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THE TDN CHECKS IN ON PLANS FOR VA BANK'S FIVE-YEAR-OLD SEASON MANAGING EDITOR ALAN CARASSO FOLLOWS POLISH STAR CLOSELY PRIX DE L'ARC DE TRIOMPHE AT CHANTILLY IN OCTOBER IS CHIEF GOAL

From the TDN's Alan Carasso, who may have been the first writer for an English-language publication to catch on to Va Bank back in 2015, comes the following:

VA BANK NEARING RETURN TO ACTION

Team Valor CEO Barry Irwin told the TDN Friday that Va Bank (Ire) (Archipenko), the 2015 Polish Triple Crown winner and victorious in the G3 Preis der Sparkassen Finanzgruppe in his lone overseas venture to date, has wintered well in Poland and is penciled in to make his 5-year-old debut in the Listed Preis von Dahlwitz (2000m) at Berlin's Hoppegarten Racecourse Apr. 16. Va Bank's long-term objective for 2017 is the G1 Prix de l'Arc de Triomphe at Chantilly, Irwin indicated.

"The horse looks good from the pictures I've seen and from the reports I've received," Irwin reported.

Va Bank has returned to steady training in Warsaw over the last couple weeks.



Va Bank with his rider about to leg up at Maciej Janikowski's yard in Warsaw last weekend. Stajnia Czerkies photo

"I wanted to travel him a bit later," Irwin conceded, explaining, "It is always a hot race and those horses in Germany have got a good month head start on us in training and have a lot better chance of being ready to run than us. But [trainer Maciej Janikowski] assures me that Va Bank keeps himself in shape, he's a naturally athletic horse and he thinks the horse will be fine."

From there, connections will pick and choose a variety of spots at home and abroad, with an eye on a trip to France the first weekend of October.

"We're hoping that he's an Arc horse," Irwin commented. "We're going to treat him like he is one, put him in the right races. It will be a combination of running him in Germany a couple of times and then back in Poland and we hope to have a horse that trains and runs like he's that good and bring him up to the race as fresh as possible."

Va Bank ran his winning streak to 10 with a trio of wins at his home base at Sluzewiec Racetrack early last season, then 'der Gast aus Polen' turned in a very game effort to best the well-regarded Potemkin (Ger) (New Approach {Ire}) in the Baden-Baden feature in late August. Soon thereafter, Team Valor purchased a half-interest in the horse and he was pointed at a defense of his title in the Wielka Warszawska in Oct. 2, but things didn't go according to script and Va Bank suffered the first loss of his career, albeit while giving nine pounds to Polish Derby winner and 2016 Horse of the Year Caccini (Fr) (American Post {GB}).

"I had the distinct impression watching him in the pre-parade ring and watching his change in behaviour...he was OK in the pre-parade ring, but the minute he got on the racecourse, he started sweating," Irwin recollected. "By the time he got to the gate, he was dripping with sweat. He acted like he did not want to be there. In the race itself, the pace situation didn't help him, but it didn't cost him the race. I think what cost him the race was he was just over the top. That trip to Germany was long and grueling, he had a very fast and hard race, and I think he had one race too many."

While Irwin and his partners harbour lofty goals for the upcoming season, they are even more ambitious looking ahead to 2018

"I think the way he relaxes that a mile and a half is going to be fine, but one thing we want to try is the Melbourne Cup (3200m)," he explained. "He's five years old, and what we decided to do this year is to see if we have an Arc horse and then after that, next year, we're going to point him for the Melbourne race.



Va Bank's Group 3 win in Germany last summer over subsequent Italian Group 1 and French Group 2 winner Potemkin.

"We'll test him enough in Germany and France over a mile and three-quarters and two miles and see if he's up to it. The one thing this horse has got going for him is he's got an incredible temperament. He can relax, he moves along like a pony and even though you know the result, you're watching and thinking, "there's no way this horse is getting up from there.' He's got tremendous acceleration, he's got a lot of desire and he's just a machine."

Bred by Airlie Stud, Va Bank was purchased by Bobby O'Ryan for €4,500 out of the 2013 Tattersalls Ireland Yearling Sale. He has amassed earnings of approximately US\$180,000 to date.

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