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Making History: Ouzts Nears the All-Time Mounts Record

Ouzts' record has been 52 years in the making and will likely stand for a long time.

By Isaiah Pinto | July 21, 2025

Perry Ouzts in his favorite photo, on horseback on a hog photoing in 2012.

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In the spring of 1971, 18-year-old Perry Ouzts began his jockey career that has lasted him a lifetime.

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After some convincing from his cousins, Earlie and Jackie Finn, who were jockeys, a teenage Ouzts left Riverside, Ark., fresh out of high school, traveling from his rural hometown, and would make his riding debut at Beulah Park in Grove City, Ohio.

Now, more than 50 years later at age 71, in the same state that birthed his career, Ouzts is set to ride his way into the riding history books at Turfway Park. Barring any scratches from his upcoming scheduled mounts or any pick-up mounts, he will surpass the existing record for most rides by a North American jockey in the eighth race at Belterra July 26 aboard **Leave It to Kitten**.

In so doing, he'll surpass the 53,578 mounts record held by Hall of Famer Russell Baze, the winningest jockey in North American racing history. Baze became the all-time mounts leader in 2011 and proceeded to ride for five more years before retiring.

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With history on the horizon, Ouzts reflected on the lifelong achievement.

"It means I was not a quitter," Ouzts said. "Yeah, I've really enjoyed this job all these years. I think that's why I've been so successful at it for so long because, like a lot of guys, they just do it just because they have to, but I just do it 'cause I still enjoy it."

In April 1973, Ouzts recorded his first career victory on the back of Rabbat at Beulah in his third career mount.

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The win photo from Perry Ouzts' first winner on Rabbat in 1973 at Beulah Park.

Throughout his career, Ouzts continued to shelve accolade after accolade.

According to Equibase, he is the oldest jockey to win a Thoroughbred race. He has 26 wins from 142 starts this year, including a pair of wins since he turned 71.

"I've been trying to quit it now for about three years; my wife just won't let me," Ouzts said with a chuckle. "When I won my 7,500th the other day, it was a horse that she owned part of, so that was kind of special."

On May 31, Ouzts achieved his 7,500th victory on the back of Lily Pike's **Calculated Move** at Belterra for trainer Barbara Riley. His wife, Toni, is a groom and horse owner who assists trainers such as Riley.

Terri Ouzts lands, "calculated movement" and Perry Ouzts in the back

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That was placed Ouzts in an exclusive club of only five jockeys to ever accomplish 7,500 wins in a career.

One of those jockeys is a longtime friend of Ouzts, Hall of Famer Pat Day. The pair of jockeys battled on the racetrack sparingly over multiple decades.

"I was just proud of him, happy to know him, and excited for him that he's continuing to ride at the ripe old age of 71," Day said. "I've got him on the top of my prayer list. The older you get, the harder the ground gets."

Day, only eight months older than Ouzts, began competing against Ouzts at Kentucky racetracks in 1980. While Day chose to hang up the silks in 2005 at age 51—around typical retirement age for most accomplished jockeys—Ouzts continued to ride.

Day couldn't imagine riding at his current age.

"I marvel at him," Day said. "And he still has the enthusiasm of a hog boy," a term used to describe an apprentice.

Pat Day poses for the camera with Perry Ouzts following Ouzts' 7,000th win in 2010 at Belterra Park.

One of the most successful jockeys of all time, Day ranks eighth on the mounts list and is one spot ahead of Ouzts by victories in fourth with 8,803 wins. Ouzts has 7,514 wins through July 23 to rank fifth.

Unlike Day—who would rise to compete at the top levels of the sport, capturing the Kentucky Derby (G1), Preakness Stakes (G1), Belmont Stakes (G1), and other major races—Ouzts has largely been out of the limelight. Over the last three decades, Ouzts has chosen to frequent local regional racetracks, riding mainly lower- and mid-level horses. He has never won a graded stakes race.

"It's just tough conditions, and he just keeps kicking," Day said. "I called him and congratulated him (on 7,500 wins), and he said, 'Yeah, and I still love it.' Day said. "And I was like, 'I'm blown away by that.' He's remarkable."

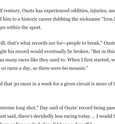
Day acknowledged that Ouzts' year-long racing schedule is especially taxing on the body, specifically in the winter, compared to warmer climates like Florida and Arkansas, where Day rode during most winters over his 30-year career.

Ouzts largely stays in the Cincinnati metropolitan area with occasional trips elsewhere to ride at **Keeneland** or **Thistledown**.

Turfway Park, located not far from Cincinnati in Florence, Ky., has its racing season in the winter from New Year's to the end of March, and Belterra's racing season runs from May through October.

"I have always done really, really well here, and that was more important to me than to go to the big racetracks and win the big races and everything, making a bunch of money," Ouzts said. "I just like to win, and it was just always easier to do it here because I knew everybody, everybody knew me, and I always got some good mounts."

Ouzts has made Kentucky home, residing in Hebron, less than a half an hour drive away from Turfway and Belterra, located alongside the Ohio River.



Perry Ouzts and The Wine Fox at River Downs

Riding in this region for decades, Ouzts has forged lasting relationships with those around him—one of those being Jeff Greenhill, a trainer who has used Ouzts for about 30 years.

"Perry's quiet ... but he's sort of an all-business guy," Greenhill said. "But he's hardworking, and he's as honest as they come. I've had a bunch of races together, I'd say in the dozens probably, and I've never lagged him up and thought, 'Well, I might not get an honest ride.' If you get Perry Ouzts, you know you're gonna get 100%."

Additionally, over the previous 30 years, Ouzts raced at Beulah, where his career began. The park closed permanently in 2014.

Ouzts has tallied 55 more total rides at Belterra, 13 rides at Beulah, and two titles at Turfway—truly a living legend in the region.

Greenhill speculated that the jockey has ridden nearly two times around the Earth, basing that estimate on his mounts and an estimated average race distance of around seven furlongs. That would translate to 48,876 miles, more than 1.88 times the Earth's circumference of 24,901 miles.

Ouzts has made quite an impression on Greenhill.

"Probably 18 years ago or something, he looked at me in the eyes (after losing a race), and he said, 'Jeff, this horse is gonna make some kind a great pony,'" he said lighthartedly. "And then told me all I needed to know ... and I appreciated that."

Outside the racetrack, Ouzts still chases the thrill of high speed. He's an avid motorcyclist, even at 71.

"I'm getting ready to go soon," Ouzts said. "Over 50 years (ago), before I started riding races, I had my first motorcycle when I was in high school."

One morning in 2012, on his way home from morning runs at Belterra, Ouzts was involved in a dangerous motorcycle accident on I-275 outside of Cincinnati. The then-57-year-old jockey recalled sliding with his motorcycle across two lanes.

"Perry's coming off the track in the morning with a horse, and I'm walking beside him. And he said, 'Man, Jeff, I totaled the thing.'" Greenhill recalled. "He said, 'I don't know how I lived.'"

Ouzts miraculously survived the wreck unscathed. In fact, Ouzts returned later that day to Belterra and raced the entire card despite soreness from the collision and seen on his first two mounts.

"I just want people to remember that when I showed up, I was prepared, and I did my best," Ouzts said.

Over the last half century, Ouzts has experienced oddities, injuries, and a change over time that has him to a historic career dubbing the nickname "Iron Man." He's also witnessed changes within the sport.

"I'm sure they will, that's what records are for—people to break," Ouzts said when asked if he thought his record would eventually be broken. "But in this day and age, they don't have as many races like they used to. When I first started, we used to race six days a week, six races a day, so there were no mounts."

Ouzts mentioned that 30 races in a week for a given circuit is more of the norm in today's era.

"I think it's an extreme long shot," Day said of Ouzts' record being passed. "For the very reason he just said, there's decidedly less racing today ... I would be riding seven days a week for four or five weeks before I'd have a day off."

The next closest active jockey to Ouzts on the all-time mounts list is 55-year-old Terry Houghton, who ranks No. 10 with 36,848 mounts in a career dating back to 1987. Houghton trails Ouzts by more than 15,000 mounts and has averaged less than 500 mounts a season for the past two years.

A record that has slowly been chipped away over 52 years by Ouzts will likely stand for a very long time, in part because Ouzts is expected to add to it.

"I'll keep going until they just won't ride me anymore, I guess," Ouzts said. "I'm surprised every day when I pick up the overnight, and I'm on three or four every day."

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