

Shaken, Not Stirred

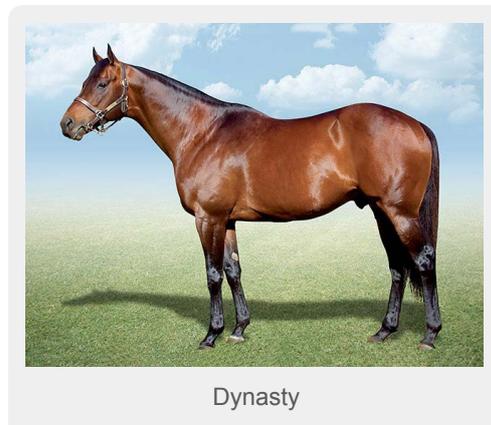
Charles Lytton - Remember My Name

by Robyn Louw

After what can at best be described a turbulent week for racing, my brain is spinning from trying to take it all in and decide exactly who and what to believe. So, while the jury is out on all that stuff, I thought I'd focus on something fun instead.

2003 was the year that Dynasty swept all before him. In that season alone, he won the Green Point Stakes, the Selangor Cup, the Cape Derby, the SA Guineas, the Daily News 2000 and the Vodacom Durban July from the 20 draw. To round off the season, the Equus panel crowned him Champion 3yo Classic Male as well as Horse Of The Year.

His dam, Blakes Affair, was still at Wilgerbosdrift and the team decided to arrange a visit to their resident stallion, Rich Man's Gold. When she foaled down in 2004, Blakes Affair duly produced a glorious bay colt, who would go on to be named Thomas Crown, after the rich, wealthy playboy character in the film, The Thomas Crown Affair. The colt found his name on the list for Wilgerbosdrift's 2006 National Yearling Sales draft and duly joined his mates on the float to Germiston.



John Freeman famously selected Dynasty for Fieldspring Racing in 2001. He has an encyclopaedic memory for horses and when I rang up to ask whether he remembered the 2006 sales in general and a half-brother to Dynasty in particular, he obliged with enthusiasm. "After Dynasty I obviously looked at all his siblings, but I hadn't been very keen on any of them. Having said that, Dynasty was an exceptional individual and in all fairness it was pretty hard for any horse to measure up to him. Until this colt. Having owned Dynasty, Fieldspring were naturally keen on him and to be quite honest, I can't take much credit for the purchase because he basically chose himself!" The hammer duly fell at R1,3 million.

If it ain't broke...

In the same way as his famous older half-brother, Thomas Crown made his way to the Kannemeyer racing stables in Milnerton. The team were very impressed with their new colt and the unraced Thomas Crown joined Dean's KZN string for the 2007 winter season. Unfortunately he colicked and had to undergo surgery and assistant David Lilley relates that the op hit him very hard. "It took him months to recover and I don't think he was quite the same after that." Nevertheless, they gave him a few starts and the colt managed to place in a 1200m Maiden Plate at Durbanville before the connections decided to call it a day.

Fieldspring were looking for a good home for him and approached Mary Slack. Manager Gail Bulpitt relates that the call came at rather a good time. Their teaser was getting on a bit and so it was that Thomas Crown ended up back at Wilgerbosdrift.



Movie script

During the 2010 breeding season, the staff gave Thomas Crown a couple of foster mares to cover and the following year they were rewarded with a magnificent colt out of the Shaamit mare Love Of Grace, and a filly out of Rich Man's Gold mare, Night And Day. I was lucky enough to visit Wilgerbosdrift in 2012 and saw the stallion as well as his two foals. Mary told me that they were rather pleased with the yearlings, but as they would not be commercial prospects, she thought she might race them herself. I made a mental note to keep track of the youngsters, and that was rather that until 31 May 2014, when Charles Lytton debuted over 1000m at Kenilworth.

What's In A Name

Wilgerbosdrift take a great deal of care in naming their horses and in keeping with the movie star theme, Charles Lytton is also named after a film character. In his case, he is named after Sir Charles Lytton a.k.a. The Notorious Phantom, the fictitious playboy who is Inspector Clouseau's arch nemesis in the Pink Panther films. It's rather fitting really, as the story is becoming something one might expect from a Disney movie !

But back to the races. With the rather underrated Craig du Plooy in the saddle, Charles Lytton duly finished second on debut, 1.25 lengths behind Vincente. Craig was in the irons again on 2 July 2014 when Charles Lytton dispatched a 10-strong field at Durbanville in soft going to win by the best part of a length.

I immediately rang the connections to wish them well and join in the celebrations and Mary was understandably over the moon with her colt. When I asked about the Fieldspring silks, she explained that as Karen Sellars had been kind enough to give them Thomas Crown, she'd given Fieldspring a half-share in his foals in return (the filly, named Nina, is in training with Eric Sands and from 3 juvenile starts, has earned 2 places).

Two months later, Charles Lytton was back at Kenilworth and with the services of Karl Neisius in the saddle this time, he lugged 57kgs against a field of older horses and won going away by half a length. I decided it was time to pay my old acquaintance a visit and duly made my way down to Snaith Racing last Friday.

Snaith Racing

The Snaiths have quite deservedly had their fair share of press coverage recently and while one reads an awful lot about racing stats, July wins and championship trophies, what one doesn't often read about is their wonderful farm. Situated across the road from the Philippi training facility, the Snaith racing yard sort of sprawls all over the property. With large, grassed paddocks, white-washed blocks of stables and herds of buck grazing alongside the groups of horses, it feels less of a champion racing string and more just a happy, relaxed farm environment. Assistant Judy Pickford directed me to Barn 2 and introduced me to Charles Lytton, rather more grown up than when I last saw him. He immediately stuck his head over the door for some attention and Judy obliged, petting and making much of him in what is obviously a well-established routine between the two of them. He was equally friendly to me and Judy confirmed that he was sweet and kind enough for her to allow her grandchild to play with. She rushed off to oversee a few details, while Charles Lytton posed for a few portrait snaps.

Charles Lytton pulled out with the second string and I joined the team down on the gallops. It was quite a fresh, chilly day with a bit of an edge to the breeze, and while there were a few hijinks from some of the more energetic members of the string, Charles Lytton was a consummate professional. He ringed beautifully and then trotted out to the sand track where his rider kindly put him through his paces for me to have a look at.

With the second string heading back to their various stables to be untacked, cleaned and fed, I was just getting ready to start making my way home when the Snaith's big blue van, with Justin behind the wheel, arrived back from the beach, so I decided to stick around for a cup of coffee.



Sir Charles Lytton aka The Notorious Phantom



Charles Lytton showing off his movie star looks



Charles Lytton being put through his paces

When I asked how Charles Lytton had ended up with them, Chris explained that he'd gone out to Wilgerbosdrift to have a look a horse that Mary wanted him to train. "They always bring the horses out in pairs. Charles Lytton was the companion to the one I was there to look at. Of course, he's the one I liked and so I asked 'who's that?' Mary said 'you don't want that one, it's the teaser's colt.' I said 'No, that's the one I want and that's that.' And that's how Charles Lytton joined Snaith Racing.

Eli's Star

Of course, horses will always make fools of men and it's not the first time that a teaser has ended up producing a 'surprise package' as we've seen before with Eli's Star who produced the Cape Guineas and Derby winner, Eli's Truth.

Given that Charles Lytton is looking so promising and that the filly with Eric Sands has also got a few places to her credit, I rang the stud to find out whether there might be any more Thomas Crown offspring around. Manager Gail Bulpitt confirmed that Love Of Grace was sadly no longer around, but that Night And Day had produced a full sister in 2012 (who will go into training in October), another filly in 2013 and is due to foal down to Thomas Crown again this season.

Wilgerbosdrift have trebled Thomas Crown's book for this year and are sending him 6 mares, including the well-bred and well-performed Lady Brompton, who already has an Equus award winner to her credit in King's Gambit. They've also had 2 outside enquiries, so Thomas Crown may well find himself rather busy this year!

While it may be a little fanciful to hope that we have another Eli's Star story on our hands (or better!), sometimes truth is stranger and more wonderful than fiction and as one of my favourite quotes sites says 'We all need to believe in movies sometimes.'



1992 Guineas winner, Eli's Truth