

THE GREATEST SIRE OF INDIAN DERBY WINNERS

Can his record ever be broken?



Grey Gaston,

He produced 14 Classic winners from just 87 foals. This strike rate has not been bettered in India nor his feat of siring five winners of the Indian Derby

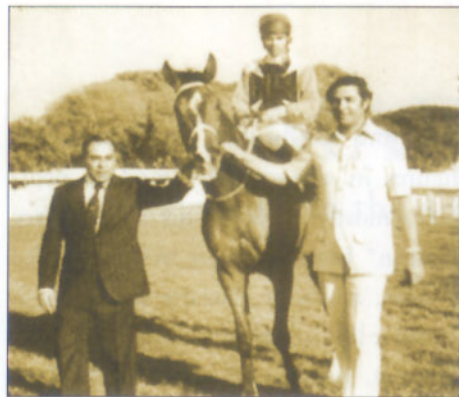
In the history of the Indian Derby, Grey Gaston holds a unique position, having sired five winners. The next best tally of three winners stands to the credit of Spadassin* - Jeanne d'Arc, Martial Law and Commoner - Rock of Gibraltar* - Rocklie, Fair Haven and Prince Khartoum -, Malvado [CAN] - Exhilaration, Desert Warrior and Astonish -, Riyahi [IRE] - Cordon Bleu, Starfire Girl and Amazing Bay - and Razeen [USA] - Indictment, Star Supreme and Psychic Flame. Only Razeen [USA] is still active and unless he can come up with two more Indian Derby winners in his remaining crops, Grey Gaston*'s feat is likely to hold the pride of place for a long time to come.*

Grey Gaston*, the third foal of his sparingly raced dam Baroda Princess, made 5,100 gns as a yearling, became the property of Mrs. R. Lamb and entered the yard of G. Beeby. He had seven starts in his first year, all of them at major tracks in England and shed his maiden tag on his last, a 42-runner event at Newmarket in October where Connorton hit the front a furlong out and held on to win by a head from Club Talk. He had twice been on the board earlier, finishing within a length of Ginevra - winner of the Epsom Oaks the following year - in the Tankerville Nursery at Ascot. Timeform gave him a rating of 92 at the end of the year.

Next year, now trained by Ryan Jarvis at Phantom House in Newmarket, Grey Gaston* had half a dozen outings, won a race over 10 furlongs and ran quite respectably in the big handicaps, being third to Redundant in the Britannia Stakes at Ascot's Royal Meeting, fifth of fifteen behind Warpath in Extel Centenary Stakes at Goodwood and finally, third again, to Fire Red in the Yellow Pages Summer Cup at Newbury. Timeform described him as "a strong, compact colt ... genuine and consistent" and upped his rating to 97. He was entered in Tattersalls' 1972 December Sale where Maj P. K. Mehra bought him for 1,850 gns.

Some of the other knowledgeable Indian buyers at that sale felt that Maj. Mehra had erred in his choice for the colt was dry-coated. Speed is what Maj. Mehra was looking for and as Grey Gaston*'s sire, Fortino II, was a winner of Europe's premier sprint race, the Prix de l'Abbaye de Longchamp, he stuck to his selection. Besides, as he often mentioned, "There were no alternatives, given the fact that I had only a shoe-string budget in which to buy a stallion and three mares."

Maj. Mehra was then the Commandant of President's Bodyguard and Grey Gaston*'s first quarters were in the backyard of his official residence in the



*Nelston (Grey Gaston - Nelciana)
Winner of the Indian Derby Gr. I*



*Manitou
(Grey Gaston - Dusty Marta)*



*Enterprising (Grey Gaston - Salvation)
One of the greatest colts in Indian Turf History*

sprawling Rashtrapati Bhavan complex. It was there that he commenced his breeding career in 1973. In the meantime, Maj. Mehra bought some land in Caterpuri. The horses moved there and on February 14, 1974 the first foal was born at the newly established Usha Stud. That foal was a colt by Grey Gaston* out of Dusty Marta*. Named Manitou, that colt enabled Mr. Ranjit Bhat to record the only owners' hat trick, annexing the Indian Derby by ten lengths, a winning margin that has not been bettered.

Winning the Indian Derby with the very first foal bred at one's farm can only be a breeder's dream. Grey Gaston* made Maj. Mehra's dream come true. Maj. Mehra certainly had the Midas touch. Some years before the establishment of the Usha Stud, the very first mare that he owned had also produced a classic winner. That was a mare called Eagle Don* and her foal, imported "in utero", was named Mica Express, who won the South India Oaks. Maj. Mehra was a horseman par excellence and the stars were certainly benign to him. Yet, he never ceased to acknowledge the contribution of Grey Gaston*. "That horse made me," he used to say often.

GREY GASTON* INDIAN DERBY WINNERS

1. MANITOU
2. TRACK LIGHTNING
3. NELSTON
4. ENTERPRISING
5. REVELATION

His dry-coated condition troubled Grey Gaston* quite a lot and he used to be miserable in the severe summers of Delhi despite all the Polo mints - he was very fond of them - the Mehra girls fed him surreptitiously. The worst was in 1976 when he was so unwell that most of the Usha Stud mares had to be diverted to Knight of Medina*. Besides,

Usha Stud was then a fledgling operation with only a few mares. Then Common Land [GB] arrived in 1977 to further denude his opportunities. Finally, there was his untimely death just before the start of the 1984 covering season. In his 11 years at stud, Grey Gaston* covered only about 150 mares, including Maj. Mehra's polo pony Zuzella. 87 of his foals were named of which 82 came under the Starter's orders, 73 caught the judge's eye, 36 - an incredible 41.4% - earned black-type and 17 - 19.5% - were Classic winners.

It is not just the statistical fact of Grey Gaston*'s having sired the winners of five Indian Derbys - he had a

FORTINO (FR) gr. 1959	GREY SOVEREIGN (GB) gr. 1948 [B]	NASRULLAH (GB) b. 1940 [B]	NEARCO (ITY) br. 1935 [BC]
		KONG (GB) gr. 1933	MUMTAZ BEGUM (GB)*1932
RANAVALO (FR) b. 1954	GREY GASTON*	RELIC (USA) blk. 1945	BAYTOWN (IRE) gr. 1925
		NAVARRA (ITY) b. 1948	CLANG (GB) br. 1925
SKYMASTER (IRE) ch. 1958	BARODA PRINCESS (GB)1963	GOLDEN CLOUD (GB) ch. 1941	WAR RELIC (USA) ch. 1938
		DISCIPLINER (GB) ch. 1948	BRIDAL COLORS (USA) 1931
DELICIOUS ASHAA (GB) ch. 1956		MY BABU (FR) b. 1945 [B]	ORSENIGO (ITY) b. 1940
		OATFLAKE (IRE) b. 1942	NERVESIA (ITY)* b. 1941
			GOLD BRIDGE (FR) ch. 1929
			RAINSTORM (GB) b. 1924
			COURT MARTIAL (GB)1942
			EUVINA (GB) ch. 1940
			DJEBEL (FR) b. 1937 [I]
			PERFUME (GB)*gr. 1938
			COUP DE LYON (GB) 1930
			AVENA (GB) b. 1936

close second in Capricorn who made that crack Chaitanya Chakram really earn his laurels - that demands awe. It is his overall record and the impact that he has had on Indian breeding. His Classic strike rate is better than his great contemporary Everyday II* as well as Rock of Gibraltar* and Prince Pradeep, the stalwarts of the era just preceding his and much superior to current stars Razeen [USA] and Placerville [USA]. He also holds the distinction - only the very best of stallions can be credited with it - of having sired a winner of each of the Indian Classics with different runners - Snow (Indian 1000 Guineas), Camino (Indian 2000 Guineas), Revelation (Indian Oaks), Manitou (Indian Derby) and Capricorn (Indian St. Leger).

His Indian Derby winning son, Track Lightning, produced a Classic winner in Celtic Lady and is the maternal grandsire of Flowersoftheforest, the winner of Golconda Derby. In fact, Grey Gaston* himself has excelled as a broodmare sire to be twice Champion Maternal Grandsire despite having had so few daughters at stud. With six winners of Indian Classics, he currently stands at the top of broodmare sires of Indian Classics. It only needs to be added that the last Indian Derby winner, Psychic Flame, was out of a Grey Gaston* mare.

What made Grey Gaston* "tick"? His racing record was fairly modest, so the answer has to be his pedigree, though it is safe to say that he would never have come to India if his three-parts sister, Dona Baroda, had been born earlier. Dona Baroda won seven

GREY GASTON*'S OTHER CLASSIC WINNERS

1. C MINOR
2. CARNIVA
3. BLUE ICE
4. AMBER FLASH
5. CAMINO
6. TICK TOCK
7. SNOW
8. CAMINETO
9. EMINENCE
10. CAPRICORN
11. SOUTHERN GIRL
12. KIR ROYALE

races in France including Prix de l'Opera, Prix Messidor and La Coupe de Maisons-Laffitte apart from placing in several graded races.

Grey Gaston*'s sire Fortino II was in-bred 4x4 to Nogara, the dam of Nearco. Though a sprinter, Fortino II got progeny which stayed better than himself and in Caro he produced a sire of international standing. On his dam's side, Grey Gaston* traces to Athasi. This mare by 9 gns stallion Farasi may not figure in everyone's list of elite mares but several winners of top races figure amongst her clan - Epsom Derby winners, Trigo and Tulyar, Irish Derby winners, Harinero and Primero, Prix de l'Arc de Triomphe victor, Saint Crespin III, Sakura Shori, who won the Japan Derby, the Indian Turf Invitation Cup heroine, Forest Fantasy, and her Indian 2000 Guineas winning half-brother, Enrico, Time Charter, Jade Hunter and many more.

The other interesting point about Grey Gaston*'s pedigree are the two daughters of Hainault. Hainault was a

Swynford half-brother to Phalaris who figures in almost every modern pedigree, mostly through his sons. (Grey Gaston* himself shows in-breeding to Pharos, a son of Phalaris and there is another line of Fairway, a full-brother to Pharos). Bromus, the dam of Phalaris and Hainault, was by Sainfoin out of a St. Simon mare. War Relic in Grey Gaston*'s pedigree is in-bred 3x3 to Rock Sand, a son of Sainfoin out of a St. Simon mare. So there is a marked concentration of Sainfoin-St. Simon cross in Grey Gaston*.

Grey Gaston* readily picked up the favourable strains in his own pedigree - Nasrullah, Relic, Djebel, Gold Bridge and Fair Trial - in those of his mares and his best winners were generally in-bred to one or more of these lines. Of course, all this is hindsight. It is said that foresight cannot be developed unless one studies the history. One of the reasons why Razeen [USA] is doing so well is because he, too, reacts immediately to Relic strains - all his three Indian Derby winners have it in their dams - and there were these Grey Gaston* mares at Usha Stud.

Mr. C.J. Haughey, later to be the Prime Minister of Ireland, owned Baroda Princess when Grey Gaston* was foaled. The real credit for breeding the star stallion should, however, go to Maharani Sita Devi Gaekwad of Baroda. She had bred Baroda Princess and sold the mare only after she had been covered by Fortino II and was confirmed to be in foal.

The House of Baroda has had considerable impact on the Indian