

Super High

(High Brite—Image of Super, by Zanthé)

by DEBRA GINSBURG

Traditionally, in order to win the Valkyr Trophy, a California-bred filly must have displayed "consistency with class during her two- or three-year-old season." Those were the lofty words of the Trophy's originator, West Coast horsewoman Amory Hare Hutchinson. In the early years of the award, however, consistency seemed to be one thing, class quite another. They did not necessarily go hand-in-hand. A tough, hard-knocking claiming filly could be said to be consistent, and her sort was not all that hard to come by. But a filly that displayed true class against top stakes rivals was something else entirely.

Many of the early winners of the Valkyr Trophy spent some of their award-winning seasons running in claiming races. The trend took a definite swing for the better in 1955, though, when Miss Todd appeared on the scene. A graduate of the inaugural Del Mar Yearling Sale, this fast and talented daughter of Your Host sped through her division that year, setting all kinds of records and beating the best the West had to offer in the Junior League and Cinderella Stakes, Hollywood Lassie, and Del Mar Debutante.

After Miss Todd, the whole look of the Valkyr Trophy changed as its winners took on almost uniform standards of quality and class. In 1966, Mira Femme was recognized in one national year-end poll as a champion of her division at two, then a quartet of fillies—Admirably in 1964, Windy's Daughter in 1972, Fabulous Notion in 1982 and Melair in 1986—were undefeated during their Valkyr seasons, while 1985 recipient Fran's Valentine captured the historic Kentucky Oaks. And,

while Mrs. Hutchinson originally created the Valkyr Trophy to promote future broodmare prospects, 1979 recipient Variety Queen was the only winner thus far to also earn the crown as California's Broodmare of the Year.

There can be no denying that Harris Farms Inc.'s Super High was a paragon of those qualities for the 2002/2003 season. She handled any distance and any age group to score four stakes wins as the state's out-



standing 3-year-old filly of 2002. Last year at this time, her first career stakes win helped propel her dam to California Broodmare of the Year honors. This time, the accolades were Super High's alone to savor as the newest recipient of the Valkyr Trophy.

The management team at Harris Farms considered Super High a real standout from the moment she was foaled on Jan. 22, 1999. One of the first Harris foals sired by newcomer High Brite, she was out of the blue hen mare Image of Super and thus a half-sister to stakes winners Super Interco, To B. Super and Image of Glory. Breeder John Harris remembers that she was not a big filly, but

had great conformation and was very athletic-looking. "She was on everyone's top 10 list of yearlings," he recalled.

However, just as she was entering training at the farm, Super High came down with a bad bout of colic and had to be rushed to U. C. Davis for emergency surgery. The filly recovered well from the colic and gradually returned to training, but the whole experience did her fragile disposition a strange turn. Not a people-oriented horse to begin with, Super High became very stand-offish and sour on the whole deal. It took her a long time to start trusting humans again.

"She was pretty testy for awhile," said her dotting trainer, Carla Gaines. "I was really concerned because I thought she might hurt somebody. She was that quick and erratic in her behavior. I was hoping we could work through it."

Despite the fits of temper, Super High's untapped potential was unmistakable. Gaines, who once counseled juvenile delinquents for a living, knew exactly how to make a high-spirited filly choose a more positive career path. Super High made her first start, at Hollywood Park on Nov. 18, 2001. Ricardo Jaime, although still an apprentice, was assigned to ride the filly in her debut because he had been on her back in the morning and knew all her quirks. The pair scored a one-length victory in the 6 1/2-furlong Cal-bred maiden contest.

Shortly after that win, Harris got a call from bloodstock agent Eric Anderson who was assembling a racing stable for newcomer Stanley Fulton, owner of the Sunland Park racetrack in New Mexico. They had been impressed with Super High's maiden

victory and wanted to buy her.

"I really hated to sell her, but the best time to sell a young horse is right after that first win," Harris explained. "We agreed on \$225,000, subject to a vet exam. While my heart kept saying it was a mistake to let her go, my brain kept telling me to sell her. We got lucky when the vet turned her down for a minor problem."

So, Super High remained with Gaines and next came out in the filly division of the California Breeders' Champion Stakes. She finished a game second to eventual California champion Lady George and was third, now with Chris McCarron aboard, to that same runner two starts later in the Boo La Boo Stakes over 6 1/2 furlongs. Gaines always believed the filly would improve over a distance of ground and when she sent her two turns for the first time on March 29, 2002, Super High won by six lengths!

It was a switch in surfaces that sent the High Brite filly into another dimension, however. She unleashed her true talents on the grass and scored a front-running victory in the final running of the California Sires Stakes at Hollywood on May 31, for her first stakes win. Following that, she promptly stepped up to open company in the Flawlessly Stakes just a month later. As the only Cal-bred in a field dominated by European raced fillies, Super High led from flagfall to finish to impressively win the one-mile turf event in 1:35 2/5.

"Along with developing physically,

she just developed so much mentally," said Gaines at the time. "And probably the most magical thing was blinkers. That really helped a bunch. When things started clicking for her,



California Cup Matron Handicap—Nov. 2, 2002

she just started improving with her attitude. She's a winner and she knows she's a winner."

By summer's end, a dominating



Solana Beach Handicap—Sept. 2, 2002

victory in Del Mar's Solana Beach Handicap, added to narrow defeats in both the grade II San Clemente Handicap and a division of Oak Tree's Harold C. Ramser Handicap,

made Super High the state's leading 3-year-old turf filly. The 1 1/16-mile California Cup Matron forced her to return to the main track for the first time since the spring. Super High didn't seem to mind a bit.

Under new rider Pat Valenzuela, Super High left from the three-hole and went right for the lead. Once she was in control, the race was merely a formality. The filly clicked off comfortable early fractions of :23 1/5 and :47 1/5 and covered six furlongs in 1:11. She crossed the wire 2 1/2 lengths in front in the time of 1:42 2/5. Super High joined 1991 Matron winner Teresa Mc as Harris Farms' second Cal Cup winner and was

soon joined by a third, Unlimited Value, who captured the Sprint an hour later. She collected \$90,000 for her biggest win to date and pushed her bankroll past \$450,000.

Following her Cal Cup win, the filly ran fourth in the Cat's Cradle Handicap at Hollywood and was training for the inaugural Sunshine Millions Distaff in January, when she unfortunately sustained a saucer fracture in her shin and had to undergo surgery. It is planned for Super High return to the races at Del Mar with California Cup as her first major goal.

"Considering we almost lost this filly twice—first from colic and then with that sale that fell through—it's got to be fate that she should stay with us and turn out to be so special," John Harris concluded.

The top five Valkyr Trophy Candidates as voted by the CTBA Membership (by July 9, 2003):
1) Super High; 2) Summer Wind Dancer; 3) Humorous Lady; 4) Jetinto Houston; and 5) Shalini