



After 158 races and 13 years on the track, Burnt Mill Road is back in his home state of Texas.

# Home Again

TEXAS-BRED RETIRES  
TO HIS NATIVE STATE  
AFTER MORE THAN  
A DECADE ON  
THE TRACK

By **Bana Varnon**

If it were up to him, he'd race forever. If it were up to him, he'd never stop.

But after 13 years, 158 races and 31 wins, Burnt Mill Road was due for retirement, Texas-style.

And it's a retirement duly deserved, as the gelding's record is as lengthy and impressive as it is rich—all told, the gelding's lifetime receipts total nearly \$350,000.

It's not often that a horse comes along who truly loves the track as much as this one. It's not often that a horse loves the taste of victory enough to want more, year after year. Most of all, it's not common for a horse to be like Burnt Mill Road.

But what's extra special for this gelding is not only his endurance; it's his story. A Texas-bred who spent nearly seven years racing primarily in his home state, Burnt Mill Road left the Texas racing circuit for West Virginia in 2003 and stayed there until the final race of his career, which he fittingly won at the age of 14.

Now, after more than five years away from the Lone Star State, Burnt Mill Road has returned to his old stomping ground to retire for the rest of his days.

### AN ENDURING, ENDEARING KIND OF HORSE

There's no other word to describe this horse than enduring. But when a teen-aged horse keeps running, and winning, against runners less than half his age, there's not much more you can say.

Foaled in 1994, the son of Wayne's Crane spent his first few years breathing in that sweet southern air and soaking up that Texas heat. A racehorse by spirit and blood, Burnt Mill Road took to the track early, debuting as 2-year-old in October 1996 at Sam Houston Race Park. What his connections didn't know, however, was that he would stay so late.

While no one really knows what makes the horse so lasting, breeder Gary Dailey says it's just a love of the game.

"The track was just his world, all the way through," said Dailey, who bred the horse out of his Personality mare Bimper.

Burnt Mill Road spent most of the first half of his career on the Texas circuit, where he stacked up wins at Retama Park, Sam Houston and Lone Star Park for his breeder.

Dailey ran the gelding until Burnt Mill Road was claimed away in 1999. After that, Burnt Mill Road switched from owner to owner until 2003, when he ended up with L. Craig Cox, a New York resident who took the gelding to Mountaineer Park in West Virginia. There, he spent the remainder of his very long career.

"It's amazing," said Cox, who also trained the Texas-bred. "Everybody at Mountaineer Park looked at him and talked about him all the time. He's just a racehorse and that's what he does. He's such a strong horse to have lasted as long as he has."

When The Texas Thoroughbred first published Burnt Mill Road's story in January 2008, he had raced 157 times with 30 wins over his 12-year career. After that story, Burnt Mill Road raced just one more time, and in his first start in more than five months he defeated a field of \$5,000 claimers on March 31, 2008.

### COMING BACK TO TEXAS

After 13 years on the track, Cox knew Burnt Mill Road was due for retirement, especially with such a great finale.

"He'd just been racing for so long for me, and I wanted to take him

back to Texas," Cox said. "That's where he's from, and I thought it'd be a good thing to let him go back after so long."

In late July 2008, just four months after his final race, Cox got in touch with Lynn Reardon at LOPE (LoneStar Outreach to Place Ex-Racers) Texas. With the help of its donors, LOPE arranged for Burnt Mill Road's transport from West Virginia back to Texas.

"We usually don't do long distance transportation—we just work with the horses in Texas," Reardon said. "But this story was so special, and he really wanted to donate the horse and have him come home. Thanks to everyone who chipped in, we made it happen."

When Burnt Mill Road arrived at the LOPE ranch in Cedar Creek, near Austin, Reardon said it was almost hard to believe that the gelding she saw stepping off that trailer had just months before run (and won) on the track.

"Literally, when he stepped off the trailer, he was so calm that I would



**With help from donors and discounted transportation from Equine Express N.A. Inc., LOPE Texas was able to bring Burnt Mill Road from West Virginia to the Lone Star State.**

not have thought he had come straight from a track life," she said. "He just looked gorgeous, and obviously his owner had taken really good care of him."

Once there, Reardon enrolled the gelding in the transitional program for ex-racehorses, which conditions Thoroughbreds for a new life before adoption. Usually the process is quite slow, since horses just off the track can sometimes be feisty and stubborn. But with Burnt Mill Road's modest temperament and gentle behavior, Reardon matched the

gelding to a new family within one week's time.

"Before we got him, we were thinking that by a month or so he'd be ready to start riding or possibly start going to a foster home," Reardon said. "But he's such an intelligent and calm horse, that he was only here about a week. It was amazing; I've never seen a horse who adapted that fast, especially one who had just ended his career."

Because of his speedy adjustment, Reardon matched Burnt Mill Road to Lisa Bobbitt, who had already adopted three LOPE horses. As a long-time "foster-mom" for LOPE, Bobbitt originally wanted to foster the gelding, but after one look at Burnt Mill Road, she adopted him immediately and took him to her home in Burton, Texas.

"I knew when I looked into his eyes that he was the horse for me," Bobbitt said.

Reardon thinks so too, even though she said it pained her to see the gelding go.

"He seems like he's really with you at all times, and he's always

paying attention,” Reardon said. “He’s sensitive in the right way, and then also extremely calm, so I think he’s in an ideal home where he gets a lot of attention.”

So after a five-year career in West Virginia, which included 56 starts and \$201,262, all from races at Mountaineer, Burnt Mill Road is back in Texas. This time, though he’s here to stay. And if he does any running, it’s only for fun.



**Although some former racehorses need a month or more of retraining before being ready for adoption and a new way of life, Burnt Mill Road needed just a week.**

**FROM THE TRACK TO THE TRAIL**

Soon after Burnt Mill Road’s arrival, the Bobbitt family began preparations to make the gelding’s transition from track to trail as smooth as possible. First in order, Bobbitt said, was a name change.

“We have now named him Diesel, since a diesel engine is powerful and runs forever,” she said.

Adjustment didn’t come immediately. Just four months off the track, Diesel’s racetrack quirks came up modestly in the beginning, and it only took a little patience and time before he learned the ways of a pasture horse.

“At the track, he didn’t have any herd experience, so he was kind of lost,” Bobbitt said. “Diesel was just a little slow to figure everything out, especially how to act in the herd. He has no desire to fight for dominance and he couldn’t care less if he’s the last one in the pecking order. He’s just so unbothered by all of that.”

Once he had settled in with the other horses, the Bobbitts prepared Diesel for training as a trail rider. The process was unexpectedly easy, all due to his gentle behavior, Bobbitt said. Even though the horse had come off the track just five months prior, Bobbitt said the newly named Diesel was extraordinarily relaxed.

“When our trainer began working with him after his arrival, he did not believe he had just come from the track,” Bobbitt said. “He was so mellow and cooperative. Within a week or so, he began riding him in the round pen. He was neck-reining in days, and changing gaits—stopping on a dime—on command, every time.

“He’s obviously had good experiences with people,” she said. “He is the most cooperative, easy to handle pet and horse I have ever owned. He’s just so professional. He’s all business and will stand straight, eyes forward, completely still for the farrier, bandage changes, fly sprays and groomings. He walks on a lead like a perfect gentleman, never pushy or excited.”

Even though Diesel’s gentle personality makes it hard to believe that

he just got off the track, parts of his behavior still show evidence of a lifetime of racing.

“He’s just so regal,” Bobbitt said. “He bows his head and he walks so proud like he’s walking out in front of everyone at the track. He carries himself with so much confidence.”

Despite and maybe because of that pride, Diesel has adjusted well to his new career, and may love his new charge at trail riding as much as he loved the track.

“Less than a month after we adopted him, we took him on

his first trail ride,” Bobbitt said. “He was amazing! He was confident and cooperative, doing all that was asked of him on the entire eight-mile ride. He was just very curious and interested in everything, but nothing spooked him.

Burnt Mill Road’s story is a circular one—born in Texas, raced in West Virginia, with a final move back home. But if his racing career is any indication, he’ll stay as long as he can. Besides, it seems he’s happy in his new home.

“I absolutely love this horse,” Bobbitt said. “I feel blessed that he has found his way here, and he seems pretty happy with the arrangement too!”

**BURNT MILL ROAD  
1994 Bay Gelding  
Wayne’s Crane –  
Bimper, by Personality**



Ceady Photography

**Race Record**

Year	Age	Starts	1st	2nd	3rd	Earnings
1996	2	4	2	0	0	\$9,180
1997	3	7	0	3	0	\$6,199
1998	4	11	2	3	3	\$15,702
1999	5	17	4	0	1	\$38,915
2000	6	23	2	3	6	\$34,150
2001	7	17	1	2	1	\$9,586
2002	8	19	3	2	6	\$21,231
2003	9	15	5	3	2	\$73,121
2004	10	12	2	3	2	\$48,196
2005	11	15	6	0	2	\$50,570
2006	12	9	2	2	1	\$20,392
2007	13	8	1	2	2	\$13,899
2008	14	1	1	0	0	\$5,858
<b>Totals</b>		<b>158</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>\$346,999</b>