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Manifold rallies to triumph

Sidney Kiran, DH News Service, Bengaluru, Jul 17 2017, 0:17 IST



Neeraj Rawal pilots Manifold to victory past Castlebridge.

The sharp brain of trainer Pesi Shroff, the brilliance of jockey Neeraj Rawal and the heart of filly Manifold all merged in emphatic fashion as the three-year old pulled off a thrilling come-from-behind victory in the Kingfisher Ultra Derby Bangalore here on Sunday.

On a glorious day for racing at the Bangalore Turf Club where the 2000-metre blue riband event set the pulses soaring, Fillies Championship Stakes winner Manifold produced a grand-stand finish, beating Colts Championship Stakes winner and favourite Castlebridge (P Trevor astride) right at the post to take home the Rs 1,58,59,800 cheque.

The biggest race of the summer season had the top three colts and top two fillies in the field but none of them had run the ten furlong distance previously. Castlebridge, who scored a jaw-dropping pole-to-finish victory in the Colts Championship, chose to employ the same strategy that saw win in one of the fastest times.

The Bharath Singh trained colt bolted quickly out of the gates and instantly charged ahead. He stayed ahead around the first curve with Olympia Fields (S John astride) and Hope Is Eternal (R J Hannam) placed second and third.

Heading into the straight with around 1600 metres to go, Trevor, one of the sought after jockeys in the country, chose to maintain a high tempo with Castlebridge. He never slowed down one bit and others too had to follow suit but they stayed a few metres behind to conserve energy.

Castlebridge, possessing good stamina, took the penultimate turn still ahead of the pack and entered into the final straight well in command of the race. Trevor then started to whip Castlebridge and others in the pack also started to beat their horses as the tempo rose.

With around 300 metres left, it seemed Castlebridge would replicate its Colts success with the strategy as it kept chugging at great speed. But Manifold, who scored a superb come-from-behind

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in the Fillies Championship Stakes, had other plans.

Neeraj steered her away from the bunch and having got a clear field in the final 300 metres, she started to build up fantastic momentum. Castlebridge, however, kept marching on and just when it appeared he would take home the spoils, Manifold overtook him with about 20 metres left before crossing home half-a-length ahead in a timing of 2:03.21.

Castlebridge clocked 2:03.30 while Olympia Fields came third, two lengths behind, and Kangra (P S Chouhan astride) came fourth.

"I've been privileged enough to work with some great horses," said Shroff, whose previous Derby triumph in Bengaluru was with Set Alight in 2008 in a record time of 2:02.32. "When you work with great horses, great things happen and that's what happened today.

"Manifold is a top filly from a premier stud farm and she's a treat to train.

"Today, she showed great heart. Despite being at the back for most part, she and Neeraj never gave up.

"Neeraj guided her well towards the end and she responded exceptionally. Both were fantastic today."

Neeraj, who is slowly making a strong name for himself, said he is happy to pull off a coup. "With 300 metres left, I knew it was going to be very difficult to beat Castlebridge. But Manifold has got great stamina and I just kept pushing her. She just blazed through. She was too good," added Neeraj, who won the Indian Turf Invitation Cup with Temerity at the same venue this March.

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