

THE RACY COCKTAIL

EACH MAY, HORSE-RACING FANS BRING TOGETHER TWO TIME-HONOURED TRADITIONS, THE MINT JULEP AND THE KENTUCKY DERBY

BY MARGARET SWAINE

Kentucky's famous for thoroughbred horses and bourbon, America's only native spirit. While Kentucky racehorses can sell for millions of dollars and even stud fees can cost hundreds of thousands, bourbon is much more affordable. Both are quite closely tied, however, to the Bluegrass State and the famous mint julep cocktail.

The state sits on a limestone shelf, permeated with clean natural springs rich in calcium. It's this water that nourishes the famous bluegrass, which strengthens the bones of the slender-legged thoroughbreds. Corn also grows very well in this type of soil. The key ingredients in bourbon are corn and pure crystal-clear water like the waters that flow through Kentucky.

When I toured the fancy properties of the horsey set living in Lexington and Louisville near the home of Churchill Downs where the derby takes place, I found a well-fed high society (and pampered horses housed in barns with mahogany wood stalls with brass fittings). Corn feeds the area in many ways beyond bourbon. Cornbread, corn-battered vegetables, corn kernels in the salads — corn turns up everywhere, bringing all the fancy stuff down to earth.

As for the mint julep, it has been the traditional beverage of the Kentucky Derby for nearly a century. If the past is any indicator, this May 2 at the 135th derby, about 80,000 mint juleps will be served at the racetrack. True julep aficionados serve them in an icy sterling silver beaker — preferably one that has been in the family for seven generations. However, the mint julep recipe is just like the derby in that everybody argues about how it should come out.

While many recipes call for you to make mint sugar syrup a day ahead, here's one that's quick. Place a few sprigs of fresh mint in a chilled silver julep cup (or highball glass). Cover with sugar and just enough water to dissolve the sugar. Crush the mint sprigs into the sugar. Fill the cup with finely crushed ice. Pour in bourbon until the cup is brimming. Garnish with mint sprigs and let stand until frost forms thick. Beware, however: one is enough, two is too many and three is not half enough. **Z**



AND THEY'RE OFF!

Veteran stockbroker Mark Ripple, author of **Handicapping the Wall Street Way**, offers up a strategy designed to separate Kentucky Derby contenders from pretenders.

1. Don't bet the favourite Favourites win approximately 33 per cent of all races. This isn't true for the Derby where only four favourites won during the past 28 years.

2. Stamina At 1-1/4 miles, the Kentucky Derby isn't the shortest race in the Triple Crown. However, there hasn't been a winner since 1950 that didn't run at least one 1-1/4-mile race prior to the derby.

3. Show up A horse is "in the money" when it either wins first, places second or shows third. Forty-eight of the last 50 winners finished in the money in their final prep race before the Kentucky Derby.

4. Potential Only two winners during the past 42 years did not win a race as a two-year-old. Ensure your selection won a race in 2008.

5. Readiness Only seven winners since 1957 ran fewer than three races as a three-year-old prior to the derby. Eliminate horses without at least three races run in 2009.

6. Maiden jockeys Since 1980, only one jockey has won with his first Kentucky Derby mount.

7. Dual entries Pay attention to top trainers with more than one entry. The press often hypes one horse while the one overlooked surprises with an exceptional race at high odds.

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