Stute for seven years after his father's death. Stute made

his first major mark in racing when he won the 1951 Santa Anita Maturity (later renamed the Strub Stakes) with Great Circle under Bill Shoemaker when it was the richest race in the world with a \$205,700 purse. Later in 1951, Stute won the Del Mar Debutante with Tonga, a race he would win again 51 years later in 2002 with Miss Houdini for Bo Hirsch. Stute spread his fame internationally earlier in 2002 when he scored the richest victory of his career with Grey Memo in the \$1-million Godolphin Mile in Dubai. There were dozens of stakes winners in between,



particularly a blitz during 1969 and 1970 with South American imports Figonero and Snow Sporting and tomboy filly June Darling. Warren and Mel formed a life-long mutual admiration society despite contrasting personalities, and each thought the other belonged in the Racing Hall of Fame.

"I might be the luckiest man in the world," said Mel. "He's not heavy; he's my brother. He carried me since I was one day old. In my humble opinion, he was the greatest trainer who ever was."

Mel conceded that his brother could be tough and stubborn, but that he came through when the chips were down. Mel recalled Warren bailing him out financially, once by paying his rent and once by buying tires for his car.

"I wanted to cancel a party for my 80th birthday and saw him 10 days before," said Mel. "He said, 'I've made 79 of your birthdays and I'll make your 80th.' He died the morning after my birthday."

Steve Stute, Warren's older son, confessed that it was not easy growing up as a teenager during the 1960s. "He broke all my Bob Dylan records and threw all my sociology books for college out the window," recalled Steve, whose father refused to speak to him for three years when he grew his hair long. "But he was honest."

Glen Stute, Warren's younger son and a trainer, thanked the racing community for its support. "The outpouring of love since this man has passed has blown my mind," said Glen. "The tears in your eyes, the stories I have never heard carried me through all this."