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## Three Chimneys gears up for Big Brown's arrival

By WILL GRAVES  
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MIDWAY, Ky. -- Lazy afternoons spent in a paddock with plenty of room to roam and all the Kentucky bluegrass you can eat.

A morning hot walk or a casual jog around a quarter-mile track. Daily baths and the kind of personal attention that would make even the most pampered celebrity blush.

Oh, and a date \_ sometimes two \_ just about every day for five solid months. Visitors stop by a few times a week, snap your picture and tell you just how great you are.

A horse could get used to this.

If Big Brown thinks he's got it made now, standing so regally in his stall at Belmont Park while he waits for Saturday's run at a Triple Crown, wait until he gets to Three Chimneys.

The farm, 2,000 acres in the middle of Kentucky's pristine horse country, will serve as Big Brown's home once the Kentucky Derby and Preakness winner retires from racing, probably by the end of the year. Big Brown will try to become the first horse in 30 years to win the Triple Crown when he heads to the post as the favorite in Saturday's Belmont Stakes.

Preparations started the second Three Chimneys chairman Robert Clay flew to New York and convinced Big Brown's owners that his farm could provide Big Brown a lifestyle befitting thoroughbred royalty.

Three Chimneys is the home of 2004 Derby and Preakness winner Smarty Jones, and 1977 Triple Crown winner Seattle Slew stood there for 18 years. A memorial dedicated to Slew stands in the middle of the barn area that houses the farm's 10 active stallions.

The ink on Big Brown's contract was barely dry when the phone in Anne Peters' office started ringing with owners hoping to get a date with the strapping colt.

"It's huge," said Peters, the farm's seasons and matings adviser. "It's a real coup for us to get a horse like this. It was a coup to get Smarty and a coup to get Big Brown. We've had the closest thing to a Triple Crown winner. The Triple Crown is the holy grail. Him winning it would be huge."

The breeding season begins around Valentine's Day and runs through early summer. Three Chimneys tries to limit the number of sessions to about 110-115 per stallion, and not every mare will measure up to the farm's exacting standards.

Sorry, but the Brad Pitt of the horse world doesn't date the girl next door.

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"We can't take every mare that calls in," she said. "We'll look at the mares that are submitted, set a bar on what mare we think has the quality to go with Big Brown, his stud fee and reputation."

Just how much it'll cost to get a date remains to be seen. Dynaformer, the sire of 2006 Derby winner Barbaro, currently commands a \$150,000 stud fee, tops at the farm. A session with Smarty Jones goes for \$100,000, a number that could fluctuate in the future depending on how well his progeny does at the track.

"The market really dictates what the fee is," farm president Case Clay said. "It will be a different number depending on whether Big Brown wins the Triple Crown or not."

Do a little math and Big Brown's earning potential is mind-boggling. Peters said a session with Smarty Jones ends up with a mare getting pregnant 90-95 percent of the time.

At \$100,000 a cover, 110 times a breeding season, that's about \$10 million a year. Many stallions can produce at a high level well into their 20s, meaning Big Brown, who officially turns 4 on Jan. 1, could arguably make \$200 million over the course of his stallion career.

Ask Three Chimneys stallion manager Sandy Hatfield if she feels any pressure knowing it's her job to make sure the horses are healthy and eager to work and she just laughs. While the breeding industry has skyrocketed in recent years, the horses haven't changed much.

"They're all different, they have their own personality, but for the most part, they're gentle animals," she said. "We just make sure they're happy and well taken care of."

Getting a new stallion ready to go takes time. When Big Brown first arrives at the farm he will ease into retirement. Rather than just release him into the paddock, he'll spend most of his early days there in a stall before gradually getting exposed to a more independent lifestyle.

Each stallion has two crew members who serve as personal valets. Assistant stallion manager Shane Glass will be in charge of Big Brown at the farm, helping him get settled.

"You just take it slow, you tend to find out their quirks and they tend to find out your quirks, find out what they can get away with and what you can get away with because each horse is different," Glass said.

Once he's ready, days become fairly routine. Most of the stallions are waiting to be let out of the paddock when the farm crew arrives around 6:30 a.m. Then it's either off for a short jog under rider Brian VanSteenbergh, or 30 minutes of brisk walking in the exercise barn.

A bath soon follows, then they're sent to their respective stalls while the mares get ready. The vans begin lining up about 9 a.m. for the morning breeding session. They're then sent into a receiving barn where a teaser horse gets them in the mood. Glass chips in by whistling at the mares, who skulk slowly around the stall before lifting their tail slightly, a sign that she's ready to go.

The actual breeding session usually lasts for just a few minutes. Each member of the crew has a specified role, with Hatfield monitoring the session to make sure things go smoothly. It's a loud and somewhat awkward process. Once the session is over, Hatfield will take a specimen from the stallion and place it under the microscope to look at the sperm.

The rest of the day mirrors the morning. The horses stay in their stalls to eat, take a nap and wait for the daily tour to make its way through. Then it's another afternoon breeding session or out to the paddock to play.

"This is the life, isn't it," Hatfield said. "Somebody takes you, gives you a little exercise. Gives you a

nice bath and a massage, brings you dates. I mean, what a good deal."

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