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Secretariat magic still casts spell

By Glenye Cain Oakford

LEXINGTON, Ky. - Ask Thoroughbred breeders to tell you about Secretariat at stud, and you could spend the next two hours listening to the feats of his daughters. Secretariat, who died 20 years ago at age 19, is considered an influential broodmare sire, and with good reason. Consider just two of his daughters: Weekend Surprise, dam of 1990 Preakness winner Summer Squall and 1992 Horse of the Year A. P. Indy, and Terlingua, dam of leading sire (now pensioned) Storm Cat.

A handful of Secretariat's sons had brilliant racing careers. Risen Star, who died in 1998, was especially memorable for his 14 3/4-length victory in the 1988 Belmont, which reminded race fans of his sire's 31-length victory in 1973. And Tinnners Way won three Grade 1 races and earned \$1.8 million.

But many of Secretariat's stallion sons, by contrast, have labored in relative obscurity. Their numbers are dwindling - Secretariat's last crop, foaled in 1990, is now 19 - and they can be difficult to trace as their breeding careers have wound down or as they have traveled into private breeding programs. There are at least eight Secretariat stallions advertised as active in the United States in 2009: Academy Award (out of Mine Only, by Mr. Prospector), Akram (Lizzie's Light, by Icecapade), Country Side (Constant Nymph, by Never Bend), Count von Count (Lass Trump, by Timeless Moment), Innkeeper (Sue Babe, by Mr. Prospector), Regal Secret (Regal Alibi, by Viceregal), Thill a Sec (Thill, by Iron Ruler), and Tinnners Way (Devon Diva, by The Minstrel).

At first, they seem to have little in common, other than their sire. Their colors range from gray to nearly black. Some are leggy; one was once mistaken for a Quarter Horse.

But they do share fans' fascination. Even people who know nothing about racing believe that by touching a Secretariat horse they are touching a piece of remarkable history, their owners say. Some fans ask to see Jockey Club papers as proof of the illustrious heritage. Most reminisce about Secretariat. A few are moved to tears.

However humble these horses' jobs might seem, as compared with the sires who earn five or six figures for every live Thoroughbred cover, their owners report that the remaining sons of Secretariat serve as a touchstone for a public that still recalls, through personal or cultural memory, one of racing's greats.

Debbie and Kenneth Harris of Maiden, N.C., got a taste of the "Secretariat effect" soon after they bought chestnut Regal Secret.

"This man, I don't know how he heard we had him, but he came to us and said, 'I could be in tears right now, I saw his daddy race,'" recalled Debbie Harris, 43.

Regal Secret, now 28, covers the Harris' Quarter Horses, mostly for barrel-racing. "They excel in the barrel arena," Harris said. "They're just awesome. They've got heart and go and good minds to them."

But the Harris' also have a few Thoroughbred racehorses by him, including 2

year-old Secret Runaway, a son of the Marquetry mare Runaway Gal, for which they're seeking racing



Bob Coglianese
Secretariat completes his Triple Crown with a runaway victory in the 1973 Belmont Stakes.

partners.

They never intended to stand a stallion, but when an Ohio man told Debbie in 1998 that E. P. Taylor-bred Regal Secret was for sale, they jumped at the chance. The horse's appeal?

"His daddy!" she said, laughing. "Enough said. We drove to Ohio and back in one day, 15 hours, and I didn't give him the deposit until he laid me down papers that showed me the lineage."

The Secretariat effect ultimately rewrote Joycelyn Kasmir's whole business plan after she offered Country Side for stud in Needville, Tex. Kasmir first mistook the dark bay stallion, now 25, for a Quarter Horse when she spotted him in a pasture. His sire line convinced her to buy him.

"I was breeding racehorses, but people kept buying my foals for pleasure riding, even before they were even weaned off my mares, and for prices that we would have expected to get at a yearling sale," said Kasmir, 36, who stands Country Side for \$1,500. "Everybody knows Secretariat, and they want a grandson or a granddaughter."

Most of Country Side's business is now in paints, palominos, and Western sport horses.

"It's ruined Country's race stats, but they just get snatched up," she said. "It's amazing."

Chris and Amy Rosell of Win Row Farm near Lebanon, Ohio, also saw Academy Award's race stats diminish because of his popularity for other sports. The farm found a side market when his son Caped Crusader became one of the nation's leading show hunters.

"Thoroughbred people interpreted that as he wasn't breeding many mares or wasn't getting them in foal," said Amy Rosell, who also breeds and trains hunter-jumpers. "But if he bred, say, 20 mares, 18 of those might be show horses or never get registered. He was covering more Thoroughbred racemares, but what's happened now with the economy and with not that many racing in Ohio, they're not getting registered. They're being sold off as riding horses. We've bred and owned many ourselves, and I've sold many as show hunters and jumpers, and they've all done very well."

Academy Award, now 23, stood for \$1,500 in 2009. But his primary market, Thoroughbred mares bred commercially or to race, dropped when Ohio's racing industry hit hard times. So when a Thoroughbred breeder out West offered to buy him recently, the Rosells agreed. According to Amy Rosell, a deal with the unidentified breeder is pending, and she hopes it will give the Grade 1-winning stallion another chance to get racehorses.

Another Grade 1 winner, Tinnners Way, is faring better at Key Ranch in Salato, Tex., where he commands at \$2,000 fee. The chestnut millionaire won consecutive Pacific Classics in 1994 and 1995, making him a fan favorite. His status as the last foal from Secretariat's final crop, foaled in 1990, adds some luster.

Two Secretariat and Tinnners Way fans, Phil Leckinger and Jerry Hardin, brought the 19-year-old Juddmonte homebred to Texas in the first place.

"I'd never been in the stallion business before, but I felt he could be successfully marketed in Texas," said Leckinger, 49, who struck a deal to move the horse from Harris Farms in California. "I liked him for a lot of reasons. One, he was a son of Secretariat and he was one of the few sons that were really successful. And his general temperament - he's the real deal as far as a smart horse.

"Harris Farms told us we'd get a lot of phone calls and requests to see him," he added. "It's gone beyond fascinating. It's gratifying to know that so many people care about an individual horse. And, if you look, his daughters especially are doing well. We still think there are enough people who understand he has something to offer the gene pool. And we've been able to develop some strong relationships in the industry because of him."

"You bring out Tinnners, and people smile," said Key Ranch manager Joe Kerby, 51. "It's like they've got a

personal connection, all the memories of Secretariat hit them all at once."

Tax accountant Bette Conlon wasn't looking to get into the stallion business either. But she loved Secretariat. In the early 90s, she bought shares in his stakes-placed gray son Akram. In 1994, she bought out her partner and eventually moved Akram to her farm in Unionville, Va.

"Secretariat was born right down the road from me," Conlon, 67, said. "What better place for one of his sons to be than back here in Virginia?"

Akram, now 21, is listed with a \$2,000 fee but rarely covers outside mares.

Conlon herself bred Akram foals to race and even got a trainer's license so she could manage his foals from foaling to finish line.

"They certainly haven't made me rich," she said. "They probably didn't even pay their own way, but we had a lot of fun with them and they did fairly well.

"Akram has a 12-foot by 16-foot stall, the door is never closed, and he has a paddock attached to it, so he goes in and out all year long. He's very happy."

Several of Secretariat's breeding sons have established reputations as dressage and eventing sires. Innkeeper, a \$1.15 million yearling and half-brother to Irish champion Sir Harry Lewis, has competed variously as a show hunter, eventer, and dressage horse. Now 21, he stands at for \$1,200 at En Avant Stud in Gibsonia, Pa., which also occasionally uses him as a lesson horse for nervous beginners. "He will never be sold," the farm website says. "He is our family pet and couldn't be replaced for any money."

Dark bay Thill a Sec, 22, was a candidate for the all-black caisson team that participates in military funerals at Arlington National Cemetery after his racing career. When the selection team decided he was too big for the light horse team and too small for the heavy horse team, owner Kurt Hopkins retired him out West.

A few years later, in 1994, Hopkins called Clint Rieff, a breeder and truck driver, and asked if he'd be interested in a son of Secretariat.

"I was thrilled," said Rieff, 51. "How many people have Secretariats?"

Thill a Sec has become a popular local dressage sire, covering two or three warmblood mares a year in Powell, Wy. Fee: \$500.

But perhaps no Secretariat son has had as curious a transformation as Count von Count.

Foaled in 1989, he raced just two times, finishing eighth and then sixth, earning nothing but bleak comments: "no rally" and "no speed."

The chestnut horse retired to stud in Michigan and sired nine winners before winding up at the Michigan chapter of Canter, a racehorse adoption group. That's where Steve Schindler found him, still entire and with few prospects, in 1999.

Schindler, a former professional trainer, was looking for a jousting horse. Seriously.

"What I do for fun is medieval games and jousting," Schindler, 43, explained. "One of the Morgan stallions I was using for games died suddenly, so I was looking for another sport horse to be my games horse."

Count von Count fit the bill. He was flashy, athletic, and well-mannered under saddle. Together, Count and Schindler have traveled the country for medieval-themed fairs and exhibitions, performing in jousting and mounted archery, which Schindler said the horse seems to love. He was the 2005 top-ranked Thoroughbred stallion in dressage, and he's been everything from trail horse to lesson horse.

Count stands at Schindler's Black Rock Stables in Fowlerville, Mass., for \$500 to \$750 and has been most successful getting competitive trail and endurance horses and eventers. And, yes, Schindler says, he gets that

Secretariat effect, too.

Several years ago, Schindler was invited to parade Count at a black-tie charity auction to which he'd donated a season.

"He comes walking up the back loading dock, through the kitchen, and right into the ballroom," Schindler recalled. "Everything just stopped. People were like, 'A son of Secretariat! My God, can I touch him?' The name Secretariat still really brings people out, and all the advertising we've done says he's a son of Secretariat. People still remember."

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