BLOODSTOCK notebook

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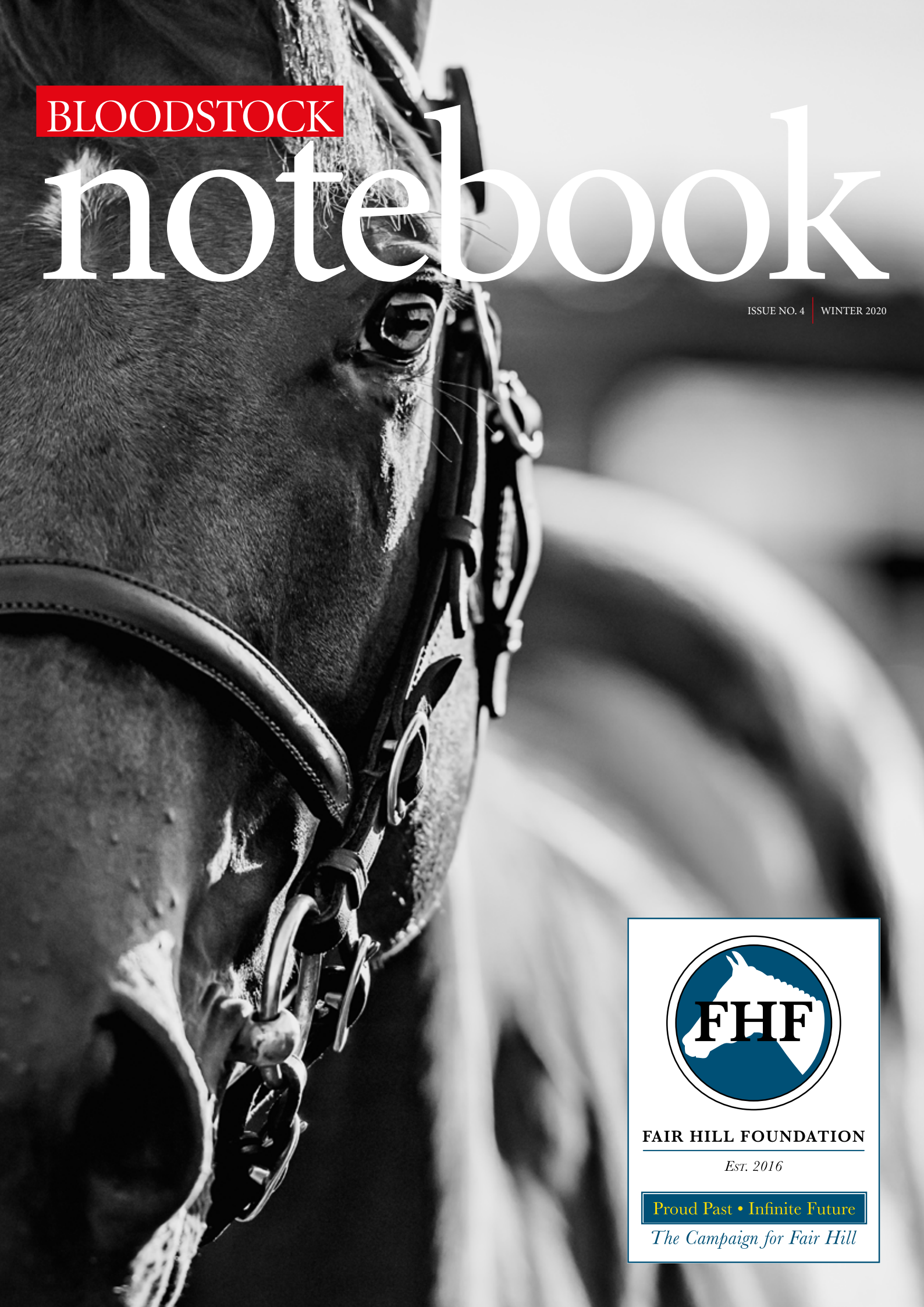


FHF

FAIR HILL FOUNDATION

Est. 2016

Proud Past • Infinite Future

The Campaign for Fair Hill

- 1-mile irrigated turf course for flat and jump racing
- The most innovative Thoroughbred training center in Maryland
- State-of-the-art sports medicine at Fair Hill Equine Therapy Center
- Regulation arenas for show jumping and dressage

FHF

FAIR HILL FOUNDATION

Est. 2016

Proud Past • Infinite Future

The Campaign for Fair Hill

- Official site of the inaugural Maryland 5 Star at Fair Hill in October 2021
- Ian Stark-designed 5 Star cross country course
- 6,000 acres of scenic public riding trails and fields

Partnering to Build a World-Class Equestrian Center

The Fair Hill Foundation, The Fair Hill Organizing Committee and the State of Maryland

"The newly revamped Fair Hill venue has state of the art facilities and is situated in some of the most beautiful horse country in the US. It's really exciting for all equestrian sports."

Phillip Dutton, ***1996 and 2000 Olympic Gold Team Medalist and 2016 Individual Olympic Gold Medalist***

"The new facility at Fair Hill is very exciting for top horses and trainers. This is a spectacular facility… I don't think anyone would be afraid to take their best horse out here and get it ready for a big race. The possibility of having more racing here is also very exciting with four or five turf races per day for several days."

Graham Motion, ***Trainer of 2011 Kentucky Derby winner Animal Kingdom***

" I look forward to the future of Fair Hill and I expect a great deal of promise for the various horse activities there."

George Strawbridge, Jr., ***Thoroughbred breeder and race horse owner***

" Of all the venues I have been to, Fair Hill stands out as one of the most exceptional places to compete a horse. The footing and terrain are the best you can have, better than any place I have been to all around the world."

Bruce Davidson, ***Five time Olympic Gold and Silver Medalist and Breeder***

Please consider partnering with us as we continue to build a world class equestrian center and join us any time to see our progress. The turf track looks beautiful and the cross-country course is extraordinary.

Keep up with us on our website: fairhillfoundation.org and if you have supported us, we thank you. If you haven't yet, we would be pleased to talk with you at any time; simply email us at fairhillfoundation@gmail.com.

Jay Griswold, ***Vice Chair, The Fair Hill Foundation***
Chair, Proud Past*Infinite Future: The Campaign for Fair Hill

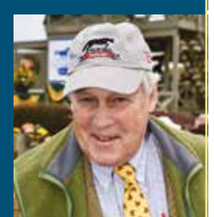


Photo by Douglas Lees

Fair Hill Foundation, Inc.

PO Box 1324 • Elkton, MD 21922 • *fairhillfoundation@gmail.com* • ***fairhillfoundation.org***

Fair Hill: From America's Aintree to America's Newmarket

Dorothy Ours and *Barbara Heck* on the regeneration of an iconic Maryland equestrian venue

Tucked in the beautiful rolling hills of the northeast corner of Maryland, the foxhunting, steeplechasing and turf racing paradise William du Pont, Jr. created and called Fair Hill nearly a century ago is quietly being transformed into a 6,000-acre global mecca for horses, trainers, riders and fans.

"The whole equestrian world is just so excited about this venue at Fair Hill," says Olympic eventing champion Phillip Dutton. "It has modern state-of-the-art facilities and footing – it's just a perfect blend for horsemen. It will arguably be one of the best venues in the entire world, one that people will flock to and want to be a part of."

"Fair Hill has a special place in my heart," says Jonathan Sheppard, 1980 Hall of Fame inductee and the all-time leading National Steeplechase Association trainer. "As my local track, it is wonderful and uniquely multi-faceted."

"The venue and facilities at Fair Hill are absolutely world-class, no matter what equestrian discipline is your interest," adds Boyd Martin, 2019 Pan American Games dual team and individual gold medallist. "It is superbly built and designed in beautiful Maryland, and a premier destination for anyone who loves horse sports."

Fair Hill came to be in 1926, after du Pont moved his Foxcatcher Hounds from his family home in Virginia, Montpelier, now known as the Home of US President James Madison, father of the Constitution and architect of the Bill of Rights. To ensure the safety of his hounds and horses, he built bridges over the roads and tunnels under them, and encircled the property with 17 miles of "super fence", a chain link barrier that was set in three-foot concrete footers with a 'T' section across the top. Even the most aggressive hound (or fox) couldn't dig under it or climb over it. As an added benefit, the deer, so distracting to hounds, also found it too high to jump over to enter the property.

Now owned by the State of Maryland, Fair Hill and its steeplechase and turf course have been evolving since its proud past. It's a story beginning in 1928, when Maryland's great 'chaser Billy Barton finished a gallant second in the Grand National at Aintree. Du Pont considered the question: In coming so close, Billy showed that a horse bred, born, raised, and raced in the United States might have the right stuff to win at Aintree. To produce that winner, what could America do better?

Du Pont thought he could help, and his vision laid the groundwork for all that follows today. He knew horses, he knew steeplechasing, he knew course design. He owned a *lot* of land. His ideas would take root at Fair Hill. He began doing one of many things that he did so well: reimagining the landscape.

He did it thoughtfully, studying every aspect of the environment, inspecting every aspect of the construction and waiting for the ground to settle before confirming any racing meet.

"Many people think that all that is necessary is to get a flat section of land, throw up a few flimsy shacks, mark out a track and hold races," he said. "Nothing is less desirable than a hot, dusty, exposed track. What is really desirable is some ground that is relatively high and hilly or rolling, with plenty of trees and with ample ground for the erection of 80 stables and space for parking thousands of cars. Good water is essential. It is easy to clear the path and interior circle of the track of trees not wanted – much simpler than waiting for years for trees to grow. It makes little difference whether the ground

"On a par with any course in the world"

"The recent improvements to the Fair Hill course are very impressive and will provide long-term value to both American turf racing and steeplechasing. Centrally located close to the East Coast horse population, Fair Hill will present much-needed opportunities for horsemen who have long valued turf racing. The initial construction and subsequent maintenance of the course is on a par with any course in the world.

"Ben Nevis may have been the only horse to win at both courses, winning the Foxhunter Cup at Fair Hill in 1976 and then the Grand National at Aintree in 1980. Later that year, he paraded in front of the Aintree stands at Fair Hill."

Charles C Fenwick, Jr, five-time winner of the Maryland Hunt Cup and rider of Ben Nevis II to victory in the 1980 Grand National. His grandfather, Howard Bruce, owned and raced the great Billy Barton.

DOUGLAS HEIS

Charlie Fenwick and Ben Nevis lead the field over Becher's Brook, on their way to winning the 1980 Grand National

The first turn at today's Fair Hill

DOUGLAS LEES

Ben Nevis and Charlie Fenwick leading the Maryland Hunt Cup in 1978, en route to winning the race for the second year in a row

"Within the last 15 years, Fair Hill has served as the home base of two Kentucky Derby winners, Barbaro and Animal Kingdom

is slightly rolling or hilly. Grading is one of the less expensive factors in the construction of a track. To be successful and attractive and a source of comfort and pleasure, the track should be made beautiful.

"There should be space [for] at least two acres of ground to be allotted to each stable or barn, to reduce the hazard should one catch fire. The grounds should be made a centre of other sports, such as polo and other outdoor events, so that the facilities might be used at other times than the few days each year when races are held."

At Fair Hill, du Pont used dirt from excavations to build up the area on which the grandstand would sit. The original stand, named the Aintree Grandstand and seating more than 2,000 people, afforded a view of the entire course for the signature race, the Foxcatcher National Cup.

The inaugural Foxcatcher National, run over about three miles over brush, seemed remarkably intimidating. As du Pont later wrote to the sporting editor of *The Spur* magazine: "Twelve of the nineteen fences have a minimum height of 5 ft. 10 in. and a maximum height of 6 ft. on the landing side of the fence."

The giant Foxcatcher National obstacles did have a trick up their sleeve: the top several inches of brush were deliberately flexible, so that horses could slide through while jumping closer to five feet than six. But the task still was tremendous and the appearance stupendously intimidating. From the start, the Foxcatcher National course would be branded as "the Aintree of America". And it looked the part. On his own land and from his own mind, du Pont had created something audacious.

The Foxcatcher National Cup looked so awe-inspiring that Aintree might seem almost cosy in comparison: not only facing brush nearly six feet high, but also, as a press release put it, "uphill and downhill stretches which will test to the extreme the most sturdy of the jumpers". The inaugural Cup drew nine entries. Only four would start.

The third of four races, the Foxcatcher Cup, brought a touch of faraway dreams. Liverton Lodge, owned by du Pont's sister, Marion du Pont Scott, lost a fierce duel to Melita – whose owner, Frederick Alfred Upsher Smith of Lake Minnetonka, Minnesota, had made his fortune producing digitalis (foxglove plants) in the United States but was born in Manchester, England, about 40 miles from Aintree.

"Since the meeting, the water jump has been completed so that now it holds water," du Pont wrote afterwards, "and the sod has been lifted on the landing side, which has been graded, and the sod replaced again to make a smooth landing. A further change has been made at the 12th fence near the beech tree, which is the last of the three fences they jump coming towards you. At this fence we have made a ditch on the landing side six feet wide, and it will have a stream flowing through the bottom on the same basis as Valentine's and Beecher's [sic] Brook. I have no "Beecher" to fall off to christen the brook so will have to be content to have it flowing under a beech tree."

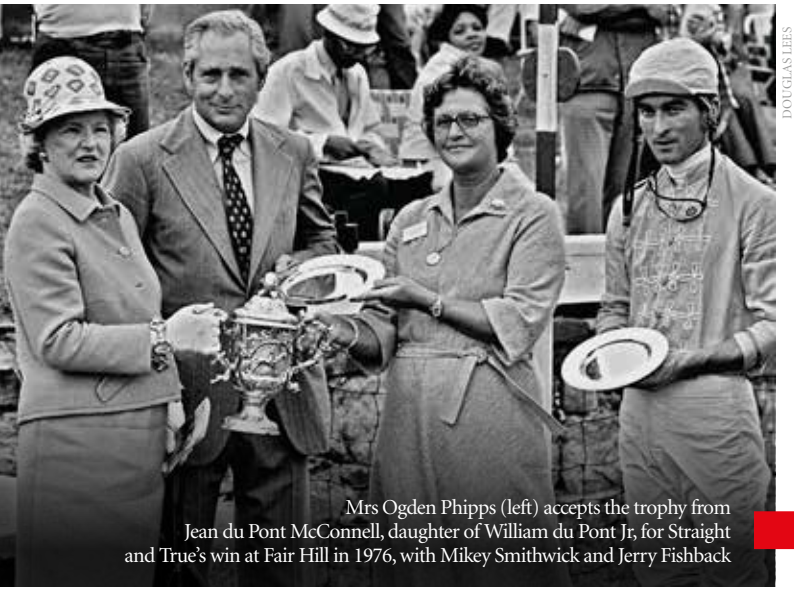
Even without a "Beecher," the Fair Hill meet quickly became a fixture. Its popularity inspired wider publicity, bigger fields, greater seating capacity and an ever-increasing number of aeroplanes flying in for the day. After a few planes landed in the infield during the 1937 meet – one during the first race – completing a proper airfield became a priority. The airfield greeted Fair Hill's fifth anniversary in 1938.

Those first five years both proved and disproved du Pont's Grand National experiment. They proved that Fair Hill *could* propel a horse towards Aintree. Case in point: What Have You, a chestnut gelding who ran second in 1934's opening 'chase, finished second in the 1935 Foxcatcher National and *won* the Foxcatcher in 1936. The "Aintree of America", however, did not produce actual Aintree success. In the 1937 Grand National, What Have You fell at the second fence. He returned in 1938 and did better – falling at fence number six, the notorious Becher's Brook.

The Foxcatcher National had tried to pin down something that has no precise formula. Meanwhile, Marion du Pont Scott kept trying to win the Foxcatcher but did not let it control her Aintree hopes. While Fair Hill quickly gained status, she sent her prized 'chaser Battleship to train and race in England, instead. In 1938, when Fair Hill veteran What Have You fell at Becher's the first time around, Battleship cleared it twice – on his way to victory.

Du Pont lived long enough to see Fair Hill continue as a touchstone for American 'chasers with Aintree ambitions. Battleship paraded there in 1938. In 1965, Jay Trump – the first American winner since Battleship, and the first ever with an American rider – did the same.

William du Pont, Jr. died on the final day of 1965. Traces of his intentions survived, even after the State of Maryland bought the property in 1975. During the spring of 1976, Ben Nevis won the 3½-mile Foxcatcher Hounds Timber Steeplechase. In 1980, he became the first Fair Hill winner to also win the National at Aintree. Several weeks later, Ben Nevis and his dauntless rider, Charlie Fenwick, galloped between races for a Fair Hill crowd.



DOUGLAS LEES

Mrs Ogden Phipps (left) accepts the trophy from Jean du Pont McConnell, daughter of William du Pont Jr, for Straight and True's win at Fair Hill in 1976, with Mikey Smithwick and Jerry Fishback

Since then, Fair Hill has added many milestones. Its thoroughbred racing contributions, alone, include the opening of the Fair Hill Training Centre in 1982 under the guidance of founder, Dr John R S Fisher. The inaugural Breeders' Cup Steeplechase, in 1986, plus three other runnings, brought national attention to the venue. And within the last 15 years, it served as the home base of two Kentucky Derby winners, Barbaro and Animal Kingdom.

All of this potential – and fulfilment – reaches back to its proud past, beginning in 1934. Back to Battleship, parading here in 1938. Standing only 15.2 hands, he drew amazed appreciation from *The Maryland Horse* magazine: "Battleship is a very imposing horse, but his size makes you wonder just how he got over those terrible high fences at Aintree, unless he has some hidden wings."

Battleship did not use his wings here at Fair Hill, but he made a lasting point. That's what racing *is*: find a place, and purpose, that brings out those wings. Looking back in time – and flying forward – that's the purpose Fair Hill so beautifully serves.

Fair Hill Foundation leaders today see an infinite future flying forward towards a facility that will rival Newmarket in England. With more than $20 million transforming the property into a truly one-of-a-kind facility for multiple equestrian disciplines in a world-class equestrian centre in the Mid-Atlantic, Fair Hill will be the only place in the world with a 350-acre thoroughbred training centre that has produced Breeders' Cup, Kentucky Derby and multiple graded stakes winners, a one-mile irrigated turf course for flat and jump racing, an international 5-star three day event venue, regulation arenas for show jumping and dressage, 6,000 acres of public riding trails and fields and a state-of-the-art equine therapy centre.

The new Fair Hill will be able to host flat racing, jump racing, eventing, show jumping, dressage and many other horse sports – all with international standards. In October 2021, the world's attention will be on Fair Hill. Ian Stark, the world-renowned Scottish course designer, is leading the development of the world-class 5-Star event course, scheduled to host its first Fédération Equestre Internationale (FEI)-sanctioned international 5-Star three-day event competition. This event will be only the second international 5-Star event in the United States; the Land Rover in Kentucky is the first.

In Spring 2021, the 86th running of the Fair Hill Races will premier on the new turf course. The new realigned track features advanced irrigation, rail systems, new turf, livestream capacity, designated and protected crossing and access points, a mile distance with uphill pull on the home stretch and wider, banked turns so footing will be maintained at the highest safety standards for horses. Providing ample training opportunities and more racing days at Fair Hill are at the core of the vision.

Because of the State of Maryland's ownership, Fair Hill is free from developmental pressure. Attracting thousands of equine participants in racing, showing, eventing, dressage, trail riding, foxhunting and the millions of potential enthusiasts, spectators and support in the Mid-Atlantic, Fair Hill is close to New York City, Washington, DC, Philadelphia and Baltimore.

Fair Hill Foundation Campaign Chair, Jack S. Griswold, sums it up. "Mr du Pont's vision is underpinning all the planning that has gone into this transformation," he says. "In everything we do, we are committed to preserving his legacy while reimagining the landscape just as he did in 1928. We are grateful to everyone who is joining us in taking Fair Hill into its infinite future." ■

Dorothy Ours is the author of Battleship and Man o' War. A consultant to the Fair Hill Foundation, Barbara Heck has wonderful memories of hunting with the Foxcatcher Hounds in the 1970s.