Count Fleet

by Kathleen Jones

Count Fleet raced for the wife of John D Hertz, founder of the rental car company, and was trained by Don Cameron, an ex-WWI balloon pilot. Hertz couldn't sell Count Fleet as a yearling, and on the advice of one of his stable boys, decided to keep him. At age two the colt was nearly sold again for $4500, but jockey Johnny Longden intervened and begged Hertz to keep the colt and race him.

Count Fleet won ten of fifteen starts as a 2-year-old, and the racing public was already talking Triple Crown after he was assigned 132 pounds in the Experimental Handicap ratings. Further compliments were added as he was labelled the "clear successor to Man o' War." Count Fleet lived up to the honor as best as he could, and went undefeated at three.

It was war-time and a ban on racing in Florida forced Count Fleet to train at Oaklawn Park in preparation for his 3-year-old campaign. Shortages also meant that out-of-town travel was discouraged, so the 1943 Derby was called by some "the Streetcar Derby".

Count Fleet suffered a serious cut on his ankle during the Wood Memorial, and jockey Longden travelled with the colt to Kentucky, holding ice on the wound. By Derby day he was fit and sound. The local fans made him the 5-to-2 favorite. Second choice Blue Swords was held at 9-to-1.

Count Fleet broke sharply and was hustled up to take the lead quickly. Gold Shower was his closest pursuer throughout the first half of the race. By the head of the stretch, Blue Swords had assumed the second position, but could not advance on Count Fleet who won by an easy 3 lengths.

The Preakness drew only four runners. Blue Swords returned to face Count Fleet even though he had finished second to that colt in their last 5 meetings. Deja vu for Blue Swords. Count Fleet repeated his Derby run, but this time drew off by 8 lengths. Blue Swords was again second. Vencentive and New Moon followed.

Between the second and third legs of the Triple Crown, Count Fleet won the Withers Stakes. He was regarded by all as a superhorse, and understandably only 2 challengers met him in the Belmont Stakes - Fairy Manhurst (a stakes winning son of Man o' War) and Desoronto (a son of Omaha). Count Fleet toyed momentarily with his two opponents, then shot off like a rocket to win by an astounding 25 length margin.

During the race he had suffered a slight injury to his knee or ankle, which was not considered at first to be much of an injury, but it failed to respond to treatment, so Count Fleet never raced again. He was retired to stud duty.

Among Count Fleet's best offspring were Horse of the Year COUNTERPOINT (won the Belmont Stakes, etc.), Horse of the Year ONE COUNT (Belmont Stakes, etc.), champion filly KISS ME KATE, classic winner COUNT TURF (Kentucky Derby, etc.), and many others.

Count Fleet lived to the age of 33 at Stoner Creek Stud, near Paris, Kentucky. He is buried in the central place of honor in their cemetery, under a marker for the farm's standardbred stallion, Nevele Pride.

After Count Fleet's death, Stoner Creek Stud became a standardbred breeding farm, and it was felt that Nevele Pride should be in the central place of honour, so the headstones were swapped.

Pedigree:

Count Fleet, br.c. foaled 1940	Reigh Count, 1925	*Sunreigh, 1919	Sundridge (GB)
			*Sweet Briar II
		*Contessina, 1909	Count Schomberg
			Pitti
	Quickly, 1930	Haste, 1923	*Maintenant
			Miss Malaprop
		Stephanie, 1925	*Stefan the Great
			Malachite

(female family # 6)

Born: 1940, at Stoner Creek Stud, Paris, Kentucky.
Died: December 3, 1973, (age 33) at Stoner Creek Stud.

Racing Record:

Year	Age	Starts	1st	2nd	3rd	unp.	earnings
1942	2	15	10	4	1	0	$ 76,245
1943	3	6	6	0	0	0	174,055
total		21	16	4	1	0	$250,300

Stakes Record:
at 2:

- won - Champagne Stakes (New WORLD Record for 2yos - 1 mile - 1:34 4/5)
- won - Pimlico Futurity
- won - Walden Stakes
- won - Wakefield Stakes
- 2nd - Washington Park Futurity
- 2nd - East View Stakes
- 3rd - Belmont Futurity
- **Champion 2yo Colt**

at 3:

- won - Kentucky Derby
- won - Preakness Stakes
- won - Belmont Stakes
- won - Wood Memorial
- won - Withers Stakes
- **Horse of the Year**
- Champion 3yo Colt