

TRIPLE DIGIT BEYER SPEED!!!

By John P. Sparkman

In 1976-77, a red comet called Blushing Groom streaked across the French racing firmament, winning seven of his nine French starts from about five furlongs to about a mile. The son of the erratic Nasrullah stallion Red God lost his first start only through inexperience and his last when he did not find a clear passage until too late in a farcically slow Prix Jacques le Marois.

Blushing Groom also ran very well indeed in the 1 1/2-mile Epsom Derby. The handsome red colt hung on for third, though the trip was obviously too far for him, beaten about five lengths by The Minstrel and Hot Grove, and he certainly could have won Group 1 races at around 1 1/4 miles had he been given the opportunity. His stud career at Gainesway in Kentucky generally reflected that aptitude for distances from a mile to 1 1/4 miles or sometimes 1 1/2 miles, as he became one of the world's best sires of the 1980s and early 1990s.

Blushing Groom led the English sire list in 1989 when his best son, Nashwan, won the 2000 Guineas and Derby, and he led the broodmare sire list there in 1995 but also proved more than capable of siring dirt champions, headed by Racing Hall of Fame member Sky Beauty, champions Blushing John and Arazi, and Travers winner Runaway Groom.

Blushing Groom's best sons at stud were Prix de l'Arc de Triomphe winner Rainbow Quest, twice the leading broodmare sire in England, and the brilliant miler Rahy, a success on both sides of the Atlantic, but two American sons also handed his male line forward for another generation. Runaway Groom's son Cherokee Run, champion sprinter of 1994, enjoyed a long and honorable stud career, but the latter's sons, War Pass and Yonaguska, have yet to sire an obvious successor.

Blushing Groom's son Mt. Livermore (out of Flama Ardiente, by Crimson Satan) was probably one victory away from a sprint championship in 1985 and succeeded his sire at Gainesway, siring 77 stakes winners, including two champion sprinters in Racing Hall of Fame member Housebuster (Big Dreams, by Great Above) and Orientate (Dream Team, by Cox's Ridge).

Housebuster failed as a stallion, but Orientate has done better overall without ever reaching the same heights as his sire and grandsire. Orientate's son, Declassify (Mir Cat, by Tale of the Cat), winner of the Grade 1 Triple Bend Stakes on June 28, may well be Orientate's last chance to continue the Blushing Groom male line in America.

Like many other American champion sprinters, Orientate was not by any means a pure sprinter. Placed at 2, he developed into a good miler at 3, winning the 1 1/16-mile Indiana Derby on dirt and the one-mile Sir Beaufort Stakes on turf. In his first two starts at 4, Orientate finished second, beaten a length by Western Pride, in the Grade 2 San Fernando Breeders' Cup Stakes at 1 1/16 miles but faded badly after setting the pace in the 1 1/8-mile Grade 2 Strub Stakes.

What limited Orientate's stamina was that he was a dedicated frontrunner, requiring the lead or at least running freely just off the pace, regardless of distance. Trainer D. Wayne Lukas finally

decided after the Strub to confine Orientate to shorter distances. He led all the way to win the seven-furlong, Grade 2 Commonwealth Breeders' Cup Stakes in the slop at Keeneland but was beaten on turf in the five-furlong Grade 3 Aegon Turf Sprint and Grade 1 Shoemaker Breeders' Cup Mile. Orientate never ran in anything but dirt sprints again and did not lose in five more starts.

Orientate led all the way to win the Grade 3 Aristides at 6 1/2 furlongs by 4 1/2 lengths and outdueled Echo Eddie to win the six-furlong Smile Sprint Handicap by six lengths. He faced tougher fields at Saratoga in the Grade 2 Alfred G. Vanderbilt at six furlongs and Grade 1 Forego at 6 1/2 furlongs, but it made no difference. He beat Say Florida Sandy by two lengths in the Vanderbilt and Aldebaran by 2 1/4 in the Forego. The only thing standing between Orientate and a 2002 sprint championship was the Breeders' Cup Sprint at Arlington Park, and for once, Orientate could not make the early lead as the extravagantly speedy Thunderello streaked through a quarter in 21.53 seconds and a half in 43.91. Orientate kept grinding though and finally wore down Thunderello to win by a half-length.

Retired to Gainesway, Orientate has been moderately successful but not quite successful enough to maintain his position in the competitive commercial market, despite the fact that he sired a top-class filly in his first crop. Lady Joanne (Oatsee, by Unbridled) captured the Grade 1 Alabama Stakes in 2007, and another daughter, Intangaroo (Tasso's Magic Roo, by Tasso), added Grade 1 wins to his record in the 2008 Humana Distaff, Santa Monica, and Ballerina. Until Declassify came along, however, those were Orientate's only American Grade 1 winners among his 42 stakes winners from 760 foals age 3 and up (5.5 percent).

Bred in Kentucky by Gaines-Gentry Thoroughbreds, Declassify is the second foal out of Mir Cat, an unraced daughter of Tale of the Cat from one of the best families in the American Stud Book. Mir Cat's dam, the unraced Destination Mir, by Cherokee Colony, produced only one minor stakes-placed winner and a couple of stakes-producing daughters, but she is a half-sister to the ill-fated Grade 1-winning sprinter-miler A Phenomenon, by Tentam, Grade 1 winner Seattle Meteor, by Seattle Slew, and stakes winner Meteor Miracle, by Twining, dam of Grade 2 winner Meteore, by Pulpit.

Destination Mir's placed half-sister, Meteor Stage, by Stage Door Johnny, is the dam of champion Pleasant Stage and graded winners Stage Colony and Colonial Play, who is dam of multiple Grade 1 winner Marsh Side, by Gone West. The latter trio's full sister, Meteor Colony, by Pleasant Colony, is the dam of another Grade 1 winner in Changeintheweather, by Gone West.

Declassify's third dam, Northern Meteor, by Northern Dancer, won the California Oaks and is a half-sister to Grade 3 winner Middle Stage, by Stage Door Johnny, and stakes winner Pleasant Line, by Pleasant Colony, out of Buckland Farm's great foundation mare Patelin, by Cornish Prince, winner of the Selima and Alcibiades Stakes.

Northern Meteor's half-sister by Sea-Bird, Last Bird, produced Grade 1 winner Roanoke, by

Pleasant Colony, and also is the fourth dam of champion I'll Have Another, by Flower Alley, winner of the 2012 Kentucky Derby and Preakness. Last Bird also is the fourth dam of 2012 champion 2-year-old filly and 2013 champion 3-year-old filly Beholder, by Henny Hughes, and her Grade 1-winning half-brother, the exciting young sire Into Mischief, by Harlan's Holiday. Another daughter of Patelin, Flying Buttress, by Exclusive Native, is the dam of Grade 1 winners Pillaster, by Riverman, and Class Play, by Stage Door Johnny, and the third dam of Australian Group 1 winner Reenact, by Marscay.

Gaines-Gentry purchased Declassify's second dam, Destination Mir, for \$170,000 at the 2003 Keeneland November breeding stock sale. They tried to sell her daughter, Mir Cat, on several occasions without success and sent her son, Declassify, through the Keeneland November auction ring unsuccessfully as a weanling before letting him go for only \$17,000 to Preston Stables at the 2011 Fasig-Tipton October yearling sale.

Declassify dazzled with a 10-second breeze at the 2012 OBS spring sale of 2-year-olds in training for consignor Eddie Woods, however, and Hill 'n' Dale Sales' Donato Lanni purchased him for \$450,000 on behalf of Kaleem Shah. Declassify did not make it to the races until April of his 3-year-old season but showed immediate brilliance, winning his first two starts by 11 1/2 and 7 1/2 lengths, respectively, at Santa Anita and Hollywood Park. Off for four months, he finished fourth in his comeback race last fall, then missed another seven months before resurfacing with a good second in a quickly run optional-claiming race at Santa Anita in May. The Triple Bend was his second start as a 4-year-old and only his fifth career start.

Mir Cat has since produced a 2014 filly by The Factor named FACT OF LIFE (A \$260,000 Keeneland sales yearling) which has started three times and has a first, second and a third with earnings of \$46,360, and an Uncle Mo 2015 colt named MIR MO, that sold at Keeneland Sept 2016 Yearling sale for \$725,000 .