

# Iza Valentine—A Grand Old Dam



by JW EQUINE

As you can probably guess by her name, Iza Valentine was foaled on February 14. The amazing part is that this California-bred daughter of Bicker and Countess Market—both stakes winners in California—was born on Valentine's Day in 1976, and is still alive and doing just fine at 29 years of age.

Robert Mitchell and Gilbert Wiener bred her, and she raced from two until five. She started 25 times (5-6-2) and was second in the Las Madrinas Handicap and third in the Bangles and Beads Stakes as a four-year-old. The \$65,900 she earned makes her the third highest career earner out of her dam.

Believe it or not, in terms of accomplishments, that was the low point in her life. Her first foal—by Saros (GB) and bred by Earl Scheib—arrived in 1982 and established Iza Valentine as the California's Broodmare of the Year in 1985. The Cal-bred Fran's Valentine won \$1,375,465 in 34 career starts, and that tally would have been considerably higher if not for a disqualification from first to tenth in the 1984 Breeders' Cup Juvenile Fillies. She set track records and won three grade I stakes. And, like her dam, Fran's Valentine became a stakes producer with stakes-winning offspring the likes of multiple grade I winner With Anticipation (\$2,660,543) and group III winner and multiple group I-placed With Fascination (\$174,978).

Iza Valentine also produced the graded stakes-winning sire Iz a Saros, multiple stakes-placed Recommendation, graded stakes-placed Crissy Aya, stakes winner Carsonality and Earl's Valentine, who is the granddam of stakes winner

Sheza Valentine. Eleven of her thirteen foals raced, each one was a winner, and her daughters produced winners. Now that's a mare with influence!

Scheib's Green Thumb Farm bred most of her Cal-breds, but her last five foals were born in Kentucky—one bred by Ron and Fran Stolich, four bred by John Gaines, and one bred by Gaines, Vinery and Hill 'N' Dale Farms.

Her final foal, Carsonality, was born in 1998, when Iza Valentine was 22 years old, and she was retired after that. In November of 2004, she found her way to Our Mims Retirement Haven (OMRH) near Paris, Kentucky, along with My Turbulent Miss, Taba, Jamra and Exactly So. I went to see her just prior to the 2005 Kentucky Derby.

I had braced myself for the possibilities of how a 29-year-old mare might look, but I was surprised—shocked, really. She not only doesn't look 29; she doesn't even look 19. She's bright-eyed, spry and the queen of the pasture.

Jeanne Mirabito, President of OMRH, said, "She came in good shape, with flesh on her bones and her feet and teeth done." That is not always the case, which is why Mirabito started OMRH. "I saw the need for a place for older mares. Pensioned doesn't always mean specialized care, and the old ladies have special needs. Because older horses tend to choke, I feed them 'soup'—moistened senior feed and my special supplements."

It takes a certain type of person to have a pasture full of older horses who can deteriorate rapidly, but Mirabito fits the bill. "I'd rather spend time with older horses; they have such personalities. I never sacrifice horse comfort for human comfort. I don't have gravel because it hurts their feet. I can live with mud." She caters to their individual needs and their individual personalities, and says, "Iza has definite likes and dislikes. She likes molasses more than anything in the world. Carrots are okay. She doesn't like peppermints, but likes a treat called Stud Muffins, which are made with a lot of molasses. She hates cats. She has very good teeth and they hurt, but she only bites when she's mad. . .like when someone lets Jamra out of the barn first."

OMRH is not a big-budget operation. Sometimes owners pay for their horses' retirement home, but not often enough. Inventiveness, donations and a regular job sustain the operation. "With Anticipation sent his halter, which raised \$401 on Ebay towards grandma's support," says Mirabito. That's not a lot when you consider that the descendants of Iza Valentine, who is still the fastest on the farm, have earned millions of dollars.



*Iza Valentine with Jeanne Mirabito and the other residents of Our Mims Retirement Haven in Kentucky*