

TONY MORRIS



PEDIGREE
ANALYSIS
Gentildonna

LAST year Gentildonna went into the Japan Cup as the only three-year-old of her sex in the line-up, but as the heroine of the fillies' Triple Crown she commanded plenty of respect, starting a well-fancied third favourite in a field of 17. Her victory, by a nose over Arc runner-up Orfevre, ensured she would be crowned Japan's Horse of the Year.

This year her route to her nation's most prestigious contest was different; she had run only three times and remained without a win in 2013. It seemed remarkable she should now be a firm market choice at 11-10 in another 17-runner event, but the punters called it right. Gentildonna became the first dual winner, again prevailing by no more than a nose.

Many felt Gentildonna had been lucky to keep the race in 2012, as she had given Orfevre a hefty clout when forcing her way through a furlong from home, but Ryan Moore procured her a smooth passage this time. She and the runner-up Denim And Ruby, the only three-year-old on parade, finished so far apart that no naked eye could have separated them at the death, and several minutes elapsed before the camera could accomplish the task.

If there was any good fortune attached to Gentildonna's success at the weekend, it was just that neither Orfevre, Japan's best older horse, nor Kizuna, the top three-year-old, was in the line-up. The muddling pace did not suit her, she reached the front sooner than intended, and there was probably more merit to her performance than the closeness of the finish might imply.

Gentildonna has done all her racing between a mile and a mile and a half. In two starts as a juvenile she finished second in a newcomers' event at Kyoto before breaking her maiden at Hanshin. Her only lapse at three came in a fourth-place finish in the Tulip Sho at Hanshin, but it was there a month later that she collected the first jewel in her Triple Crown in the mile Oka Sho. Tokyo's 1m4f Yushun Himba provided her second Classic triumph and she completed her treble in the 1m2f Shuka Sho at Kyoto. The unfortunate Verxina was her runner-up on each occasion.

Gentildonna ventured to Meydan for her first outing as a four-year-old and was sent off the 11-8 favourite for the Dubai Sheema Classic. She ran a few pounds below her best home form there, but there was no disgrace in chasing home St Nicholas Abbey, a shade over two lengths in arrears.

The filly returned after a three-month absence for a slightly disappointing third place in the Takarazuka Kinen and four months elapsed before she was a beaten favourite again, runner-up in the Autumn Tenno Sho. Those three consecutive defeats cost jockey Yasunari Iwata his formerly fruitful association with Gentildonna, and on Sunday he had to watch Ryan Moore guide her to victory from the back of seventh-placed Verxina.

Gentildonna has now won eight of her 13 lifetime starts, including five at Group 1 level, while earning in excess of £7.9 million. Those figures illustrate why Japan's prize-money structure is the envy of every other nation, and why her breeders are prepared to invest so heavily in breeding stock from Europe and North America.

There was a time, not so long ago, when the west treated Japan as a dumping-ground for stallions and mares who seemed surplus to



GENTILDONNA		b f 20-2-2009	
		Hail To Reason	Turn-to Nothirdchance
	Halo	Cosmah	Cosmic Bomb
Sunday Silence		Understanding	Almahmoud
	Wishing Well	Mountain Flower	Promised Land
Deep Impact (b 2002)			Pretty Ways
			Montparnasse
			Edelweiss
		Lyphard	Northern Dancer
	Alzao		Goofed
Wind In Her Hair		Lady Rebecca	Sir Ivor
		Busted	Pocahontas
	Burghclere		Crepello
		Highclere	Sans Le Sou
			Queen's Hussar
			Highlight
		Northern Dancer	Nearctic
	Danzig		Natalma
		Pas De Nom	Admiral's Voyage
Bertolini		Alydar	Petitioner
			Raise A Native
	Aquilegia		Sweet Tooth
		Courtly Dee	Never Bend
Donna Blini (ch 2003)			Tulle
		Lyphard	Northern Dancer
			Goofed
	Lyphard's Special		Bupers
		My Bupers	Princess Revoked
Cal Norma's Lady			
	Junius		Raja Baba
			Solid Thought
	June Darling		Darling Boy
		Beau Darling	Fair Astronomer
Bred by Northern Racing Co Ltd in Japan			
VERDICT			
▶▶Extremely game top-class performer, well suited by 1m4f			
▶▶By an outstanding racehorse who is already promising to prove a major influence at stud			
▶▶Easily the best product of her family in recent generations			

requirements. We were not going to miss what we sent there, because we could always reckon to produce better replacements. What was more, we had not learned to respect Japanese breeders; where was the evidence that they could produce horses capable of competing with the best from the rest of the world?

We know better now, Americans having learned their lesson over Sunday Silence, with whom they happily parted only to discover that Japan had acquired a hugely successful sire. The old adage said that performance provided proof of pedigree, but that was forgotten by US breeders who did not want to know a

horse who had been Horse of the Year, had won the Kentucky Derby, the Preakness and the Breeders' Cup Classic, and had never finished worse than second in 14 efforts.

He was by Halo, a horse with temperament issues, his conformation left something to be desired, and the distaff side of his pedigree was so unexciting he had failed to make a modest reserve when offered as a yearling. The Japanese were supposedly mugs for taking this reject, but it turned out they had not only got the better of the bargain – they had obtained the horse who would raise their breed to a new level.

Sunday Silence was only 16 when he died in August 2002, but he had served for 13 seasons and was Japan's champion sire on 12 occasions. Who knows what he might have achieved from a base in Kentucky?

FROM Sunday Silence's penultimate crop came the colt who is widely regarded as the best racehorse ever bred in Japan, and who is now promising to emulate his sire as a massive influence at stud. Deep Impact was appropriately named.

A winner of 12 of his 14 starts, seven of them at Group 1 level, Deep Impact was twice named Japan's Horse of the Year. The Triple Crown winner of 2005 and of the Japan Cup in 2006, he was defeated only once at home and in his only foreign venture he finished third – although subsequently disqualified – as 9-4 favourite for the Prix de l'Arc de Triomphe.

Deep Impact was bound to attract widespread interest as a stallion. Aside from being the best son of his exceptional sire, he was out of a European Group 1-winning mare in Wind In Her Hair, whose own granddam was dual Classic heroine Highclere, famously also granddam of Unfuwain, Nashwan and Nayef. He had lived up to his illustrious pedigree as a runner and breeders understandably were confident he would do the same as a sire.

Now with four crops of racing age, Deep Impact has already supplied two Derby winners in Deep Brillante and Kizuna, plus three winners of the 1,000 Guineas, and he has been

represented by four individual Group 1 winners in 2013. Gentildonna's immediate victim in the Japan Cup, Denim And Ruby, is another of his daughters.

Gentildonna is the second stakes winner produced by her dam Donna Blini, whose name should ring a bell in these parts. A 20,000gns Doncaster yearling, she earned distinction as winner of the Group 2 Cherry Hinton and Group 1 Cheveley Park Stakes. Having failed to stay a mile the following spring, she reverted to shorter distances and confirmed her status as a smart sprinter.

Sent to the December sales at the end of her second season, she fetched 500,000gns, which might have seemed excessive for the daughter of an indifferent sire, but not to a Japanese buyer who recognised performance as proof of pedigree and was taking her to produce offspring who would race in the world's richest racing jurisdiction.

Donna Blini was already recognised as a bargain when her daughter Donau Blue won twice at Group 3 level last year. Now Gentildonna has spread a thick layer of icing on the cake.

Gentildonna clearly stays a mile and a half very well, which was perhaps not to be expected in light of the performances of Donna Blini and her closest, rather undistinguished antecedents, but Deep Impact excelled up to two miles and he has presumably supplied the filly with the necessary stamina genes.

Deeper in the female line is another example of a filly who stayed rather better than most expected. I well recall the unfashionably bred Fair Astronomer scoring six times as a juvenile in Ireland, apparently indicating she was a sprinter pure and simple, but when she arrived with Harvey Leader, a wonderful trainer of fillies, in Newmarket, he stretched her out to win twice at a mile, including the Rous Memorial Stakes at Royal Ascot, and both her races over 1m2f.

The supposed speedball wound up starting a warm favourite for the Cambridgeshire under a big weight and was a shade unlucky to finish no closer than fifth. Now we find her as fifth dam of another filly who stays rather better than might have been imagined.