

TEAM VALOR HAS 4 NOMINATED TO SAF EQUIVALENT OF ECLIPSE AWARDS

The 2007-2008 South African racing season ended July 31 and last weekend it was announced that Team Valor International had 4 individuals nominated for an Equus Award, which is South Africa's equivalent to an Eclipse Award. Team Valor is the only owner with as many as 4 nominees.

Ceremonies are set for August 14 and, although he would love to attend, Barry Irwin does not plan to make the long trek to Johannesburg for the annual festivities. Go to this link [here](#).

Nominated for an award are the following:



Captain's Lover is the most likely to be named Champion, in the 3-year-old filly division. Best in 5 of 7 career outings, she took the Grade 1 Cape Fillies Guineas, which is the most prestigious race on offer for a sophomore filly on the South African racing calendar. Although she has not raced since January, she did enough before she departed for France to wrap up the award. She did something that is rarely accomplished when she wired her field in the Guineas. In her next start she faced Dancer's Daughter, who will be voted Champion Older Filly or Mare.

Captain's Lover acted up in the paddock before the race (she was later found to have been in heat) and loosened her saddle, which slipped in the stretch run of the race, causing her jockey to be unable to ride her properly, when third in the Grade 1 Paddock Stakes. "I know that Dancer's Daughter deadheaded to win the Durban July and that she won many Grade 1 races, but I will always believe that Captain's Lover would have beaten her in January under normal circumstances. So does her rider, Richard Fourie," said Irwin, who bought her for \$27,000 as a yearling at the National Yearling Sale.

Russian Sage is in with a big chance to be voted Champion Colt at 3. On Merit Ratings, he is ranked below King's Gambit. Russian Sage ran in Cape Town and Durban to mount his claim for championship honors, while King's Gambit was successful in Johannesburg and was a late scratch from the Durban-based Grade 1 Daily News 2000, in which he would have faced Team Valor and partners' newly acquired colt. Russian Sage won the Grade 1 Cape of Good Hope Derby, which is the considered to be the most prestigious Derby contested in South Africa. He cemented his claim for divisional honors by winning the Grade 1 Daily News 2000 in a gritty performance. "These awards tend to be given for the body of a horse's performance, rather than the opinion of the handicapper representing the National Racing Authority," Irwin said. "As King's Gambit did not take his chances against Russian Sage and our colt won in Durban, it is expected that Russian Sage will take down the honors." Russian Sage prior to finishing out of the frame as the pacesetter in the Durban July, had won 5 of his 7 previous starts, finishing second in the 2 losses. He is bound for Europe, then Dubai, then the United States.



Stratos is one of only two mares nominated to the category of Champion older filly or mare, an award she has absolutely no chance to win, as Dancer's Daughter is a prohibitive choice to nail down the honors, based on her 3 Grade 1 wins and deadheat victory in the Durban July with Pocket Power. It is a shame for Stratos, because at a mile she would have given the grey mare all she wanted. Stratos swept the three Graded features for fillies



and mares on offer in Johannesburg during the 2007-2008 racing season, which gained her recognition as the Champion filly or mare to have raced in the Gauteng province of South Africa. In the third of her victories, she overcame severe pressure as exerted by jockey Kevin Shea on a rival horse and bravely kept to her task to win the Grade 1 Empress Club Stakes, even though Shea's whip spent more time trying to steer her than his own mount. Stratos had been bought privately as a 3-year-old filly and she accounted for 7 wins prior to retirement. The Jet Master mare is slated to enter stud next month and most likely will be booked to leading sire Western Winter in the Western Cape.

On Her Toes is nominated in the category of Champion Filly at 2 because she is a Grade 1 winner, but she probably will not win, as she ran only 3 races and deadheaded in her Grade 1 victory. Another Grade 1 winner bought as a yearling by Barry Irwin at the National Yearling Sale in South Africa, the Western Winter filly overcame considerable greenness to win her bow sprinting downhill on the tricky course at Scottsville. Trainer Mike Azzie boldly predicted a big win on



national television and had to sweat out a close call. But the experience over the straight course aided On Her Toes immensely when she returned later in the summer to contest the Grade 1 Allan Robertson Fillies Championship, in which she hugged the rail and prevailed in a ding-dong battle to land the "heater." Unfortunately, the filly sustained a hairline fracture in a limb on the eve of contesting her next Grade 1, for which she would have started favorite. "I know it was a bitter pill to swallow," said trainer Mike Azzie. "Hopefully she will make up for it by winning the Guineas at 3. She is that good."

