

CAL CUP II: THEN & NOW

Bel's Starlet

by DEBRA GINSBURG

"I always wanted to try her down the hill," said trainer Richard Mandella of Bel's Starlet. "In her long turf races, sometimes she makes a premature move and hangs a little. Sprinting on the turf might be her best suit."

John and Betty Mabee's roan daughter of Bel Bolide was one of the best 2-year-old fillies on the west coast in 1989. She won the CTBA Stakes at Del Mar, ran second behind California champion Dominant Dancer in the grade I Oak Leaf Stakes and compiled earnings of \$132,365.

Her 3-year-old campaign was a bit disappointing, but after taking some time off to recover from an injury, Bel's Starlet returned to the racing wars in September, 1991, with a whole new attitude.

Mandella had an opportunity to test his theory when he sent Bel's Starlet down the hill in the Autumn Days Stakes on opening day of the 1991 Oak Tree meeting. She burst through an opening on the rail entering the stretch and rambled on home by two lengths in the sparkling time of 1:11 4/5, which equaled the course record. The win set her up perfectly for the Cal Cup Distaff.

Backed down to 7-10 favoritism and asked to carry 122 pounds, Bel's Starlet broke alertly from the outside post in

California Cup Distaff 1991

the field of 10. She made the lead easily without any pressure at all from Kent Desormeaux.

"I just guided her out there today," the rider said. "Most horses jump crossing the main track, but you can't even tell when the ground changes under her, she's so smooth."

After crossing the main track, Desormeaux asked Bel's Starlet for some juice, and the filly responded at once. She quickly opened a daylight lead in the upper stretch.

With a two-length advantage at the eighth pole and the needle on her fuel tank far from empty, the 1991 Distaff, for all intents and purposes, was over. Bel's Starlet coasted under the wire in 1:12 2/5, a good time that could have been even faster if she had been pressured. Paper Princess finished 1 1/2 lengths back in second and Dancer's Career ended up third.

Her victory in the 1991 Distaff made her a perfect two-for-two in grass sprints. Additional wins in the 1992 Valkyr and Great Lady M. Handicaps extended that streak to four. Bel's Starlet, however, wasn't even pointing for a second Cal Cup win until she scored a repeat victory in the Autumn Days and bettered Baffle's 1970 course record by a fifth of a second.

"This mare really comes alive in the fall at Santa Anita," John Mabee exclaimed.



Nov. 9, 1991—Cal Cup Distaff—Bel's Starlet 1st

Bel's Starlet won her second Cal Cup Distaff and proved to all she was indeed 'Queen of the Hill' at Santa Anita, but it wasn't an easy task. The 5-year-old mare was shouldering top weight of 124 pounds and conceding from six to 13 pounds to 11 rivals. After appearing boxed in and hopelessly beaten at the top of the stretch, Bel's Starlet slipped through a narrow opening on the rail and scored a three-length victory in 1:13 2/5.

Her victory in the 1992 Distaff made her the second back-to-back winner in Cal Cup history. Just two races earlier, His Legacy had scored his second consecutive win the Starter Handicap. The next horse to score back-to-back Cal Cup wins in the same race was Here-Tis Ranch's Chichim in the 1999 and 2000 Distaff.

Bel's Starlet tried to make it a three-peat in 1993,

of the Mabees' Individualist, a half-brother to the dam of Bel's Starlet, who was voted California's champion 2-year-old male of 1989 and ran second behind Gum in the inaugural Cal Cup Mile on turf. Bel Darling, another daughter of Bel Bolide, ran third in the 1991 Distaff Starter Handicap.

Mandella was inducted in the National Museum of Racing's Hall of Fame in August and Desormeaux won Kentucky Derbies aboard Real Quiet and Fusaichi Pegasus. Tiny Kristen, who ran fifth to Bel Starlet in the 1991 Distaff, became the dam of Stormy Jack. He finished third in the 1999 Cal Cup Juvenile and won three stakes at Del Mar. Jetinwith Kennedy, the ninth place finisher in the 1992 Distaff, produced 2000 California Champion 2-year-old filly Jetin Excess.

Bel's Starlet must be the biggest money earner who never received a California championship. Lethe-bighossroll and Answer Do were the state's sprint champions during the years of her consecutive Cal Cup triumphs, and Somethingmerry and Bountiful Native wore the crown as outstanding older female. Her first foal, a Seeking the Gold colt, sold for \$700,000 at the 1998 Keeneland July Sale, and her second, a colt by Kingmambo, was sent to Japan. Neither accomplished much on the race-track.

The Mabees sold her for \$500,000 at the 1999 Keeneland November Sale and Bel's Starlet is now a Kentucky resident. Last year, she produced a Danzig filly that brought \$450,000 as a weanling at the 2000 Keeneland November Sale.



Nov. 7, 1992—Cal Cup Distaff—
Bel's Starlet 1st

but finished second to Miss L Attack. She did win her second Valkyr Handicap over the Hollywood Park lawn that summer and scored another record-equating victory in the Shywing Handicap at age seven. She retired with 13 wins and 20 placings from 46 starts for earnings of \$863,802, of which \$696,887 was won on the turf.

It was hardly surprising to her breeders that Bel's Starlet loved to race on the grass. Bel Bolide had won the Two Thousand Guineas in England and such noted turf events as the Del Mar and Carleton F. Burke Handicaps. He was also the sire



Oct. 16, 1993—Cal Cup Distaff—Bel's Starlet 2nd (left)