



Domino

by Kathleen Jones

Domino was an amazing phenomenon in the annals of American thoroughbred breeding. He exists in the pedigrees of perhaps half of the recent stakes winners in this country, yet that he appears in any is a miracle. But we are getting ahead of ourselves.

Domino was dark brown colt with a peculiar coat which appeared to change color depending on in which light it was viewed. (The coat of Equipoise, Domino's great grandson, was similar in nature.) On cloudy days, his coat was dark as coal, yet in bright sunlight, people would swear they had seen a chestnut horse. He was known by several racing nicknames including "the brown phenomenon" and "the black whirlwind".

He was foaled at Major Barak Thomas' Dixiana Farm, a son of the speedy Himyar, and the stakes producing mare Mannie Gray. He was his dam's ninth foal, and she had already produced the good runners TEN STRIKE (by Ten Broeck), BANDALA (by King Ban), and the great handicap mare CORRECTION (by Himyar) for whom the present-day Correction Handicap is named.

Domino was a beautiful specimen of a horse, and Thomas sent him to the Tattersall's yearling sales with high expectations. For a sale in which the average selling price was \$895, Domino fetched an eye-popping \$3000 (the second top price of the sale). The new owner was Foxhall Keene.

Keene placed the colt in the capable hands of African-American yearling-handler Albert Cooper, who broke and trained the young horses for the Keenes. The colt worked a quarter mile at Coney Island in such fast time that Cooper was certain his watch had malfunctioned. So with a borrowed watch, he tried the colt again the following morning, and Domino ran an identical time. But he bowed following these fast trials, and afterward always raced in bandages.

Keene's race trainer was William Lakeland. Domino debuted at the Gravesend track in Brooklyn, on May 22, in a 5 furlong 2yo sweepstakes, and led all the way to win by 6 lengths. Five days later, he won the Great American Stakes by 4 lengths, and followed that with a 2 length victory in the Great Eclipse Stakes on June 10.

The colt's rider in all but one of his race was Fred Taral who was rather infamous for his liberal use of the whip, and on several occasions hammered a terrific tattoo on Domino. The colt, understandably came to dislike Taral intensely, and tried whenever possible to savage the jockey. (Good for him.)

By mid-August, when Domino was winning the Produce Stakes, his assigned weight was beginning to increase. He toted 128 in that race, conceding 20 lbs to the runner-up. Thus he was assigned 130 for the coming Futurity Stakes.

To this point, Domino had always got away from the start cleanly, and led post-to-post with little challenge. But the Futurity would be a very different race. The track was sloppy and 20 colt had gone postward. Domino slipped slightly at the start, and found himself in the second flight instead of at the lead. Before much progress had been made, stable-mate Hyderabad slipped and fell in the mud and Domino nearly went over him. But he kept his feet and after a half mile moved to engage the leaders, Galilee, Dobbins and Potentate. He caught and passed the latter without much effort, but Taral would not let him forget that two more remained in front of him. As they approached the grandstand, the trio became one, and all were extremely game. Each of the jockeys rode as if for their lives, but Taral's action was the most animated. At the wire, Domino had moved to the fore by the margin of a head.

Dobbins' owner was not yet convinced that Domino was the better horse, and so arranged a match race to be run two days later, at Coney Island. The race would be run at 6 furlongs under equal weights of 118 lbs. After standing in a cold spray for 24 hours to ease his aching legs, Domino returned to the track to face Dobbins. They broke together. Domino kept his head in front for two furlongs, then Dobbins usurped the position and raced with his head in front for another 3 furlongs. Then Domino returned to match him stride for stride in the final furlong, and they crossed the wire inseparable. A dead-heat was the result; all bets and the match were declared off, which started a near-riot at Coney Island. Domino raced once more at 2, winning the Matron Stakes at Morris Park. His juvenile earnings of \$170,890 was a record at the time, and was not bettered until Top Flight earned \$219,000 in 1931. It might also surprise you to learn that Domino won more money in his juvenile year (1893) than 2yo champion Seattle Slew did (1976).

In his first start at 3, the Withers Stakes, Domino had his first encounter with frequent rival and Belmont Stakes winner - Henry of Navarre. Domino missed the start and had to close from fourth place, but defeated Henry by a head. Entered next in the mile and half American Derby at Washington Park, Taral was under orders for the first time to rate the colt, as the Keenes must have had some reservation about Domino's ability to get the distance.

The colt broke sharply, eager for the lead, but Taral held him back, practically strangling the colt to do it. Such energy was exerted in the battle between Domino and Taral that neither had anything left when needed and they finished last in ninth place.

Shipped back to New York, Domino ripped off four consecutive victories including the Flying Stakes in which he turned in the fastest time ever at the track for the "about six furlong" distance. Then in September he faced Henry of Navarre again in a match arranged for the Third Special Stakes, at 9 furlongs. Henry allowed Domino to go to the front. Down the backstretch he opened daylight by 2 lengths, then the jockey aboard Henry of Navarre let his colt go, and they came with rush. He collared Domino on the turn

and the two fought furiously all the way to the wire. The race ended in a dead-heat. The horses were so exhausted that the owners agreed to split the stake and dispense with the run-off.

Following one more race that year, in which he was beaten into third place by Henry of Navarre at 9 furlongs, he was rested for the winter. At 4 he reappeared in a 6 furlong race at Brooklyn and won easily. Keene then entered him in the Suburban Stakes at 1 1/4 miles, which was really beyond the scope of this colt. He led for a mile then tired to finish fourth. Taral later said he never saw a horse start so fast, nor stop so fast, as Domino.

Domino won three more easy sprints, ranging from 5 1/2 furlongs to 1 mile, carrying highweight in all three. In the Fall Handicap at Coney Island, he carried 24 lbs more than the great filly The Butterflies, who had won the Futurity in the previous season, and was closing resolutely at the end but failed by the margin of a head. In his last two starts, he again faced Henry of Navarre, who was bred for the longer distances of these two races. In the 9 furlong special event, he was beaten by a neck by his famous rival, and in the 10 furlong race finished fifth. Prior to his final race, Domino had to have a blanket thrown over his head in order to allow Fred Taral to climb aboard, so hateful had their relationship become.

After this, Domino did not train well. His legs ached, and he became enraged at the sight of the jockey. Keene decided to retire him to his Lexington farm, Castleton Stud, a few miles from the colt's birthplace at Dixiana. He was known by all as a sprinter of great speed, but also with enough courage and heart to last a mile and an eighth through severe challenging. He entered stud with the highest of credentials.

When his first crop were still nursing on their mothers, Domino died of meningitis (an inflammation of the membranes which envelop the brain and spinal cord.) Keene requested that the stallion be returned to his breeder, Major Barak Thomas, for burial on his farm. Thomas no longer owned Dixiana by this time, and operated a small farm called Hira Villa, a farm now part of Mt Brilliant Farm.

An article from the next issue of the Turf, Field, and Farm reported the following:

Major Thomas stood at the head, and Major Daingerfield at the foot of the grave with uncovered heads, while some 40 people were grouped around them, and the sadness that was plainly felt was revealed in their faces as the earth fell upon the rigid form of the once great racer. It was a strange and impressive scene, but no one who sincerely admires fleetness and gameness and other desirable qualities in the horse will find fault with it. The animal which possesses intelligence and affection and which brings to us fame and fortune is worthy of remembrance in death.

Domino left behind only 20 foals. Nine of these were sons. Of those, five were gelded and one died. Yet Domino exerted a tremendous force on the American thoroughbred, which is still strong today.

Among his small band of offspring were DISGUISE, winner of the English Jockey Club Stakes, and toppler of English Triple Crown hero Diamond Jubilee, also sire of one-time world record holder Iron Mask whose 5 1/2 furlong record was set while carrying 150 lbs.; CAP AND BELLS, winner of the Epsom Oaks; PINK DOMINO, dam of Belmont Stakes winner and great sire SWEEP; stakes winner NOON DAY who became the dam of sires High Noon and High Time; RUNAWAY GIRL, the dam of stakes winners and the second dam of UPSET.

But Domino's best produce was a son named COMMANDO. He won the Belmont Stakes and others, and became Domino's best son at stud, getting such standout offspring as COLIN, CELT, PETER PAN, PETER QUINCE, SUPERMAN, RESTIGOUCHE and ZAMBESI. In a strange twist of fate, Commando also died very young at stud. He left only 27 foals behind. So it is remarkable that the line of Domino exists at all, let alone have become so influential in the American thoroughbred breed. One can also trace to Domino in pedigrees of the American Quarter Horse.

Pedigree:

Domino, br.c. born 1891	Himyar, 1875	Alarm, 1869	*Eclipse
			*Maud
		Hira, 1864	Lexington
			Hegira
	Mannie Gray, 1881	Enquirer, 1867	*Leamington
			Lida
		Lizzie G., 1857	War Dance
			Mare by Lecompte

(female family # 23)



Born: May 4, 1891, at Dixiana Farm, Lexington, Kentucky
Died: July 29, 1897, (age 6) at Castleton Farm, Lexington, buried at his breeder's Hira Villa Farm (now Mt Brilliant).

Racing Record:

Year	Age	Starts	1st	2nd	3rd	unp.	earnings
1893	2	9	9	0	0	0	\$170,890
1894	3	8	6	0	1	1	19,150
1895	4	8	4	2	0	2	3,610
total		25	19	2	1	3	\$193,650

Stakes Record:

at 2:

- won - Great Eclipse Stakes
- won - Belmont Futurity Stakes
- won - Great American Stakes
- won - Great Trial Stakes
- won - Hyde Park Stakes
- won - Matron Stakes
- won - Produce Stakes
- **Champion 2yo Colt**

at 3:

- won - Withers Stakes
- won - Flying Stakes (130 lbs & set New Track Record)
- won - Culver Stakes
- won - Ocean Handicap
- won - Third Special (dead-heat match with Henry of Navarre)

at 4:

- won - Coney Island Handicap ... (130 lbs)
- won - Sheepshead Bay Stakes
- 2nd - Coney Island Fall Handicap .. (133 lbs., conceding 24 lbs to the winner)