

India and the Thoroughbred

American-bred horses have a long and influential history on the Asian subcontinent

by Anil Mukhi

NOT much is known in the rest of the world about the Indian Turf. Frankly, this does not come as a surprise, given that India, the country itself, has been more familiarly associated in the West with images of tigers, bullock carts, and naked fakirs, if stereotypes are to be believed. The reality is, of course, very different. India is a vibrant and dynamic country that is home to 1-billion people (one-sixth of humanity), along with 200-million cattle—and 10,000 Thoroughbreds.

Most of those Thoroughbreds have been carefully concealed from the gaze of the world. Only one Indian-bred racehorse has ever run in Europe, and that was in 1951. Just four individuals—all older runners past their prime—have tested their prowess on American tracks, with only a solitary victory in an allowance race at Ellis Park in Kentucky to show for it. Admittedly, this is a disappointing tally, but the sample size has remained far too small for any definitive conclusions to be drawn.

Like most countries that underwent a lengthy period of subjugation to British colonial rule, India has had a long association with horse racing and breeding. There are records of equine contests in Calcutta in 1769 before America attained independence and in Madras in 1778. Bangalore had a functioning racecourse in 1803, more than 200 years ago. The horses employed in these sporting pursuits were "country-breds" or Arabians. Thoroughbreds came much later.

By the first quarter of the 20th century, several hundred imported Thoroughbreds were racing in India, chiefly British- and Irish-bred. In addition, the nascent Indian bloodstock industry had commenced activities, producing two or three dozen Thoroughbred foals annually.

The identity of the first American-bred equine to set foot on Indian soil is uncertain. In all probability, this honor belongs to the chestnut colt Morfair (Morvich—Mormaw, by Fair Play), who was imported from England by the Maharaja of Rajpipla in 1936. The son of a Kentucky Derby winner from a half-sister to Whetstone (winner of the Ladies' and Brookdale Handicaps) won three sprint races worth 9,500 rupees in India in 1936 and '37 before retiring to stud.

The well-bred Harlem (*Pharamond II—Brown Bride, by Brown Prince) was sold as a yearling at the 1938 Fasig-Tipton Saratoga yearling sale for \$5,900 to Lord Carnarvon of England through the British Bloodstock Agency. Winner of four races in England in 1939, including the Solykoff Stakes, Harlem finished fourth to champion Djebel in the Middle Park Stakes before being resold through the Anglo-Irish Agency to Maharaja Sir Harisinghi of Jammu and Kashmir for the unusual figure of 32,121 rupees. Raced in India in 1940-'42, he recorded a solitary victory from eight starts and was retired to stud in '42, but he received scant patronage.

Coincidentally, Harlem sired a foal out of a daughter of Morfair, whose

fate is unknown as the *Indian Stud Book* notes, somewhat laconically, "Mare and her 1949 colt stolen."

Early broodmares

Which was the first American broodmare to make the long journey across the globe at a time when air transport for horses was unknown? Relying on the American and Indian *Stud Books*, we find that Frank S. Kerr shipped a consignment of six mares and three stallions in 1946. Of the mares, Ridiculous (1936, Cherokee—Neatness, by *McGee) was "lost en route," while Bonguen (1943, The Porter—*Bonnie Blue II, by Baytown), *Leap On (1936, Poor Man—Leap Year, by Hurry On), her daughter Agathos (1944, *Tartarus II), Percent (1934, *Pharamond II—Margin, by *All Gold), and Yaday (1943, Mr. Bones—Easy Day, by *St. Germans), the latter a half sister to Pimlico Futurity winner Big Stretch and Louisiana Derby winner Day Off, arrived safely.

All these horses resided at the Western India-based Induri Stud, which was owned by Kerr. Anecdotal evidence suggests the nursery was modest in its achievements. Shortly after India attained independence in August 1947, the puritanical Morarji Desai became chief minister of the erstwhile Bombay province, and he decided racing and the associated "evil" of gambling were to be banned in the state. The market for horses collapsed, and the breeding industry suffered a savage blow.

Kerr packed off a handful of his horses to Europe, among them Percent and Yaday. Nothing more was ever heard of Induri Stud or its hard-won American female lines.

As it happened, the ban never became law. Jawaharlal Nehru, Prime Minister of India, overruled Desai, evidently agreeing with the dictum propounded by Turkish reformer Kemal Ataturk that "racing is a social need of a civilized country." But the damage was done, as the foal crop spiraled downward from a high of 328 in 1947 to a low of 118 in '50. It was 21 years before the annual production of foals in India recovered to the levels attained before the ban was proposed.

Another hurdle was soon to present itself to the breeders of India. An acute foreign exchange crisis in 1958 resulted in the free import of racehorses and breeding stock being discontinued. Horses were placed on a restricted list, which meant an import license was required for each animal that a buyer sought to obtain from abroad. Numbers were severely curtailed and value restrictions imposed. Predictably, the annual influx diminished both in quality and quantity.

The 1960s were a period of consolidation, with breeders loath to make fresh investments. After all, the direction of the political wind remained uncertain, even if no storms were actually threatening.

Everyday

Although unknown at the time to all but a handful, a significant event occurred in 1971, when P. A. B.



INSTANT HIT

The Northern Dancer stallion Razeen was retired to India's Usha Stud in 1992 and sired seven stakes winners in his first crop of 30 named foals

Widener III put up a brown colt for sale at Tattersalls December named Everyday. Although an excellent walker, fluent mover, and useful performer on the track—he had won five times, including the Greenlands Stakes in Ireland, and twice had been runner-up to Nijinsky II—Everyday failed to attract much attention. The reason was fairly obvious: He was a son of the extremely obscure stayer *Jet Stream II, who ended his days at the Auburn University School of Veterinary Medicine in Alabama. Everyday was bought for India for just 2,000 guineas (\$5,124).

Everyday retired in 1972 to the Doaba Stud not far from New Delhi. In his first season, Everyday had a book of just ten mares, three of whom produced live foals, all of whom turned out to be high-class performers. Within two years, Everyday had become champion sire in India. By the time he died in January 1993, having sired just about 400 foals, he had completely rewritten the record books.

Until 1979, the Keeneland November breeding stock sale probably had never seen a buyer from India until Haryana Meadows Stud acquired the broodmare Broma (Saidam—Bonne Foi, by *Mamboreta), in foal to Distant Land, for just \$4,500 through the Cromwell Bloodstock Agency. The resultant filly foal, named Tribute, was extremely talented and scored in the Indian St. Leger, Bangalore One Thousand Guineas and Bangalore Oaks.

The first son of Northern Dancer to come to India was Ilheus, a twin, whose arrival from France in January 1982 sent a ripple through the breeding community. The unraced, gangly chestnut, bred in Kentucky by Nelson Bunker Hunt from the 1964 Epsom Oaks victress *Homeward Bound II, by Alycidon, proved very successful, getting several classic winners, including Indian Derby winner Astronomic. His get tended to be big in size and stout in aptitude, although a few were speedy and precocious.

It is not very well known that another son of Northern Dancer—the moody Minshaanshu Amad—was scheduled to be shipped to India in early 1986. At the eleventh hour, he was replaced by his vastly superior paternal half brother, Tocave Botta

(Thirty Years, by Bold Hour), who had fetched \$1.25-million as a yearling in 1982.

From 1979 until '94, there was a somewhat irrational contagious equine metritis-related ban on mated stock from the United States. Hence, almost all North American broodmares who came to India were bought in Europe or Canada. Several of these have had a profound impact on Indian-bred stock. Passed So Fast (Gallant Romeo—Past Example, by Buckpasser), Moment in the Sun (Timeless Moment—Wild Summer, by Mongo), and Cut of the Cloth (Dauphin Fabuleux—Grenada Pride, by Nijinsky II), dam of 2003 Indian Horse of the Year Zurbaran, are prime examples.

The history of the Turf is replete with romantic tales and improbable coincidences. One such story—which came within a hair's breadth of having a fairy tale ending—concerned the Arctic Tern mare Arctic Eyes (Valse Nobel, by Nijinsky II). Unsold at the Stavros Niarchos reduction at Tattersalls Newmarket December sale in 1987, the unraced chestnut filly was offered by Maria Niarchos to the author aboard a bus leaving a just-arrived aircraft from Dublin to the terminal at London's Gatwick Airport. The deal was concluded on behalf of a client for just 1,250 pounds (\$2,050). The mare's first offspring in India, Arctic Light, by Thaumaturge, led all the way up the straight in the 1993 Indian Derby before suffering a heartbreaking defeat in the shadow of the post.

Obviously, a more representative selection of American blood was available to Indian breeders once they were able to buy directly from the U.S. Both pedigree and performance were keenly sought. Notable acquisitions in the past decade or so have been the dam of Swale, Look (Spectacular Bid—Tuerta, by *Forli); the dam of Judge T C, I'm Pretty (Secretariat—Quit Me Not, by Bold Reason); graded stakes producer Bazoooka Babe (Mullineaux—Rustic Gal, by Good Behavior); Hollywood Oaks (G1) heroine Perchance to Dream (To B. Or Not—Rendezvous, by Meneval); and a full sister to Polish Precedent, Zienelle (Danzig—Past Example, by Buckpasser), who is also grandam of European high-weight Intikhab.

Razeen

Top female bloodlines, desirable as they are, can have only a limited impact, as each broodmare can produce only one foal a year. The far more crucial contribution is that of the prepotent stallion, and India has been fortunate in obtaining a pair of American-breds that have revolutionized the Indian Turf.

The first of these to arrive was Razeen (Northern Dancer—Secret Asset, by Graustark), winner of the 1990 Predominate Stakes in England when trained by Henry Cecil for Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid al Maktoum. Few stallion prospects with better credentials have crossed the Arabian Sea. Retired to the Usha Stud in 1992, Razeen was an instant hit, with seven stakes winners from his first crop of 30 named foals. His current strike rate of 18% stakes winners places him on a pedestal with his illustrious father.

In a coup that left some European stud farms breathless, Poonawalla Stud Farms acquired the blue-blooded Royal Ascot winner Placerville (Mr. Prospector—Classy Cathy, by Private Account) mere hours after he suffered a saucer fracture while winning the 1993 Prince of Wales Stakes (Eng-G2). Being completely free of Northern Dancer blood, Placerville proved easy to mate and has an excellent 13% ratio of stakes winners.

Kentucky castoffs such as Green Forest, Local Talent, Procida, Tejano, and Wise Times all found homes at Indian stud farms. Useful as they have been, none has had a strike rate significantly different from that achieved in Kentucky prior to export. It could be argued that the virtual absence of dirt racing in India compromised their chances of success.

Has India benefited by shifting the pendulum away from traditional sources in Europe to North America? With five of the top six names in the current sires table being bred in the U.S. or Canada, the answer has to be an unqualified yes.

What is more, poised in the wings with their initial crops yet to reach the market are 2000 UAE Derby winner China Visit (Red Ransom—Furajet, by The Minstrel); '00 Gimcrack Stakes (Eng-G2) third-place finisher and \$1.45-million weanling Juniper (Danzig—Montage, by Alydar); 1999 Arlington Classic (G2) winner Mr. Mellon (Red Ransom—Mackie, by Summer Squall); dual Grade 1 winner Senure (Nureyev—Diese, by Diesis [GB]); and Western Verse (Gone West—Reams of Verse, by Nureyev), who carved out his own niche in Indian bloodstock history by becoming the first stallion from India to shuttle to Australia.

There is not the slightest doubt that one or more of these will replace aging heroes Razeen and Placerville in a decade's time and bring fresh laurels to the American-bred in India. ☉

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