

MILLIONAIRE PONY BECRUX GETS SPOTLIGHT FROM PAULICK REPORT ITALIAN IMPORT WAS A CHAMPION, G1 WINNER ON TRACK, LOVES 2ND JOB OWNER, ADMIRER BARRY IRWIN FOUND A ROLE FOR HIM BEYOND RACING

From Jen Roytz comes the following for the *Paulick Report*.

Becrux Stays Young In Second Career

Becrux is nothing if not a world traveler. Born and raised in Italy, he literally and figuratively hit the ground running, winning his first four outings in his homeland to earn top honors as Italy's Champion Two-Year-Old of 2004. He then went to Dubai and won, then to America and won, onto Canada – and won, and then for good measure, he came back to America and won some more.

But Becrux is so much more than just a worldly racehorse. He was a stocky, gritty runner who gave Team Valor investors thrills again and again. That's why when the horse's form began to wane, managing partner Barry Irwin dug into his own pockets to purchase the horse outright and retire him to a slower pace of life.



Becrux winning the Grade 1, \$1-million Woodbine Mile for Hall of Fame trainer Neil Drysdale, Team Valor and partner Gary Barber.

“Becrux was originally brought to my attention by a friend who is an English bloodstock agent,” said Irwin. “He was in Italy running on grass. I watched his replays and loved how he moved and thought ‘This horse looks like he has a shot to run on the dirt.’”

The plan was to purchase Becrux and send him to South African trainer Mike de Kock. De Kock ran the horse that year in Dubai, where he ran poorly in a pair of group stakes but won a conditions race by daylight and then some.

“Those races at Nad Al Sheba were on the dirt, and I remember Mike telling me, ‘This horse isn’t all you think he is,’” said Irwin. “Mike just wasn’t overly impressed with him.”

So, with that, Becrux was imported to the United States at the conclusion of the Nad Al Sheba meet and placed with trainer Neil Drysdale. The colt was muscular and Irwin noted that he was getting quite thick in the neck, much like a stallion.

“Even though he was a champion and a stakes winner overseas, he didn’t have the bloodlines to be of great value as a stallion in a major breeding market. I made the decision to geld him to help keep him from getting too heavy and hard on himself. It was a good decision. He went on to be a Grade 1 winner and millionaire.”

Becrux ran for Team Valor and partner Gary Barber year after year, racking up wins and placings all over the country. Toward the end of his seven-year-old year, the gelding started showing signs of his age and was struggling to remain competitive with his peers.

“Becrux had done so much for us, and even as he got older, he was still consistently running speed figures in the 90s, which is very impressive,” said Irwin. “He had been in our stable for years. Rather than dropping him down for claiming tags, we wanted to do right by him and give him a dignified retirement and a chance at success after the racetrack.”



Becrux, right, showing the ropes to a young horse at Margaux Farm this week.

So, at age eight, Becrux retired from the racetrack and was given some down time at Margaux Farm. After a few months of enjoying the retired life, Becrux began subtly, and then less subtly, letting everyone around him know he was growing bored with paddock life, so Irwin suggested looking into making him a stable pony.

“He was always a strong, steady horse on the track. He was always competitive and enjoyed being involved in the action, whether on the track or in the barn,” Irwin said. “He was nine or ten-years-old but looked like a four or five-year-old.”

“I asked [former Margaux Farm owner] Steve Johnson to help me find someone who could retrain horses, and he suggested Bill Streaker,” said Irwin. “Bill came out to take a look at Becrux and went into the stall with him. After two hours, he came out and said, ‘Yes, I can work with this horse.’”

Streaker said he needed about four months to retrain Becrux. At the conclusion of four months, he told Irwin the horse needed more time.

Once Becrux was ready, though, was he ever! He was sent to Fair Hill, the home base for many of Team Valor’s horses and learned the ways of the racetrack in the picturesque Maryland setting.

Becrux remained at Fair Hill for several years, enjoying his job and doing it well. This year, at now nearly 13 years old, Becrux has been transferred to Margaux Farm in Midway, Ky., where the work would be a step less demanding.

“Becrux is great. I’m looking right at him bringing back the last set,” said Margaux trainer Kevin Notlemeyer when I called to inquire about Becrux. “When we start the babies under saddle, we like a seasoned pro like Becrux to go out and jog in front of them so he can lead and they can follow.”

At Margaux, Becrux shares a paddock with four other geldings and stays out about 15 hours a day. He comes in each morning to eat, get fed, and get to work, going out with three or four sets of horses each day.

“He loves his outside time, so we try to keep him turned out as much as possible,” said Notlemeyer. “He’s a huge help with the younger ones, though. This year he helped with re-breaking a two-year-old that, due to a setback, wasn’t on the same training timeline as the rest of the horses his age. In his last set today, he went out and jogged with a horse we tried blinkers on for the first time.”

Still owned by Team Valor, the plan for Becrux is to remain at Margaux and work as a track pony for as long as he seems to enjoy the job. When the time comes to retire him, Irwin says he’ll remain at the farm and hopefully enjoy a long, happy retirement.

“Way back when, I dated a girl who had a track pony that was 25-years-old. He loved his job and in a way it seemed to keep him young. As long as Becrux can do something worthwhile, he’ll get to. Once he’s all done with it, we’ll make sure he never wants for anything.”