

June 24, 2010

EBONY FLYER REMAINS UNBEATEN AT 2 WINNING LADY'S SLIPPER STAKES, BIG GIRL ATTENDS PACE, CRUSHES FAVORITE, DRAWS OFF BY 2 LENGTHS, BARRY IRWIN BOUGHT HER TWICE, HOPES FOR SECOND GUINEAS SCORE

Ebony Flyer confirmed the high opinion of her connections to take today's Lady's Slipper Stakes. Bookmakers made her the 17 to 10 choice over the morning-line favorite Ce Loire. The story of the race is simply told: Ebony Flyer broke running, raced in second outside of Ce Loire to the midpoint of the stretch, responded when asked by her rider and drew off to score by 2 ¼ lengths.

A field of 14 juvenile fillies went into the gate for the Listed event and Ebony Flyer caused the only anxious moments for her connections when it took three attempts to load her. A strict time limit is imposed on starters in South Africa and she came perilously close to being a scratch at the gate.



Ebony Flyer, racing on firm ground, showed she did not require the yielding turf of her career debut, when she strode away effortlessly in the final furlong to score an impressive 2 ½-length victory on Thursday in the Listed Lady's Slipper Stakes.

Ebony Flyer is a big filly—at 17 hands plus, she's the tallest horse regardless of age or sex in the Snaith stable. "Chris Snaith, the father of the trainer, Justin, and the racing manager, Jono, told me recently that he took a measuring stick to the filly. It only went to 17 hands and he ran out of stick," said Barry Irwin.

"Unlike her first race, where it took her awhile to get into stride and find a nice position when she sprinted 5 furlongs, this time Ebony Flyer was alert and up with the action from the get-go. For a filly of her size to be able to show this kind of early foot is nothing short of astonishing to me.



Chris Snaith (right), patriarch of the Snaith Family, accepts son Justin's trophy.

"Felix Coetzee, the rider, said Ebony Flyer was gawking around the turn, because it was all so new to her, as her first run was on a straightaway. But Ebony Flyer is a smart filly, she got her focus back and kept on going.

"When Felix wanted her to go and catch the favorite, Ebony Flyer seemed contest to just follow her. But when Felix gave her a backhander, the signal was instantly received by Ebony Flyer and she simply, as Felix said, "dominated" the race."

Not surprisingly the race not only drew a large field, but there were some seasoned youngsters in the lineup and the first three positions were filled by 3 of the 4 betting favorites, with only Mike de Kock's Kwacha disappointing back in twelfth.

Finishing up well to be second was Short List, a Durban invader making her sixth start for the powerful stable of Mrs. Bridget Oppenheimer. The home-bred daughter of Champion Sire Fort Wood had been first or second in all of her starts but one at Greyville.

Finishing third was 2 to 1 Ce Loire, who had been thoroughly tested against the top juvenile fillies in Cape Town this season, having broken her maiden first time out going 7 furlongs, then finished second in black-type stakes behind the two best fillies in The Cape in Justin Snaith-trained Emerald Cove and Grade 3 winner Madrisa. Ce Loir, who carries the colors of leading South African owner Markus Jooste, was beaten 3 lengths.

Although contested off the beaten track at Arlington Park (the race had been postponed the week before due to bad weather at Fairview) in the weakest province on the South African scene, the Lady's Slipper itself has become an important fixture for juvenile fillies because of its place on the racing calendar and was contested.



Justin Snaith leads filly in on debut.

The Cape Town season for all practical purposes in terms of viable racing opportunities for young horses ended last month. Two-year-olds with promise generally are taken by the bigger stables to race in Durban in the South African fall of the year, or they remain in Cape Town, doing a raid to Port Elizabeth or using small races to prepare for the Classics later in the year.

The Snaith Family decided last year not to take any youngsters to Durban. Chris Snaith explains it as follows: "If you take a young horse, especially a filly, to Durban, the racing in the Graded events can be very hard on them, both physically and emotionally. When they return after the Durban season, many of them are spent and useless for several months.



Jockey Felix Coetzee accepts his trophy and cash bonus from the Thoroughbred Breeders Association for riding Ebony Flyer to victory in the Lady's Slipper race.

"We have found out that if one leaves the youngsters in The Cape and is patient with them, they will have their best chance in the Classics at 3."

Snaith can back up his contention, because with Captain's Lover and Sparkling Gem, his family has won 2 of the last 4 Grade 1 Cape Fillies Guineas contested in South Africa. And that race is the most lucrative and prestigious fixture on the entire South African racing calendar for 3-year-old fillies on the continent.

Fillies have to qualify for entrance into the body of the Cape Fillies Guineas and the reason Justin Snaith wanted to send Ebony Flyer to Port Elizabeth for the Lady's Slipper Stakes is that a win in this feature race will insure inclusion for the filly into the starting line-up for the Grade 1 when it is renewed the first week of December.

Barry Irwin was told by Justin Snaith two weeks ago "that if Ebony Flyer does not beat Ce Loire and win the Lady's Slipper, I will turn in my trainer's license!" In his other juvenile filly Emerald Cove, he has one of the top 2 or 3 proven young fillies in The Cape and he knew that even though Ebony Flyer (breezing on sand at right) had run but once, that she held the measure of her stable mate easily.

Jono Snaith spoke with Irwin after the race and said "Now that we have qualified for the Guineas, the pressure is off and we can take a longer-range approach with her. She will van home on Saturday morning. You saw now that she had given trouble at the gates in both of her starts, so we are going to have to spend a lot of time schooling her. As big as she is, we don't want to have any problems with her in that regard.



"Justin will figure out what to do next, but we are certain to employ races like the Diana and the Odessa (Stud Fillies Championship) as her final preps for the Fillies Guineas."

Captain's Lover, the older half-sister to Ebony Flyer, won 5 of her first 6 starts in South Africa, taking maiden and an allowance races in May of her 2-year-old season and returning in August to begin her 3-year-old season, which began in August with another allowance score. She was then upset by Joshlin when unable to overcome a traffic-plagued trip to finish second in the Grade 3 Diana, after which she won the Grade 2 Odessa by 4 lengths and the Grade 1 Guineas by a head. Even though she ran through only half of her season, she was so dominant that she was voted Champion Filly.



The half-sisters are different in size and type, with Captain's Lover being a more feminine and elegant model with exceptional balance, and Ebony Flyer being an Amazon type that is bigger than life from the tip of her foot to the end of her ears.

"I would not be able to compare them at this stage of the game," said Barry Irwin. "But suffice it to say, both are immensely talented. I would say that Ebony Flyer has a better chance to run farther than Captain's Lover based on their sires alone, as Captain Al gets faster stock than Jet Master, many of whose get run beyond a mile.

“What a fantastic achievement it would be if Ebony Flyer did go on and win the Cape Fillies Guineas. To own a mare and both of her offspring that won the best race in South Africa for a 3-year-old filly would be something to relish and cherish.”

Barry Irwin bought Captain’s Lover for \$27,000 at the National Yearling Sale. Just prior to the filly becoming a household name in her homeland, Irwin engineered the acquisition of her 10-year-old dam Sunshine Lover, in foal to Captain AI, with a 7-month old weanling filly by Jet Master.

Irwin originally planned to retain half of the package for his own account, but he was besieged with partners that wanted to participate in the venture and he wound up selling all but a fraction. That Jet Master filly foal turned out to be Ebony Flyer, who was consigned last season to the National Yearling Sale, as the stated policy for the Sunshine Lover partnership was to be a “for profit venture.”



Ebony Flyer photographed at the National Yearling Sale.

After Irwin inspected all of the lots in the yearling sale, he found himself smitten with Ebony Flyer and he bought her for his own account, for a second time. Although he did not have to, Irwin extended an offer to the original to continue on and race her and he included her in the annual partnership that is offered to all Team Valor partners.

“I didn’t expect much of a response,” Irwin said. “It really was more of a gesture than anything else. But son-of-a-gun if the filly wasn’t oversubscribed! I guess when people see that I am putting up my own cash, they figure that must be a very good sign.”



Justin Snaith (left) was unable to be at the races in Port Elizabeth today, as he was in Durban preparing the stable’s Champion Colt Russian Sage for the Thukela Handicap on Saturday at Greyville, where it is hoped the double Grade 1 winner can be qualified for the Grade 1 Vodacom Durban July at the end of the next month at Greyville.

Sunshine Lover, dam of Ebony Flyer and Captain’s Lover, currently has a weanling filly by Captain AI and is back in foal to that leading sire.

Captain’s Lover is in foal for the first time, having been impregnated by Pulpit in Kentucky. She may be offered at Keeneland in the fall.