

A Glorious Time



by ROBERT KNOLHOFF JR.

The question seems at once both familiar and mystical—“Like father, like son?” as Jim Bolus once wrote of the following pair. Thanks to the Thoroughbred’s mystique, we never tire of awaiting the answer to that particular query.

With a Pennsylvania-bred son of Northern Dancer, whom he scooped up for a shade less than \$38,000 at Newmarket’s October yearling sale in 1970, French-born trainer Alec Head aspired to win a European classic at the same 1 1/2-mile distance that had eluded the grasp of that legendary sire’s own quest for the Triple Crown in 1964. While Head’s ambition would likewise go unfulfilled with Lyphard, a compact and perfectly balanced racehorse like Northern Dancer, he settled for watching his pupil prosper as both a top-class miler and later, alongside his own sire, as one of the world’s most influential stallions.

However, the following decade, a Kentucky-bred son of Lyphard bred by Harold and Diane Keith breathed new life into the storyline. Named for William Shakespeare’s rotund dramatis personae, the beautifully-bred Falstaff, with a short, sturdy frame and a well-defined girth and set of hindquarters, far better emulated his sire. His dam Ivorina, a daughter of the great Sir Ivor, had won over ten furlongs in Ireland and would years later also produce Ivory Mint, a fine California-bred stakes winner by Key to the Mint. Falstaff himself was sent to England, straight into the capable hands of the inimitable Michael Stoute, who has since been knighted for his lifetime training exploits.

“Falstaff was one of the first foals we had,” remembers Diane Keith, who now runs the breeding program left behind by her late husband Harold, “and he became Michael’s pick for his Derby horse.”

If the demands and distance of the spring classics would prove just out of Falstaff’s scope, it would certainly not come from a lack of trying. Blessed with class and good acceleration, Falstaff found himself in the midst of an exceptionally deep crop of European colts. From his very first start over Newmarket’s right-handed July Course on Aug. 26, 1983, Falstaff held his form amongst an endless line of horses destined for an abundance of success in both Europe and the U.S. Home first in the seven-furlong maiden was Rainbow Quest, while the small, strong chestnut Falstaff finished third, two and a quarter lengths behind the future Prix de L’Arc de Triomphe winner, who was also making his debut at the races.

The field that lined up beside Falstaff for his second start on Oct. 13, was no less exceptional. Having retained top English jockey Walter Swinburn for the one-mile event, the chestnut colt took the lead over a furlong out and appeared home free before



Falstaff

yielding late to a pair of long-winded young performers. This duo was none other than Bob Back, a top-class colt by Roberto out of an American-bred daughter of Carry Back, and Commanche Run (GB), winner of the following season’s St. Leger in England, behind both of whom Falstaff again held well for third.

He came out of his next effort, a solid fourth-place finish at Doncaster behind Alphabatim and Mendez (Fr) in the group I William Hill Futurity, with a pulled muscle in his shoulder and

was put away for the year. *Time-form*, which identified Falstaff as a “good walker, shaped very well with a quick action,” concluded from the brief campaign that he was “sure to win races and stay 1 1/4 miles.”

Sent through the paces of a busy 1984 season, Falstaff earned his first career victory at Sandown in late May, with regular partner Swinburn aboard. Interspersed amongst this victory, he also ran with honor by placing in three more Group races, including two

while still a maiden and one where he even stayed on up to 1 1/2 miles in the Dalham Chester Vase. His European finale was a fourth-place effort in the group III Prix Daphnis in June, behind



Falstaff enjoying life at Hidden Oak Farm in 1993

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FALSTAFF Continued

Palace Music and Seattle Song where he perhaps provided a foretaste of his future destiny. He was then returned to California, the scene of many a triumph for his contemporaries from that same remarkable overseas class as well as the marvelous Greinton (GB) and fellow longtime Californian Al Mamoon.

Of all the locales the world over where he might have been received with open arms, it was California's breeding community where Falstaff was given his chance, even after only one further victory and two subsequent placings in listed company from eight starts on the West Coast. As Diane Keith foresaw, the presence of third dam My Sister Kate, a full sister to Raise a Native, would bode well for Falstaff's appeal to California breeders. Plus, thanks to Lyphard's success in the mid-1980's, the timing of Falstaff's arrival at Hidden Oak Farm in 1987 would prove flawless.

Already established as a champion sire in Europe, Lyphard was purchased in 1977 by Kentucky breeder John Gaines to stand at his Gainesway Farm in Lexington, where the 34-year-old stallion still holds court to this day. Limited by neither surface nor distance, the progeny of Lyphard were equally dazzling in America. He was led by his top-drawer fillies Sangue (Ire) in California and Sabin on the East Coast, as well as long-distance runners like Ends Well and Dahar, the latter a Charlie Whittingham-trained son of the inimitable Dahlia.

An early season victory by Dahar in the 1986 San Juan Capistrano launched, in earnest, a landmark year for his sire. By season's close, Lyphard stood atop the general sire lists in both America and Europe, while a pair of his 3-year-old colts would be regarded among the finest to ever grace the turf on their respective sides of the Atlantic.

In Europe, English champion Dancing Brave's visually stunning triumph in the Prix de L'Arc de Triomphe helped earn him a rating of 141 on the International Classifications, the highest ever awarded under the Pattern system. Back in America, Manila, an eight-length graduate on the dirt, matured quickly into an exceptional grass performer, highlighted by triumphs in the United Nations Handicap at the old Atlantic City Racecourse and Belmont Park's Turf Classic Invitational Stakes. The pair would meet once, in the Breeders' Cup Turf at Santa Anita, presumed by many to be an American coronation for Dancing Brave. Yet, it was Manila, today the grandsire of California stallion Bienamado, who prevailed in an epic finish over Theatrical (Ire), with Dancing Brave checking home in fourth place.

Beginning in 1988, with his first crop of six foals including the exceptionally fast colt Apollo, Lyphard's son Falstaff began to flourish in California. His progeny often sported a similarly compact frame to him, while earning for their sire the reputation of a source of tremendous speed. He would reach a pinnacle with his vintage 1997 crop, beholding his two California-bred champion fillies, Go Go and Cover Gal, plus stakes winners Ivory Bowl and Reds Superstar. So, as the sire of 20 stakes winners begins his fourth season at Creston Farms, the emphasis naturally flows towards Falstaff's enduring mark as a broodmare sire.

Considering their sire's impeccable four-tier presence of Lyphard, Sir Ivor, Damascus and Native Dancer in his pedigree, while flattering an ever diverse book of mares year in and year out, it would be no surprise should Falstaff's daughters, in time, both match and even surpass his influence.

While his own son Apollo, a Vessels Stallion Farm resident, has proven popular with both Thoroughbred and Quarter Horse breeders alike, Falstaff's profile as a broodmare sire may come to resemble that of Ogygian or one of California's own longtime favorites, Slewpy. They are both sires whose reputation for brilliance belies their classic lineage, representing a heritage that has returned once more to international prominence by the performances of the offspring of these sires' stakes-producing mares.

The finest of Falstaff's daughters have already made their presence felt in California. The 1994 California Cup Distaff winner Nannetta, an elegant chestnut mare bred by the longtime partnership of Harold and Diane Keith in partnership with pedigree expert Leon Rasmussen, has produced Quiet American's graded stakes-placed filly Nanogram as well as the winning

Alysheba filly Alyetta, both examples of the Rasmussen Factor (RF) of inbreeding to full siblings. Falstaff's Code It Nikki is the dam of Shalini, a stakes-winning daughter of Urgent Request (Ire), as well as Slewpy's stakes-placed mare Broke the Slump, both bred by James Briere.

The key element here is that they are all by proven middle-distance sires and, likewise, all exude Falstaff's patented turn of speed. Also bearing these traits is the fleet stakes winner Excessivepleasure, who is out of Pleasing, a full sister to Falstaff's diminutive yet ever redoubtable multiple stakes-winning gelding Brew.

As Lyphard has done for decades, the 23-year-old Falstaff maintains his own evergreen glow at Creston Farms.

"Falstaff stays young by taking good care of himself," says Creston Farm Manager Art Mercado. "He's an easy keeper and a steadying influence on the other stallions. His foals have always been kind like him, yet holding that same drive and ambition. He's great to be around, and has a real enduring presence."



Go Go, the California-Bred Champion Sprinter of 2001



Cover Gal, the California-Bred Champion Two-Year-Old Female of 1999 and Champion Three-Year-Old Female of 2000