



TONY MORRIS'S GIANTS OF THE TURF



TODAY
MTOTO

I'VE NEVER subscribed to the view that all top-class colts should remain in training after their three-year-old season. It is more appropriate for some than for others, and while it can be instructive in terms of learning how one crop compares with another, the fact remains that for more than two centuries achievement at three has been what has mattered most; we have developed the breed on that basis, and the practice has served it well.

But there are horses who, for any number of reasons, are not able to fulfil their potential in their first two seasons, who need to race on to prove their merit, and who sometimes enhance weight-for-age competition to a striking degree. One such was Mtoto, who entered my orbit first as an attractive yearling in the Newmarket sale-ring, affording me some pleasure by enriching his breeder and my friend John Moore by 110,000gns when the Curragh Bloodstock Agency bought him on behalf of Ahmed Al Maktoum.

The colt was by an old favourite of mine in Busted and from a first-class family, giving me further reasons to monitor his progress when he went into training. As it turned out, Mtoto's first two seasons barely began to show what he was capable of achieving. By the end of 1986 he had won just one of his seven races, a humble maiden at Haydock Park. With that record he might have seemed a candidate for culling at a horses-in-training sale, perhaps to go jumping or for export.

But there were good reasons why Mtoto was retained to race on from Alec Stewart's Clarehaven stable. A hind leg injury had meant he had been restricted to a single start at two – a promising third at Yarmouth – and at three he had proved difficult to train on account of his fragile hooves, but had nevertheless turned in some smart performances.

That solitary maiden win did not define his talent; his fifth in the King Edward VII Stakes at Royal Ascot and his fourth on the same course in the Queen Elizabeth II Stakes were admirable efforts, and if a remedy could be found for those troublesome feet, he might yet become a significant achiever. If he could be cured of a tendency to be headstrong in his races, so much the better.

The solutions were found. The Mtoto who reappeared at four was a revelation, and we learned that on his seasonal debut as an unfancied 16-1 shot in the Group 3 Brigadier Gerard Stakes at Sandown. Stone last entering the straight, he found an explosive turn of foot that carried him past all seven of his rivals in the space of two furlongs and he was out on his own at the end, striding clear of odds-on favourite Allez Milord.

The Group 2 Prince of Wales's Stakes came next and the outcome was another smooth victory. Coming from behind again after settling well, he quickened impressively to lead over a furlong from home and kept going strongly, earning a shot at the highest level back at Sandown.

Highly satisfactory though his first two performances as a four-year-old had been, the competition had not tested him fully. The Eclipse Stakes promised to be an altogether different proposition, the field being headed by the previous month's Derby hero

Late arrival who found his feet at the right time



Mtoto and Michael Roberts beat Derby winner Reference Point and Steve Cauthen in the 1987 Eclipse Stakes

Reference Point, with the doughty five-year-old mare Triptych, fresh from her victory in the Coronation Cup, an obviously worthy rival. The Cecil colt went off at evens, with Triptych 4-1, while Mtoto was bracketed at 6-1 with Bellotto, second in the Guineas and third in the Derby on his latest outings. Milligram, runaway winner of the Coronation Stakes at Royal Ascot last time, was a 10-1 shot.

As expected, Reference Point set the pace, and a furious gallop it was. Michael Roberts was in no hurry to bring Mtoto into contention, and turning for home in fifth place the four-year-old still seemed to have plenty to do. But steady improvement up the straight brought Mtoto almost level with the leader two furlongs from home, and from that point a splendid duel developed, both colts displaying dogged determination in the struggle.

Inside the last Mtoto edged ahead, only for Reference Point to rally and keep the issue in doubt until the last

few strides, but at the finish the Derby hero had to concede by three-quarters of a length. With Triptych a length and a half back in third and the rest ten lengths and more in arrears, Mtoto was unquestionably a top-grade performer now.

But there were to be no more wins that season. Soft ground kept him out of the King George (won by Reference Point) and an injury prevented his return in York's International (won by Triptych). Mtoto had been on the missing list for three months before he returned a little rusty in the Arc and had to settle for fourth place behind Tremolino, Tony Bin and Triptych, and he signed off for the year with an indifferent run, far behind Triptych in the Champion Stakes, clearly ill at ease on the tacky ground.

Mtoto's fourth campaign began farcically in the Listed Festival Stakes at Goodwood, when his 'victory' was annulled because he and his five opponents took the wrong course. No matter, the outing tuned him up

nice for a second shot at the Prince of Wales's Stakes, which he won only narrowly, having been compromised by a slow pace. On paper, the 1988 Eclipse promised to represent almost as tough a test as its immediate predecessor and as Mtoto was trying to become the first repeat winner since Polyphontes over 60 years earlier there was history to overcome in addition to old foe Triptych and another formidable female opponent in Indian Skimmer.

But by now the public had faith in Mtoto, who started favourite at 6-4, and the double was duly delivered in spite of a slow start which left him way off the pace for much of the contest. He had to be hard driven to snatch the spoils close home from long-time leader Shady Heights.

The ground was not ideal – riding good to soft – when Mtoto was sent out for the King George and there was one preferred to him in the market in the shape of three-year-old Unfuwain,

MTOTO
bay colt, born April 1, 1983

Pedigree

	Crepello	Donatello
		Crepuscule
Busted (b 1963)	Sans Le Sou	Vimy
		Martial Loan
	Mincio	Relic
Amazer (br 1967)		Merise
	Alzara	Alycidon
		Zabara

Bred by John L Moore in England
110,000gns Tattersalls Highflyer yearling

Race record

Ran 17 Won 8 2nd 4 3rd 1
Earned £841,959
Big races won Brigadier Gerard Stakes, Prince of Wales's Stakes (twice), Eclipse Stakes (twice), King George VI & Queen Elizabeth Stakes, Select Stakes
Group 1-winning progeny Celeric (Gold Cup), Shaamit (Derby), Serious Attitude (Cheveley Park Stakes)

fresh from his spectacular 15-length triumph in the Princess of Wales's Stakes at Newmarket. A slow early gallop at Ascot was also not calculated to help Mtoto, who was held up in last place until just before the turn from home, but when Roberts unleashed him in the straight his striking burst of acceleration settled the issue. Unfuwain was a game second, two lengths in arrears, with Tony Bin a length and a half further back.

Mtoto tuned up for the Arc with a ready victory over four inferiors in the Select Stakes at Goodwood and on the big day at Longchamp he started 6-4 favourite in a field of 24. He turned in a gallant display, progressing from 17th to second in the straight, but Tony Bin, luckier in running, was able to preserve a neck advantage at the line, depriving Mtoto of a triumphant finale to an outstanding career.

With his old-fashioned, stamina-laden, Northern Dancer-free pedigree, Mtoto was never the height of fashion at stud, but he did get a Derby winner in Shaamit and his Derby-placed son Presenting became a hugely successful sire of jumpers. In his mid-20s, by now neglected by most prominent breeders, he was back in the limelight when his daughter Serious Attitude became a top-level winner in Britain and Canada and was sold to Shadai Farm for \$1,850,000 as a broodmare prospect.

One way and another, that late-developing colt with the dodgy feet made quite an impact.

Your recollections of last week's giant – Connaught

▶▶I remember seeing Connaught's jockey, Sandy Barclay, being miserable in the weighing room after leading at Tattenham Corner and thinking he'd won the Derby until Sir Ivor just swept by him in the straight. *roy_rvnet*

▶▶Sandy Barclay wasn't miserable in the changing room – he was crying. He couldn't believe the Derby had

been taken out of his hands. Lester on Sir Ivor had found the gaps but stayed on the rails. *makaritis*

▶▶I saw Connaught as a two-year-old and started backing him for the Derby. I took all the 33-1 I could and just kept going. Derby day Sandy Barclay kicks on and can't get beat! Sir Ivor drops out of the sky and it's all over – Lester magic. *Banbuild*

▶▶Connaught was a great character, kind hearted like a large lapdog. Had a great sense of nice humour without an ounce of nastiness and was too huge to fit into the stalls. Top class, genuine and honest at 1m2f during golden era. Great broodmare sire. *drawnsley*

▶▶Tell us your recollections of Mtoto on racingpost.com