

Side 1



**Presents a Special Exhibition for
the International Museum of the Horse.**

The History of the Thoroughbred in America

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The flag is low'red--they're off--they come!

*The squadron is sweeping on!
There's a sway in the crowd--a murmuring hum,
They're here--they're past--they're gone.
They came with the rush of the southern surf
On the bar of the storm-girt bay;
And, like muffled drums on the sounding turf,
Their hoof-strokes echo away.*

--Gordon

The wonder and mystery of the racing horse have captivated men and women for thousands of years. The "Sport of Kings" has gathered followers around the world, and has created a culture that crosses gender, race, and class lines. It was the love of the sport of racing that originally led to the development of the Thoroughbred, a horse designed specifically for the

racetrack and its glory. And today, the sport that created this magnificent animal exists to ensure that the breed continues: "Racing is at every level about the pursuit of quality and a striving for excellence. The notion of improving the breed permeates every aspect of the sport (Bowen, 18)." It is because of this integration of sport and player that a discussion of the Thoroughbred cannot be accomplished without a simultaneous study of the history of horseracing. This essay will introduce the Thoroughbred as a breed, but it will go further, and will place the Thoroughbred in its proper context of racing and sport in both England and the United States.

The Thoroughbred

What is a Thoroughbred? From such a seemingly simple question comes a multitude of responses. Different authorities in Thoroughbred racing and breeding, in particular the Jockey Clubs of both England and America, have set criteria for determining a pure Thoroughbred. In the Stud Book of 1949, the English Jockey Club declared:

Any animal claiming admission to the General Stud Book (which registers all Thoroughbreds) from now on must be able to prove satisfactorily some eight or nine crosses of pure blood, to trace back for at least a century, and to show such performances of its immediate family on the turf as to warrant the belief in the purity of its blood. (Montgomery, 43)

An American writer put the definition of a Thoroughbred into slightly simpler terms in 1905 when he said that a Thoroughbred must be "of Oriental extraction and an animal developed through centuries of cultivation by enlightened nations (Merry, 15)." In both definitions, the ancestry of a horse, and the purity of his family tree, are the primary factors which designate him a Thoroughbred. Careful breeding between select family lines has made the Thoroughbred what he is, and, in fact, every modern registered Thoroughbred can trace his roots back to one of three eighteenth century stallions. Most Thoroughbreds share several physical attributes, including strong, muscular hind quarters, and a high withers. But these attributes cannot designate a horse as a Thoroughbred, as they are not characteristics unique to the breed, nor are they shared by every one of the 50,000 Thoroughbreds foaled each year around the world. It is also impossible to determine a Thoroughbred by the color of his coat, for the Jockey Club "recognizes black, dark bay or brown, bay, chestnut, gray, and roan (Evans, 27)." Romantic chroniclers of the horse claim that it is "heart. . . a special combination of competitiveness and determination" (Patent, 4) that makes a Thoroughbred unique as a breed. However, heart, too, is elusive, so it is in the end only the ancestry of a horse that conclusively makes him a member of that elite racing breed, the Thoroughbred.

From the Beginning: England

Racing has existed far longer than has the breed of horse developed for the sport. Horse-drawn chariot races were popular amusements in Ancient Egypt and Greece, and in medieval times, jockey-ridden horses raced through village streets in England and all over Europe. By the seventeenth century, a Scottish breed of pony, the Galloway, had proven itself superior in informal racing contests throughout England. If racing was already so well established by the seventeenth century, what was it that persuaded English breeders to try to develop a new breed of horse?

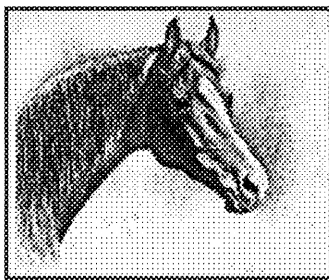
In the early seventeenth century, the Stuart Kings James I and Charles I hunted around

Newmarket, and had set up a royal palace and stable nearby. Both attended the popular races held on the fields at Newmarket, but it wasn't until 1660, when Charles II began attending Newmarket races, that the royal family became actively involved. Charles, an avid rider and race horse owner, made Newmarket the official center of horse racing in England. The monarch also provided purses, marked out courses, and laid out rules, arbitrating disputes whenever necessary. With the prestige of the royal court behind it, racing began to expand, and gentlemen horse owners searched endlessly for the champion that would earn them one of the new "King's Plates."

Two elements of seventeenth century British agricultural history collided with this new search for an unbeatable horse to provide the ideal atmosphere for the seeds of the Thoroughbred breed to flourish. Hunting in England had long been a popular amusement for upper class gentlemen, but with the heavy deforestation taking place to make way for increased cultivation, the face of hunting was changing. The sturdy, surefooted horses perfect for dense woodland hunting were unsuited for the new hunt over open fields. New mounts were needed, who could meet the demand for a faster, lighter, more agile hunter. Horse breeders, too, were affected by the increase in agricultural production. A population explosion was stretching the available food supplies. To alleviate this demand, breeders of all types of livestock were beginning to experiment with selective breeding techniques that would provide the most favorable traits in offspring. Once presented with the new demands for better hunters and faster racers, horse breeders were able to draw on new scientific breeding practices to meet those needs with a new breed of horse.

To complement the speed of native Galloway horses, breeders in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries began importing stallions from both the Near East and from Spain¹. Andalusian horses, native to Spain, were imported heavily in the seventeenth century. The height, size, and agility of these horses made them ideal for inbreeding with the speed of the small, heavy English mares. Stallions imported from Eastern countries, in particular Arabia, Turkey, and the Barbary Coast, offered still more to the mix. Races in England were held over long distances, and were often run in heats. Heats, usually one to four miles each, were repeated until one horse had won twice and proven himself the best of the field. In this system of racing, a horse could be expected to run up to twenty miles in one day. Imported stallions from the East were known for their incredible stamina and strength, two traits essential in the heat style of racing. Eastern stallions, too, were purebred horses. Unlike English breeds, which were indiscriminately mixed by constant cross breeding, Eastern horses were carefully bred to maintain the same characteristics in each new generation. This purity of breeding would add genetic stability to the new breed being developed.

Between 1690 and 1730, over one hundred stallions were imported from Arabia and Turkey to the breeding farms of England. Three of these, the Byerley Turk, the Godolphin Arabian, and the Darley Arabian², proved to be incredibly important as the foundation sires of the modern Thoroughbred. Although every one of the imported stallions produced offspring, only the lines of these three remain active today.



Darley Arabian

Imported to England in 1704, this stallion is known as one of the three foundation sires of today's Thoroughbred.

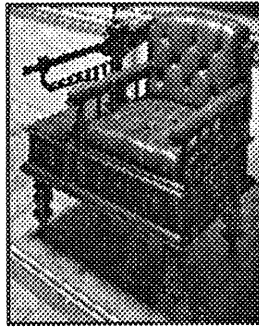
By 1750, the Thoroughbred was recognized as a distinct breed of horse, and the English had found their first brilliant Thoroughbred racer in Flying Childers. These two events cemented an interplay between racing and breeding that survives today. Breeders searched for the perfect combination of genetic traits to meet the ever-increasing demands of the race goer, and the race acted as the proving ground for those same breeders' accomplishments. To ensure that this proving ground remained honest and organized, the English Jockey Club was founded to act as the final authority in creating and applying rules, and in settling disputes over bets and race results. Gradually, the Club gained control of the English turf; weigh-ins for jockeys, handicapping to equalize horses' chances, and in 1762 ordering the use of private colors for each owner in each race.

The first public Thoroughbred auction took place in 1766. This sale, run by Richard Tattersall, gave breeders a new market for their 'product', and attracted more owners into racing. However, racing in the late eighteenth century remained a denizen of the upper crust. Race meetings were observed from the height of elegant carriages, and became excuses for exclusive parties and balls. Racing gave rise to gambling of all kinds, including dice and cards. Cock fights, boxing matches, and an occasional foot race became popular adjuncts to a day at the races. To keep the attention of tempted racegoers, meetings began making longer, more exciting race cards. Long four or five mile heats between two horses gave way to dash races of a mile involving a larger field of competitors. Several courses created Classic races to serve not only as the ultimate test of ability for each new crop of Thoroughbreds, but also to attract large audiences.

For breeders, the change from long distance racing to sprints meant focusing on new genetic characteristics. The champion racehorse of 1750 had stamina and power to endure through the grueling match races. But by the end of the century, it was quick speed and agility that would mark a successful Thoroughbred. Breeders, as they developed the fast sprinter, were also being faced with an economically driven demand. Owners had traditionally raced their Thoroughbreds at five and six years old, but were realizing that financial resources were stretched too tight before they saw any return on their investment. By training horses to race at two and three years old, stables could see a profit earlier. For breeders, the end result was a horse that was not only fast, but also matured early.

This precocious horse rocketed into the nineteenth century with a longer stride and more height (approximately six inches) than its eighteenth century Arabian and English ancestors. During the first half of the century, the number of Thoroughbreds tripled and the number of racecourses doubled. Young horses captured more and more of the spotlight at these tracks as the century wore on. Newmarket alone held over a hundred races a year for two year olds, and fifty percent of all horses actively racing were two and three years old. Priam, The

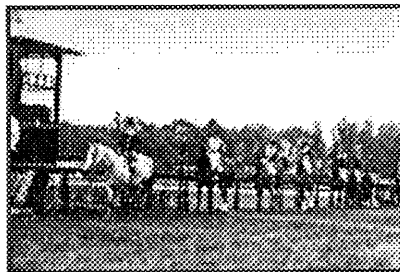
Flying Dutchman, and St. Simon became enduring champions of this youthful turf.



Weigh-in Chair

This nineteenth century scale, like earlier ones, ensured that jockeys carried the appropriate weight in each race.

The nineteenth century English turf saw more than youthful speed explode on its courses. Gambling and bookmakers proliferated everywhere, and with the advent of trains, so too did fans of all classes. Corruption abounded as more horses entered each race, and more money could be made. Owners registered various silks under several names to be able to enter a race with more than one horse. Horses were switched at the last minute. Jockeys and starters were bribed to create confusion and false starts at the beginning of a race, to throw off the concentration of a favored horse. In an attempt to halt these practices, the post parade, the numbers board, and the starting signal were introduced onto race tracks everywhere as the century came to a close.



Post-parade

A Victorian innovation, the parade allows spectators to see each horse and its behavior before a race.

Ahead to the next section: **Across the Atlantic: The American Thoroughbred**

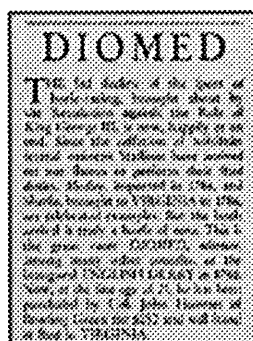
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Across the Atlantic: The American Thoroughbred

Race horses first came to this country with the aristocratic settlers of the southern colonies. These wealthy colonists, many of them refugees from the English Revolution, were accustomed to the pastime of racing and to the prestige of owning winning horses, and brought their best racers with them to the New World. As southern fortunes grew throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, these colonists were able to begin importing examples of the new English breed, the Thoroughbred. The first Thoroughbred to reach this country was Bulle Rock, imported in 1730. From that point on, Americans set about creating their own version of the Thoroughbred, blending imported stock with their own native horses and adding strains of the short, tough, and fast American Indian ponies. Although interrupted by the American Revolution, Thoroughbred breeding in the South flourished. By 1798, the year the mighty Diomed was imported to Virginia, America had laid unshakable foundations for a strong line of Thoroughbreds that would eventually rival the best in the world.



Diomed poster

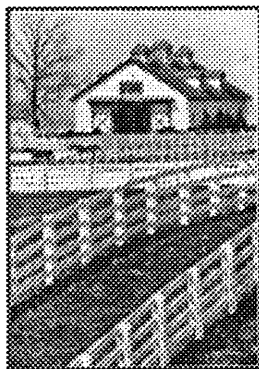
This advertisement, placed in a Virginia paper, announced the arrival of Diomed, and his availability for breeding.

Diomed was a racing legend in England, having won the inaugural English Derby in 1780, but the gallant horse proved himself useless in the stud barn. When he was sold to a Virginia breeder in 1798 at age 21, it was assumed that his best days were behind him. But once Diomed found himself on American soil, his problems disappeared, and over the next ten years he sired enough successful progeny to immortalize him as the father of the American Thoroughbred.

With Diomed, Virginia quickly established itself as the center of breeding in the new country. But while Southerners held impromptu races on any available strip of land, including village streets, American racing was born elsewhere. The first official race track in the colonies was opened by the royal governor of New York in 1665, on a clear stretch of pasture on Long Island. It was not until the 1690s that southern colonies were able to open tracks, as every available piece of cleared woodland went to the production of tobacco. As the over-planted land grew fallow, however, and became useless for the cash crop, the flat space was snatched up, and race tracks opened all over. Williamsburg became the center of southern racing, attracting the elite colonists from miles around to bring their horses together in grueling match races similar to those in England and New York.

The unique, developing culture of the post-revolution United States at the end of the eighteenth century affected racing as it did most American pastimes and habits. Northern

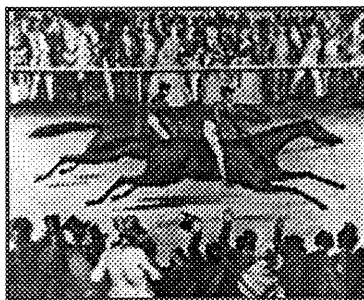
puritans felt racing was immoral, and effectively choked its growth in New England. In the South, too, problems were brewing. The dominant Church of England, officially tolerant of racing, was no longer in power. Questions arose about the importance of a gentry sport in a newly egalitarian society. But with breeders importing new stallions to replenish stock lost in the war, and southern horse owners wealthier than ever since the 1792 appearance of Eli Whitney's cotton gin, racing, and the Thoroughbred, survived the storm.



Breeding Farm

This farm is one of many that dot the landscape in Kentucky, the center of Thoroughbred breeding in the United States since the end of the Civil War.

After the temporary setbacks of the final years of the eighteenth century, the racing scene of the nineteenth century was marked by almost constant expansion. As settlers moved farther west, they took racing with them, and by 1840, Illinois, Missouri, Texas, and Louisiana all hosted racing events. The bluegrass of Kentucky and Tennessee welcomed horse breeders as they, too, moved westward. Hopeful diggers in the 1848 Gold Rush carried the Thoroughbred as far west as he would ever go in this country: to California. Racetracks in the east, meanwhile, were slowly gaining favor and were hosting more and more people from all classes, and were building grandstands and setting up rails unlike anything seen on the informal, village tracks of the west. One of the eastern tracks, Union Race Course, opened on Long Island in 1821 with a "skinned" (dirt) track. Unlike the traditional grass of English tracks, this dirt was fast, and Union became the model for future American tracks. Union Race Course was influential for another reason as well. Two years after it opened, it hosted the first of the great match races between north and south that came to characterize racing in the United States before the Civil War. Horse owners from each of the increasingly disparate sections of the country put up open challenges, offering purses to prove their horse better than any other. American Eclipse met Sir Henry that day in 1823 at the Union Race Course, and the northern-bred Eclipse won in three four-mile heats. Black Maria and Trifle went head to head in 1832, and Fashion and Boston met twice in the 1840s. The victor in those matches, northern Fashion, went on to meet Tennessee's Peytona in two matches in 1845.



Fashion vs. Peytona

After being beaten in their first match-up, Fashion edged by Peytona to win the second.

While these North versus South horse races were run at least partly in fun, and attracted more crowds than any other event in American history to that point, the real match-up between North and South, in the Civil War, brought racing to its knees. The traditional breeding centers of Virginia and the Carolinas were devastated: pasture was torn up, and horses stolen or killed in the wake of advancing armies desperate for both mounts and food. In the north, Thoroughbreds were conscripted for military duty, and tracks were closed or used as army training camps. After the war, areas of the country not as deeply marked with battle scars were the first to regroup. California racing flourished toward the end of the nineteenth century, while Kentucky and Tennessee emerged, relatively unscathed, as the new centers of American breeding. The north was able to reopen tracks in New Jersey and Pennsylvania, but the center of racing after 1865 rested squarely in New York State.



Saratoga Track

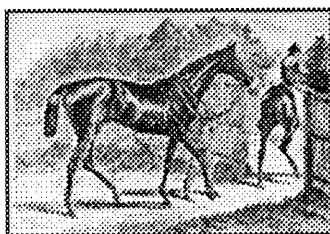
A view of the historic track started in the resort community during the civil war.



United States Hotel

Saratoga Springs, whose spas and resort hotels entertained thousands of the country's elite, was an ideal location for a racetrack

New York, undaunted by the horrors of Gettysburg, opened a new track in the summer of 1863 in Saratoga Springs ³. The success of this picturesque track encouraged a number of courses in the state after the war's conclusion. Jerome Park, opened in 1866 in New York City, became the control center of New York racing when the American Jockey Club set up headquarters there and declared their goal to "promote the improvement of horses. . . and to become an authority on racing matters." (Longrigg, 223) The famous match races were replaced by shorter dashes with large fields of horses on racing cards at Jerome Park, as everywhere in post-Civil War United States. England had switched to these short races by the beginning of the nineteenth century, and new horses imported to the United States both right before and after the Civil War were bred for this short, fast race, no longer exhibiting the traits of endurance and stoutness necessary for long matches. Just as England had done in the opening years of the century, the United States racing community founded Classic races that became the proving grounds of the truly great horses. The Kentucky Derby, the most famous of these Classics, was started in 1875; the Belmont Stakes and the Preakness Stakes had started several years before.



Iroquois

By winning the English Derby, he set the stage for the success of American Thoroughbreds in the racing world of the twentieth century.

As the nineteenth century closed, racing in the United States was preparing for huge changes to racing and to the Thoroughbred market, changes they could only guess at. Racing was becoming more corrupt every year, and by the dawn of the twentieth century was considered too dangerous for honest fans and owners. This corruption paved the way for the shut-down and reform of racing in the early years of the new century. The international racing world of the twentieth century was foreshadowed by the victory of Iroquois in the 1881 English Derby; as the first American-bred to win that august race, he signaled the importance of America in the racing world of the coming years.

Ahead to the next section: The Twentieth Century and Beyond

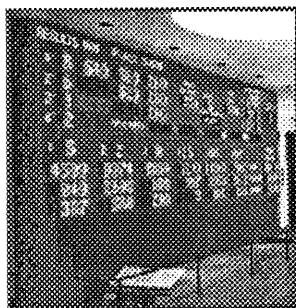
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The Twentieth Century and Beyond

The beginning of the twentieth century marked a low point for both English and American racing, as gambling and corruption took a firm hold on race tracks across both countries. In the United States, state governments responded with anti-gambling legislation which effectively closed most American race tracks by removing what had become the main incentive for attendance. With no bettors and little interest, breeders lost their market for Thoroughbreds and, devastated, were forced to export large quantities of bloodstock overseas. To alleviate a desperate situation, Churchill Downs officials began using French pari-mutuel boards in 1908. The boards created a legal and honest betting pool, where odds were determined solely by the amount of bets placed on each horse. State racing associations and governments gradually accepted the pari-mutuel, and it came to represent the rebirth of American racing. In England, the pari-mutuel appeared, but bookmakers also continued to ply their trade as officials sought other solutions.

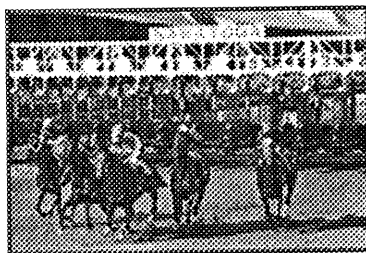


Toteboard

The board displays race times, and results, and provides the current odds for each horse based on the amount of money bet.

Both racing and breeding were affected by the great wars of the twentieth century. In England, racing was halted as unnecessary activities during the first and second world wars. In the United States race tracks remained open but found themselves dealing with the problems caused by wartime rations: transportation was limited, excluding horses from faraway meetings, and materials for building and repairing tracks and stables were stringently restricted to war use. The post-war years of 1919 and 1945 to 1946 witnessed amazing explosions of popular support for racing, as the euphoria of victory and carefree spending took hold. Once again readily available, building materials were put to good use in post-war years to build larger, more modern grandstands and clubhouses on major race tracks.

At an ever-increasing rate, new technological advances found their way into racing and onto these updated tracks, helping to assure the continued integrity of the sport. In 1929, the mechanical starting gate eliminated delays and disputes caused by the traditional starting line or tape. Close races were no longer a problem with the advent of the photo-finish camera, which caught every finish on the indisputable medium of film. These and other advances in mid-century reassured fans of racing's honesty, and brought more and more people to the track. These changes meant new tasks for trainer and breeder as well, as they prepared their horses to deal with the new machines and practices of the track.



Starting Gate
A gate in action at Saratoga.

At the same time that England and the United States were modernizing racing and race tracks, another trend was beginning that would, by the end of the century, revolutionize the racing and breeding industries: internationalization. Boundaries between countries began to fall, as more and more horses made overseas journeys to compete, and rules of racing became standard all over the world. New owners, from countries traditionally uninvolved with racing, began spending large amounts on English and American bloodstock. And breeding, too, became an industry without borders, with mares and stallions regularly exported to provide a particular genetic cross.

Japan first imported American Thoroughbred stock in 1895, with a small shipment of only fourteen stallions and mares. Their fledgling breeding industry was completely devastated during the Second World War, but since then has grown steadily into one of the most prominent in the world. Racing, too, has gained an enthusiastic following throughout Japan, as hundreds of thousands of fans attend race meetings outside of Tokyo.

Another major contributor to late twentieth century racing and breeding is the royal family of oil-rich Dubai. After blowing into the American bloodstock market in the 1980s and paying millions for top colts, these Arab owners have produced and trained their own crop of successful racers. To provide a showcase for their own Thoroughbreds, as well as to welcome the best from around the world, Dubai has become the latest in a string of countries to begin annual races meant specifically for international fields of horses. The four million dollar Dubai World Cup will be held for the first time in the spring of 1996.

The Dubai Cup, as well as offering a purse large enough to attract the world's best horses, will provide conditions and regulations that are sympathetic to the habits and needs of Thoroughbred competitors from all countries. The Washington International, held at Laurel Race Track in Maryland, was the first race to attempt to accommodate foreign horses, and has been followed in the United States with the ten million dollar Breeders' Cup and Chicago's Arlington Million. France hosts the annual Arc de Triomphe for an international field, and the Canadian International Championship and Japan's Tokyo Cup also draw some of the world's best.

The search for the world's best racer is becoming more and more difficult. From self-contained breeding farms in the United States and Europe, breeding has become an enormous industry that consistently crosses international borders in a quest for the ideal mix of genetics that might produce an international champion. Stallions are exported from England to cover the mares at a Japanese farm, while a single Australian mare might be imported to the United States to be covered by a Secretariat descendant.

Racetracks, like breeders and owners, have been deeply affected by changes in the late

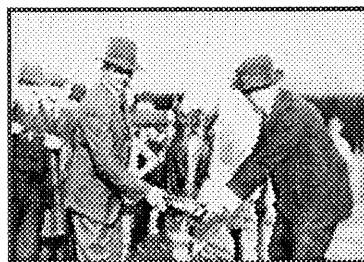
twentieth century. Advanced communication technology has come to form a major part of the structure of the sport. Television coverage allowed millions of people access to important races, and the advent of off-track betting provided the chance to place bets on races across the country. Many tracks, too, have embraced the idea of the simulcast, where fans can watch and bet on an entire race day at a distant track while the local track is dark. These innovations have brought millions of people from all classes and all areas of the world together in racing. The proximity of the racetrack is no longer a factor, as long as a television or off-track betting parlor is within reach.

In this fast-paced environment which has transformed a sport defined by tradition into a vehicle of the twenty-first century, the Thoroughbred still retains the spotlight. It would not be inconceivable that a horse born in Ireland of American and English parents would race in five countries, be retired to stud in Japan, and produce offspring in Australia and Dubai. Yet even as bloodlines change, and the community around the Thoroughbred grows, the horse remains the same bundle of energy, glory, and power, and new champions have appeared that embody the same spirit and stubbornness of Man O' War and Eclipse. Spectacular Bid, Sea Hero, and Cigar each have taken their place, deservedly, among the great Thoroughbreds of all time.

The Champion

Man O' War, Secretariat, Cigar. Their performances stirred people to tears, and fostered undying loyalty from their fans. What is it that marks certain Thoroughbreds as true champions of the sport of horse racing? Of the 50,000 Thoroughbreds foaled each year, only three of five of them will ever win a race (Flake). Of these winners, only a few will become household names. Some of these true champions reveal themselves early, while some come into their glory only as an older horse or at stud. Some make their name in one astounding, come-from-behind victory, but others secure themselves a place in history with a perfect racing record. Looking at individual champions, it becomes clear that a Thoroughbred champion is a horse that has simply, somehow, captured the spirit of the sport and the imagination of the racing fan.

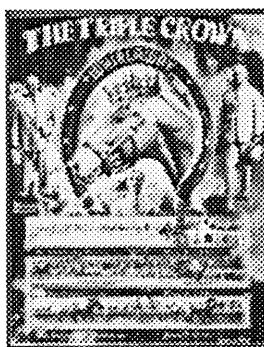
Arguably, the first champion English Thoroughbred was a chestnut named Eclipse. Foaled in 1764 during a solar eclipse, Eclipse was the great-grandson of the Darley Arabian. Eighteenth century racing in England was generally reserved for horses of five or older, so at age five, Eclipse went into training. In his first race, a match race of four-mile heats, Eclipse distanced his competitors⁴, an event which coined the phrase "Eclipse first, the rest nowhere". From that point on, Eclipse won every race he entered, and, according to legend, "was never whipped, spurred or headed. He became, literally, matchless (Longrigg, 80)."



Man 'O War

The tired Man 'O War takes a sip of champagne from his trophy in the winners circle.

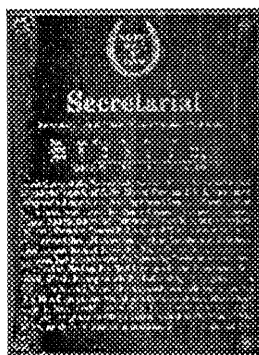
In the twentieth century, Man O' War was to become as big a legend as was Eclipse. Known by most as "Big Red", and by his groom as "the mostest hoss", Man O' War got his name from his breeder August Belmont. When Belmont enlisted in World War I at age 65, his proud wife named their new colt "My Man O' War". When the colt was sold at auction, the name stuck. Man O' War entered 21 races in his two year career, winning all but one. Eight of his wins set records, as did his earnings of almost \$250,000. With this astounding record, Man O' War came to embody the "horsemen's credo for judging greatness: "it isn't just what he did; it's how he did it" (Bowen, 55)." At his death, Man O' War was laid in state, and thousands appeared to mourn a lost hero.



Whirlaway

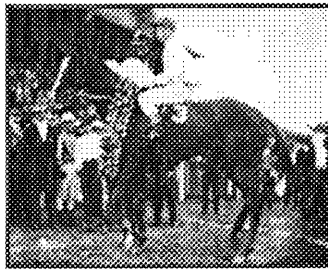
The triple crown races, once joined as a series, became the ultimate test of a thoroughbred, and winners became the heroes of the race track.

The Triple Crown series was created in the 1930s by linking the historic Classic races: the Kentucky Derby, the Preakness Stakes, and the Belmont Stakes. This series has produced several enduring champions over the course of the twentieth century. In the minds of fans, owners, and trainers, the Triple Crown has become the proving ground of the truly great champions. Secretariat, also known as "Big Red", won the series in 1973, the first winner in 25 years. He won the first two legs of the Crown two and a half lengths ahead of his nearest rival, but it was his finish in the Belmont Stakes, an amazing 31 lengths ahead, that secured Secretariat his place in history.



Secretariat Plaque

Secretariat's Hall of Fame plaque describes his amazing record.

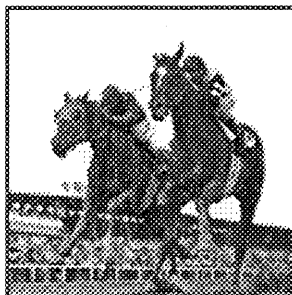


Regret

The victorious accepts the traditional blanket of roses in the winner's circle at the Kentucky Derby.

Not every Thoroughbred hero has become immortal with an amazing win record. Some have gained recognition with wins against all odds. The filly Regret won the 1915 Kentucky Derby against a field of colts. That feat was not repeated until 1980, with the victory of Genuine Risk. Some horses seem to flourish on one particular track or in one area of the country. While their race records are not stellar, they have captured the hearts of local audiences and live as legends. Seabiscuit, an average horse in the Eastern United States, was taken to California later in his career and became the father of California racing. More recently, Saratoga fans have adopted Fourstardave as their local champion. Although only average on other tracks, "Dave", nicknamed the "Sultan of Saratoga", has won at Saratoga every year for eight straight. When he retired in 1995, a street in town was named for him.

Champions are sometimes remembered for their part in a great rivalry. These matches between two brilliant racers go back as far as does horseracing. In nineteenth century United States, matches between the North and the South, with the best horse from each region competing, were extremely popular. In 1841, the New Jersey bred Fashion and the Virginia born Boston met. Fashion, the younger horse by four years, was known as "one of the fleetest, gamest misses of the turf" (Longrigg, 213) and had an unblemished record. Boston, also unbeatable, was nicknamed "Old Whitenose". Boston came not from the city but from a card game; his breeder lost him in a wager. Thousands of fans came to Camden, New Jersey to see the two pitted against each other. Youth prevailed, and Fashion won. Both horses are remembered not for their individual races but for their rivalry with each other.



Affirmed vs. Alydar

In one of their blazing match-ups, the two horses race toward the finish side by side. This time, Affirmed races ahead of his rival to take the 1978 Preakness.

By the twentieth century, match races had given way to shorter races with larger fields, but exciting rivalries continued to develop. Recently, Affirmed versus Alydar and Sunday Silence versus Easy Goer offered fans some of the most exciting moments in racing history. Perhaps the two champions best known for their intense rivalry with each other were Swaps and Nashua. Both were foaled in 1952, Nashua in Kentucky and Swaps in California. Both had nearly perfect records. When they met as three-year olds in the Kentucky Derby, Swaps won, leaving Nashua to take second place. At Washington Park that same year, in a match race, Nashua fought back, and beat Swaps. Both horses were later elected to the Hall of Fame.

However a horse gains the accolades of the racing fans, through his record or his spirit, through his connection with another horse or through his luck, a horse deemed a champion also becomes a hero of the sport. Stakes races like the 'Man O' War', and monuments like Belmont Park's Secretariat, remind every fan, trainer, and owner what racing is and what it can be: racing offers glimpses of perfection, of incredible beauty, grace and speed that can take your breath away. A champion reminds anyone lucky enough to see them race of the wonder and mystery of nature and her world.

Ahead to next section: [The Sporting Horse: Steeplechase and the Thoroughbred](#)

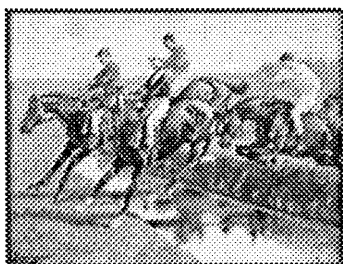
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The Sporting Horse: Steeplechase and the Thoroughbred

From the beginning of the breed, Thoroughbreds were intended for a narrowly defined purpose, that of racing over the flat. The modern Thoroughbred, though, has become increasingly versatile, succeeding in many different areas of sport. Show jumping and dressage have become Olympic level sports, taking advantage of the agility and grace of the Thoroughbred. The royal sport of polo, too, has benefited from the singular abilities of these horses. But it is the arduous work of the steeplechase, and of the hunt meeting, that has best, and most popularly, showcased the talents of the Thoroughbred outside flat racing.



A Steeplechase

This Fredrick Remington painting captures the energy and power of the jumping horse.

"Thorough-bred horses make the best hunters. I never heard of a great thing yet but it was done by a thorough-bred horse (Longrigg, 156)." By the late eighteenth century, most mounts used in English sporting hunts were Thoroughbreds. With their speed and agility, Thoroughbreds were ideally suited for hunts over flat, rocky pasture. Gradually, the speed of the horses began to dominate the hunt, as gentlemen owners and riders tried desperately to outrun their neighbors and prove their horse the fastest. In the 1790s, owners hired professional flat jockeys to ride their hunting Thoroughbreds in cross country match races over fences and hedges, and even the pretense of hounds and scents to follow had in general been abandoned. An English Sporting Dictionary of 1803 defined a hunt match, or steeplechase as it came to be called, as parties "rid[ing] their own horses across country to some point agreed upon, encountering all difficulties and taking the leaps in stroke (Longrigg, 156)."

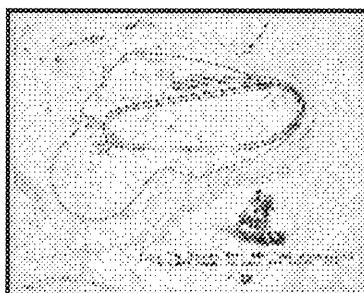
The first steeplechase course set up on a race track was created with artificial barriers at Newmarket in 1794. Gradually, the idea of a laid out jump course caught on, and the sport of steeplechasing was organized; prize money was offered, betting opportunities abounded, and classic races, like the Grand National at Aintree in 1839, were created. Barriers designed to provide the most challenging events included stone walls, hedges, fences, and brooks.



Belmont Poster

An early twentieth century advertisement for the American Grand National Steeplechase at Belmont Park

Steeplechasing came to the United States after the Civil War. In 1869, a steeplechase was held at Jerome Park in New York. "The people pronounced it immense and it was an all-absorbing topic for weeks (National Museum of Racing panel)." Jumping races were soon arranged on race tracks across the country, making up a regular part of many tracks' race meeting. An American Grand National was created to rival the original English race, and was run at Belmont Park.

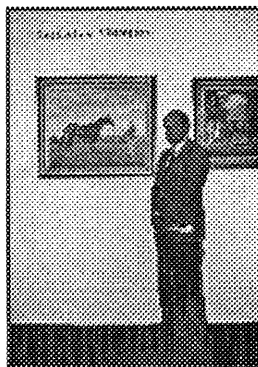


Maryland Hunt Cup Map/Far Hills Course Map

A hunt meeting for amateur riders, this course is made up of a grueling series of jumps and obstacles.

At the same time that steeplechasing was gaining popularity in the United States, another trend was developing that would eventually threaten the future of jumping at race tracks. Hunt meetings, similar to eighteenth century English hunts, were being created for amateur riders. Cross-country matches took place over open fields littered with natural barriers. Seen against these increasingly grueling hunt meetings, professionally-ridden steeplechasing came to be seen as the "poor cousin", with smaller, tamer jumps, and few rewards. However, the National Steeplechase and Hunt Association was formed in 1895 to regulate both of these sports throughout the United States, and that organization, together with enthusiastic and persistent owners, kept steeplechasing alive. Today, it has regained popularity, and the twentieth century has seen several "stars" of the 'chase emerge. Joe Aitcheson had won a record 440 steeplechase races by the time he retired as a jockey in 1977. Jonathan Sheppard was named the leading steeplechase trainer in the country in 1995; he has won that title twenty-one times in the past twenty-six years. But it is the horses who

are perhaps best remembered. Sergeant Murphy was the first American-bred horse to win the English Grand National, in 1923. Battleship, a chestnut son of Man O' War, won both the American and the English Grand Nationals in the 1930s.

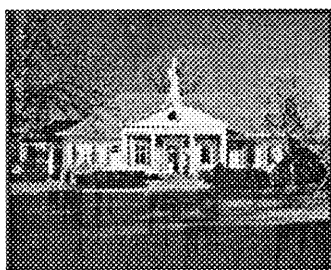


Jonathan Sheppard

Named the leading steeplechase trainer in the country in 1995.

Conclusion

"Thoroughbred racing is always moving forward on a line between here and perfection (Bowen, 18)." Every once in a while, a horse appears on the racetrack that provides a glimpse of what perfection is like: grace, beauty, energy, and heart. These gifts of perfection ensure that the sport of racing will outlast even the most ardent critic, and the hardest of economic times. Breeders and owners will never tire of mixing bloodlines and genetic traits to find the one combination that produces a Secretariat, or a Man O' War. Jockeys and trainers will not be able to give up the exhilaration of coaxing twelve hundred pounds of muscle around a track, or over a jump. And fans will always remain at the rails, in their attempt to see a piece of history, or to witness the birth of the next champion.



National Museum of Racing

The National Museum of Racing and Hall of Fame is located across the street from the historic Saratoga race track.

Racing and the Thoroughbred have a shrine, of sorts, as well. The National Museum of Racing and Hall of Fame was opened in Saratoga Springs, New York in 1950 to honor and explore the history, excitement and beauty of the racing Thoroughbred. Using exhibits, galleries, movies, and educational programs, the Museum helps to ensure the future of the "Sport of Kings" by passing on the love of racing and of the Thoroughbred to new generations of fans.

1 This theory of origin is widely accepted. However, it is only one of several theories on the origin of the

Thoroughbred.

2 These stallions' names indicate the owner/breeder who imported them and the country from which the horse originated. Because of poor record-keeping before importation, these origination names are often misleading. The Byerley Turk may have been an Arabian who was only shipped out of Turkey.

3 The first Saratoga track, today used as a training track, opened in 1863. The track now known as Saratoga Race Track opened in 1865.

4 To distance an opponent in a heat meant that the winning horse won the heat by 240 yards; a distanced horse was disqualified from subsequent heats.

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