

"Until you go to Kentucky and with your own eyes behold the Derby, you ain't never been nowheres, and you ain't never seen nothin'!"

— Irvin S. Cobb



Cruising Kentucky

Touring thoroughbred country, Corvette style

text and photography by Thomas and Kelly Glatch

The still calm of dawn is broken by a distant rumble. Within moments a blur of color thunders by, leaving a train of dust and flying dirt. We have just witnessed the most perfectly refined racing machine on earth.

The ancient Greeks included horse racing in their Olympic Games. During the Roman Empire the Circus Maximus was full of spectators watching the same exciting sport. It's still the most popular spectator sport in America, with total annual attendance surpassing the stick-and-ball sports, and even auto racing. Today, the descendants of those early race horses — the thoroughbreds — can trace their bloodlines back to three prototypical British-bred Arabian horses from the mid-1700s. And today, most thoroughbreds call the Commonwealth of Kentucky home. Since 1981, so has America's other thoroughbred, the Corvette.

Spring comes late to the upper Midwest. While the rest of the country is showered with blossoms and warm weather, we are still beset by cruel tricks of nature. The opportunity to visit relatives in Louisville, with the promise of a 1994 Corvette on loan from Chevrolet to drive, sent us packing the first week of May.

Heading east from Louisville on Interstate 64, the landscape turns to gently rolling meadows. This is the Bluegrass Plateau, since shortly after the American Revolution the center of the world's equestrian industry. Kentucky was one of the first areas explored and settled after the founding of the original 13 states, and it was discovered that the grass of the Bluegrass region was especially rich in calcium and phosphorus, perfect for the development of sturdy livestock. By 1800 wealthy Easterners were having their race horses bred and trained in and around the city of Lexington, the "capital" of the Bluegrass. Today, 300 horse farms in the area raise 200,000 thoroughbreds, standardbreds, American saddle horses, and other breeds.

The ideal introduction to this region is at Kentucky Horse Park, just north of I-64 on Interstate 75 on the outskirts of Lexington. This 1,000 acre state-owned park was built on the former site of a standardbred farm, and is a self-sustaining working farm. We caught one of the free horse-drawn wagons that tours the park for an overview of the facility, then began walking from building to building. Some of the buildings include the International Museum of the Horse, the American Saddle Horse Museum, and the Breeds Barn with examples of many different horses. We caught the Parade of Breeds show in which each breed is paraded by with a brief history. We missed the Hall of Champions presentation, however, in which a number of ex-champion horses are shown, occa-

Travel Information

Kentucky Dept. Of Travel Development
500 Mero St., Suite 2200
Frankfort, KY 40601
800-225-TRIP

Greater Lexington Convention and Visitors Bureau
430 W. Vine St., Suite 363
Lexington, KY 40507
606-233-1221

Louisville Convention and Visitors Bureau
400 S. First St.
Louisville, KY 40202
800-626-5646
(800-633-3384 in KY)

Bowling Green - Warren County Tourist & Convention Commission
352 Three Springs Road
Bowling Green, KY 42104
502-782-0800

sionally including a former Kentucky Derby winner. Near the park's entrance is the burial site of Man o'War, one of the greatest racing thoroughbreds of all time and winner of the 1921 Derby. A shrine to a race horse? Consider that when *Sports Illustrated* published its Top 50 Athletes issue it included Secretariat, winner of the 1973 Derby and the greatest race horse of all time. These are true athletes, with distinct personalities and huge followings, just like any human hero.

To really partake of the splendor of the Bluegrass, we headed east out of Kentucky Horse Park on Iron Works Pike. As the road heaved and swelled through the countryside we were surround-

ed by beautifully groomed horse farms on either side, bordered by twin rows of split-rail fences. As we neared another famed 200-year-old road, Paris Pike, we passed Spendthrift Farm, where Leslie Combs II pioneered stallion syndication and bred many famous winners. The farms, however, are off limits to tourists, due to the high value of the horses, the constant threat of fire and disease, and the serious business that takes place in the barns and training runs. As romantic as the area and the whole notion of horse racing is, it must be remembered that this is a major enterprise, with millions of dollars on the line, riding on the backs of powerful yet fragile thoroughbreds. That fact hit home the day we drove by Spendthrift Farm; like Calumet Farms (with more Derby winners than any other) a few years before, Spendthrift had fallen on hard times, and the property and buildings of this long-time bastion of horse racing were being auctioned off that day. Kentuckian John E. Madden, possibly the greatest horseman ever, once remarked: "It is this 'glorious uncertainty' which enables a poor man to get hold of a great horse, that makes racing the most fascinating and exhilarating sport in the world. It is this uncertainty that fills the grandstands . . ."

We turned north on Paris Pike and could have gone on to the town the road was named after, which in the early 1800s was where Jack Spears first brewed what became known as Kentucky Bourbon. Instead, we ambled down some side roads following instinct instead of map, enjoying the beauty of the land and letting our Torch Red LT1 air out. After a while we found ourselves back on Paris Pike heading toward Lexington.

Many of these horse farms exist because of racing, and Lexington has plenty of it in the area. We stopped at The Red Mile Track, whose red clay surface contributes to its title of "The World's Fastest Harness Racing Track." Harness racing runs there evenings from mid-April to mid-June,



and again in mid-September. The track was just gearing up for the night's program, but we drove across town on U.S. 60 to the Keeneland Race Course, perhaps the most romantic track in all of horse racing. Built in the 1930's by trainer J. O. "Jack" Keene, this nonprofit track has racing for just 16 days in April, and 16 more in October. Its spring races are often the place where Kentucky Derby participants first make their mark, and any race there is an experience. The grounds are groomed to perfection, the massive limestone grandstand a sight to behold, the genteel air about the place a step back in time. You won't hear "And they're off" as the gates swing open as no loudspeakers are installed to break the peace. This is thoroughbred racing for true aficionados. Jack Keene stated, "I had no heirs, and I

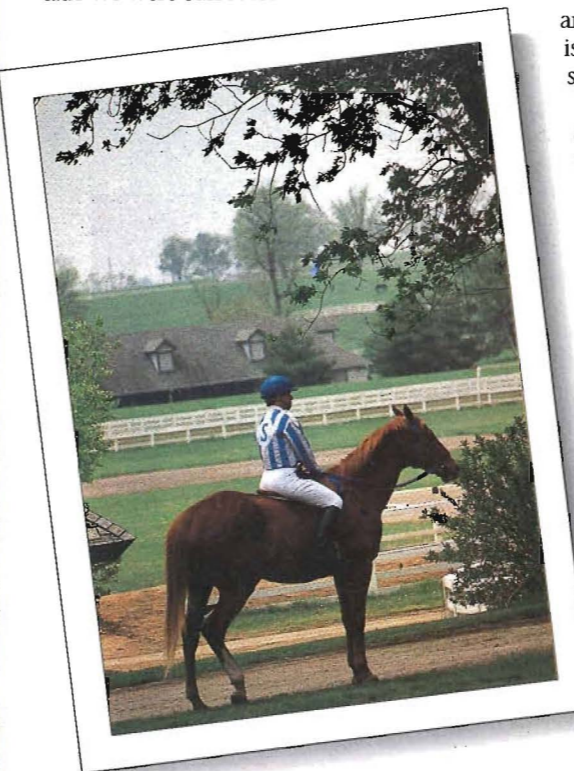
Museums

Kentucky Horse Park
4089 Iron Works Pike
Lexington, KY 40511
606-233-4303
Open daily

Kentucky Derby Museum
700 Central Avenue
Louisville, KY
606-637-1111
Open daily, closed Derby and Oaks days

National Corvette Museum
Louisville Rd. (Exit 28) and Corvette Dr.
Bowling Green, KY
Open daily 9:00 AM to 7:00 PM
502-781-7973

Plant Tours
General Motors Corvette Plant
Louisville Rd. (Exit 28) and Corvette Dr.
Bowling Green, KY
Tours weekdays 9:00 AM and 1:00 PM
502-745-8000





Corvette Country

wanted to do something really worthwhile for racing. It's such a grand sport." The spring racing season had ended by early May, but Keene's tribute to that sport is worth a visit any time of year, and deserving a special trip to make its short racing season.

No visit to Kentucky in early May would be complete without a stop in Louisville. The two weeks preceding the Kentucky Derby, the first Saturday in May, is a time of parades, parties, and other festivities. Not

since the time of Roman Emperor Caligula has such a huge party been thrown in honor of a horse race. Witness the annual Great Steamboat Race in the Ohio River between the "Belle of Louisville" and the "Delta Queen," two authentic paddlewheel steamers. Take in the Pegasus Parade downtown, or the Great Balloon Race. Stop by the Kentucky Derby Museum at Churchill Downs and view over 120 years of Derby history. Or go to the Downs early mornings for Dawn at the Derby, where you can join the "rail birds" as the greatest three-year-olds in the world practice for the Derby, then

stay for a traditional country breakfast at the track. Best of all, experience the Kentucky Derby itself, "the greatest two minutes in sport." Upwards of 130,000 attend this wonderful event, but only 50,000 have seats. The wait for tickets is on the order of years, but if you want to try for seats call Harriet Howard at Churchill Downs and expect the worst. Otherwise

you'll have to stand in the infield or the paddock. Still, like the Super Bowl, World Series, or other major event, it's a once-in-a-lifetime experience.

There is an alternative. Instead of bucking the crowds for the Kentucky Derby, we attended the Kentucky Oaks the day before. This is the day the locals head for the track (most Louisvillians can't get Derby tickets either) to take in the atmosphere and play the horses. Seeing the famous twin-spires of Churchill *continued on page 48*

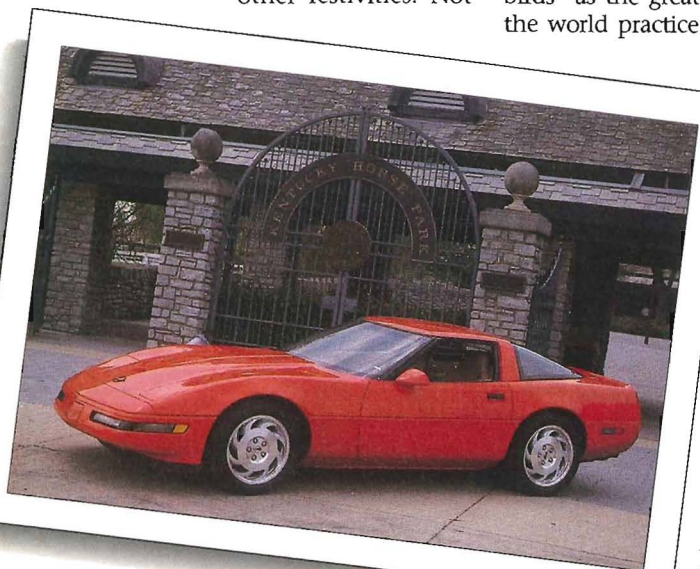
Horse Racing

Churchill Downs
700 Central Avenue
Louisville, KY
606-636-4400

(Thoroughbred racing: Late April to early July, late Oct. to late Nov.)

Keeneland Race Course
4201 Versailles Rd.
Lexington, KY
606-254-3412
(Thoroughbred racing: 16 days in April, 16 days in October)

The Red Mile Track
947 S. Broadway
Lexington, KY
606-255-0752
800-354-9092
(Harness racing: last week in April through June, 4 weeks in September)



Corvette Country
continued from page 46

Downs and standing in its venerable paddock is an awesome experience, like entering the Indianapolis Motor Speedway for the first time, or sitting on the worn bleachers of Wrigley Field for a Cub's game. We watched up close as the horses for each race entered the paddock, the jockeys mounted them, and the handlers led them out to the gate. We observed the pretty belles in

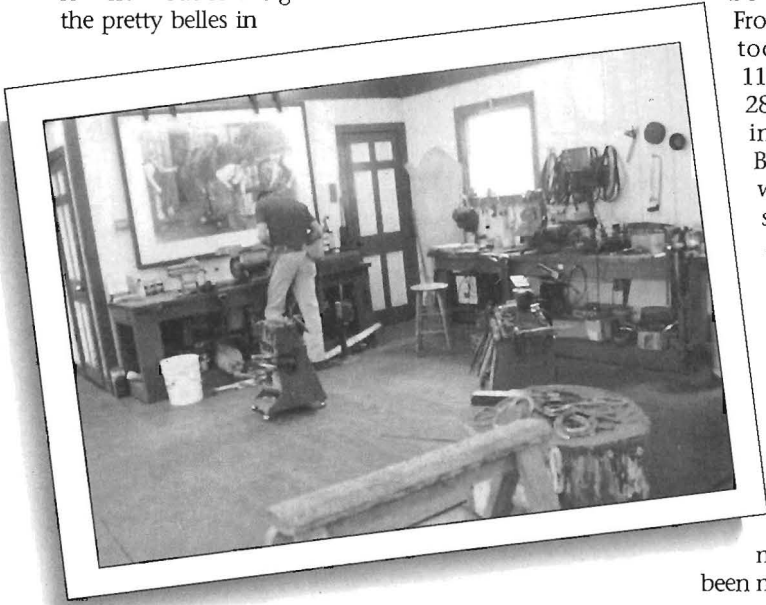
their race-day best, watched rich and poor place their bets, and saw the races on the giant TV screens in the paddock and infield. We studied our programs, placed our bets, and pretty much broke even for the day. No, this is not the Derby, but the Oaks is the next best thing, and is highly recommended.

A visit to thoroughbred country would be incomplete without a trip to Bowling Green. From Louisville we took I-75 south 113 miles to Exit 28 (or from Lexington take the Bluegrass Parkway to I-75 south to Exit 28, a journey of about 151 miles). Even if you have seen the Corvette plant in operation in years past, it is worth another tour since many improvements have been made recently to

the line. Across the road, of course, is the spectacular new National Corvette Museum, truly one of the finest automotive museums in the world, and another must-see for any Corvette enthusiast.

Years ago Irvin S. Cobb, Paducah, Kentucky's, home-spun philosopher, was asked what made the Kentucky Derby so great. After a lengthy explanation he concluded: "Until you go to Kentucky and with your own eyes behold the Derby, you ain't never been nowheres, and you ain't never seen nothin'!" We would have to say the same of all of thoroughbred country.

CF



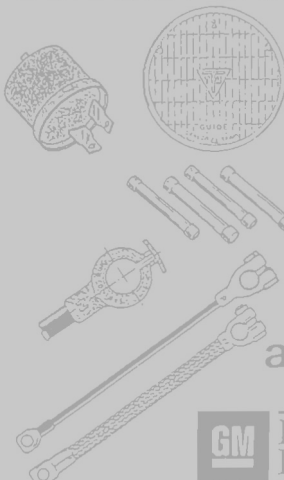
Kentucky Bluegrass Country At A Glance

| | |
|---------------------|-----------------|
| Time Zone | Eastern/Central |
| Average Temperature | |
| Spring | 44°F |
| Summer | 69°F |
| Autumn | 49°F |
| Winter | 25°F |

*Lectric Limited carries a full line of
CORRECT CHEVROLET and CORVETTE ELECTRICAL PRODUCTS:*

**Reproduction Wire Harnesses
 Dated Spark Plug Wire Sets
 Spring Ring Battery Cables
 Bolt Type Battery Cables
 Small Bulb & Fuse Kits
 Wiring Diagrams**

and Other Reproduction Products



Guide T3 Headlight Bulbs

(These are new O.E.M. bulbs produced under license from General Motors Corporation.)

Call for our FREE PRODUCTS CATALOG!



LECTRIC LIMITED, INC.

7322 S. Archer Road • Justice, IL 60458 • (708) 563-0400 • Fax (708) 458-2662