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ON HER TOES ASSERTS HERSELF LATE TO SCORE IN KZN FILLIES GUINEAS, GAVIN LERENA TURNS IN MASTERFUL RIDE TO PRODUCE FILLY FOR TALLY, GRADE 1, CLASSIC-WINNING FILLY IS NOW UNBEATEN IN 5 RACES IN NATAL



In The Azzman We Trust!

On Her Toes' victory in Tuesday evening's postponed Classic Kwa Zulu Natal Fillies Guineas at Clairwood was as much a triumph for trainer Mike (The Azzman) Azzie as it was for Team Valor International and its partners and Anant and Vanashree Singh, because he pushed Barry Irwin hard to be allowed to run the filly in the testing conditions.

Irwin relented after much discussion and figured that he had given the trained enough rope to hang himself, but instead the third generation horseman showed why he is one of the top trainers in South Africa.

In winning the Grade 2 Guineas by a neck, On Her Toes ran a tenth of a second faster than required two races later on the card by Big City Life, who earlier had won the Grade 1 Cape of Good Hope Derby, so the time of On Her Toes appears to have been exceptional on the evening.

On Her Toes was providing her owners with their second victory in the Durban-based 3-year-old filly Classic, as Sally Bowles had upset Champion Sun Classique in the event two seasons ago. Sally Bowles got a brilliant ride from an inside draw. This time, Gavin Lerena had to begin from the number 11 post position, no mean trick at Greyville, where the race begins right on a curve.

Lerena was able to position the Azzie-trained filly exceptionally well from her draw, as she tracked the leaders in fourth place, as the top three places were occupied by the fancied runners in Grade 1 winners Sparkling Gem and Mother Russia, with the emerging filly Jet Goddess in the mix.

When the real racing began, Sparkling Gem fell right away, as did Jet Goddess. Mother Russia soon was unable to maintain pace, as the race suddenly was between On Her Toes, who assumed command in the center of the course inside the final 300 meters, while last season's Champion juvenile filly Consensual was putting in a huge run on the stand side of the course.

With a furlong remaining in the Guineas, On Her Toes was in the middle of the drying out turf course, as Consensual bore down hard to her left and Sparkling Gem's longshot stablemate Dance for Al made a strong run to her right. In the end, On Her Toes ran straight and true to prevail by a neck over Dance for Al, with Consensual another neck away in third.

Mother Russia, which had been vying with Team Valor International's Gypsy's Warning for honors as the Champion Filly at 3 this season in South Africa, was beaten just under 4 lengths in sixth and the Grade 1 Cape Fillies Guineas winner Sparkling Gem was a tailed off last.



Final time on a course officially labeled “good” was a fast 1:38.32, which compared very favorably with the colts’ Guineas time of 1:38.42.

On Her Toes remarkably was winning her fifth race in as many starts in the province of Kwa Zulu Natal. Last year she dead-heated for a victory in the Grade 1 Allen Robertson Fillies Championship at Scottsville and this season she successfully prepped for the Guineas with a victory in the Umzimkhulu Stakes. In that Grade 3 race at Scottsville, the Western Winter filly had drifted dramatically across the course in a move that could have been a cause for concern.

Barry Irwin naturally was concerned the filly might have a soundness problem. Azzie, though, told Team Valor’s owner that the jockey “caught a flank” with his whip, meaning the rider accidentally struck a sensitive spot, causing her to shift her position on the course in a somewhat violent manner.

Irwin also was concerned about her wide draw and the fact that she had a hard race coming into the Guineas. Truth be told, Irwin was not in favor of running in the Guineas and wanted to wait a month for another race.



Muscular On Her Toes powers home with ‘flash of brilliance,’ according to the race caller.

But, to his everlasting credit, Azzie pushed back just as hard and told Irwin that he bases his desire to run horses on how they look and train, and On Her Toes was “telling me that she needs to run.”

“You have to love the guy,” said Irwin. “He is talented and he is enthusiastic, and he makes racing exciting and fun. Sometimes he gets a bit carried away, but on the whole, he has done as well for us as any trainer in South Africa. His horses are turned out in immaculate condition and it is a pleasure to behold them when they arrive in the paddock.

“On Her Toes has always shown me that she was a pure Miler and a classy one to boot. Now I hope that Mike wants to wait until July 4 for the Grade 1 Garden Province Stakes on the afternoon of the Durban July. I just might want to attend those races at Greyville.”

On Her Toes is the latest in a long line of top fillies bought by Barry Irwin from the National Yearling Sale in Germiston, South Africa. Among the other Grade 1 winners and Champions plucked out of the annual spring vendue by Irwin have been Captain’s Lover, Little Miss Magic and Sally Bowles.