

## JUVENILES IN UNITED STATES AND SOUTH AFRICA OFFER HOPE FOR 2012 DEBUTANTE AGRA IS “AS ADVERTISED” IN KENILWORTH MAIDEN ROMP HOWE GREAT SPARKLES OVER THE GREENSWARD AT GULFSTREAM PARK



*Agra scampered home easily under Felix Coetzee in her racing debut today.*

Barry Irwin’s racing partnerships enjoyed their best season in 25 years of racing in 2011 and Team Valor International already is looking forward to a better one in 2012, based on the number of the stable’s promising 2-year-olds.

Today in South Africa and Thursday in the United States, the stable sent out a pair of youngsters that figure to make their mark in a big way.

Barry Irwin bought seven fillies in January at the Cape Premier Yearling Sale in Cape Town, South Africa, and the first one made its debut this afternoon over 4 ½ furlongs up the straightaway at Kenilworth race course.

Backed down to the prohibitive odds of 13 to 20, Agra was the talking horse of the second race, which saw 4 of the 16 intended runners scratched, because of the strong pre-race chatter about the Team Valor International color bearer.

“Justin Snaith, our trainer in Cape Town, told me in November that Agra had already shown him that she was out of the ordinary,” Irwin said. “Justin is a great judge and I liked hearing what he had to say, but when trainers get a little too excited about their horses, it tends to make me nervous, so it was with a bit of trepidation that I watched her go down to the post with a pony—something I had never seen before in South Africa.

“The filly actually had been ready to run a few weeks ago, but she needed some additional practice in the starting gate. When her workmate won easily earlier in the month, Agra seemed more live than ever, because in a morning trial, Agra had handled that other filly comfortably.”

Agra broke smartly and was allowed to race forwardly without showing too much of her speed by veteran reinsman Felix Coetzee. When the jockey let her loose with about half a furlong remaining in the grass dash, Agra simply scooted away from her competition to win in a common gallop by 2 ¾ lengths in ultra impressive fashion.

Snaith called Irwin in Kentucky to say “Believe me when I tell you there is lots more to come, because we haven’t even come close to winding her up. She figures to have a big year and now we will take a look at that juvenile stakes at the end of January on J & B Met day. Felix said he hardly had to use her and that he felt she had another gear to use if necessary.”

Agra is the first runner from the first crop of foals sired by Trippi, the former Florida stallion who became the top North American 2-year-old sire after he departed from his homeland. Irwin paid about \$100,000 for Agra at the sale, but received his highest mark on conformation.

Two days earlier in Florida, Barry Irwin's home-bred Howe Great was dispatched as the 5 to 1 third choice in a contentious field of 2-year-olds males going a mile and a sixteenth on the grass in the co-feature race at Gulfstream Park. The race featured a pair of recent New York maiden winners trained by Kiaran McLaughlin and Jimmy Toner.

Howe Great is bred is run long on grass, but he was sprinted twice by trainer Graham Motion at Parx racetrack in Pennsylvania.



*Howe Great cruising home under Johnny Velazquez in Florida.*

Irwin explained that “The colt was ready to run, he had trained well enough on dirt and we sprinted the first time just to get him started. He raced greenly and finished a useful second. Instead of sending him long next time, I asked Graham to sprint him again, because I thought the colt was still pretty green and another short race might be good for experience and conditioning. He won well in his second outing.”

Howe Great, making his first start going long and racing on turf, broke on top and jockey Johnny Velazquez was intent on keeping him on the lead throughout. The dark-colored bay colt was challenged a furlong out of the gate, he was contended with again when passed briefly while between horses on the backstretch and he was swamped turning for home.

When Howe Great cut the corner and changed leads turning for home, he exploded to quickly establish about a 3 ½-length lead. Velazquez hand rode him to the wire to win easily by 1 ½ lengths.

Irwin said “I was not high on the colt going into the race. He looked the part physically. I bought the sire, Hat Trick, and in my opinion Howe Great is an improvement on him, because he is more robust. Graham couldn't have him looking any better. But his stride was short and quick on dirt and my thought was that unless he moved up on the grass, that he was probably just a horse.

“When Johnny let him roll, however, the colt relished the grass, displayed a long stride and really was very impressive, because he most likely could have won by 6 lengths if ridden out.”

Howe Great is most likely to make his next outing in January in the \$100,000 Kitten's Joy Stakes over the same course and distance.

In the wings, Team Valor has 2-year-olds State of Play, winner of the Grade 2 With Approval Stakes at Saratoga; Lucky Chappy, an Italian stakes winner, Grade 3 placed in the U. S. and fourth in the Grade 1 Breeders' Cup Juvenile Turf; Table Three Ten, a sensational 5 ¼-lengths maiden sprint winner at Fair Grounds running the same speed figure as Rachel Alexandra did over the same track in December of their 2-year-old season; and Thursby, the half-brother to Animal Kingdom who is now over shin problems and ready to show what he can do. All of the domestic juveniles are trained by Graham Motion.