PEDIGREE ANALYSIS Moonlight Cloud

TONY MORRIS

HE toss of a coin determined which horse should be celebrated in this column a week ago, the Sussex Stakes hero Toronado winning out over Moonlight Cloud, who gave a record-setting

display in the Prix Maurice de Gheest. But the wait for a chance to pay tribute to George Strawbridge's brilliant home-bred mare was brief, as only seven days elapsed before she scored another Group 1 Deauville success in the Prix Jacques le Marois.

Sunday's race was eagerly anticipated, appearing on paper to be the best-contested inter-age mile event in Europe this season. And it did not disappoint, treating us to a thrilling tussle between the five-year-old Moonlight Cloud and her three-year-old rival, the Choisir colt Olympic Glory, with the pair separated by a few millimetres at the death.

The mare seemed to have ended the race as a contest when her abrupt change of pace took her clear entering the final furlong, and that sudden move was to prove crucial, but in the end she had to demonstrate her bravery in a battle as well.

Still only third with 100 yards to run, Olympic Glory was fairly flying at the finish and Moonlight Cloud was all out to repel him in those dying strides.

The form book had said this was a high-quality edition of the Jacques le Marois, and on good ground with three pacemakers to ensure a truly run race, all we needed was for the principals to run up to their best. The one who clearly didn't was Dawn Approach, but it was reassuring to learn later that he had his excuses, scoping with mucus in his lungs. There is reason to believe he will return as a major force before long.

Intello was perhaps a little short, not at all surprising over what was surely an inadequate trip, but his third place was highly commendable in such company, while Declaration Of War, only a head back in fourth, ran to the level we were entitled to expect from him.

Best of all, both first and second turned in career-best performances, remarkable in the case of Moonlight Cloud, who was having her 18th lifetime start in her fourth campaign, while Olympic Glory advanced on previous form by a substantial margin on his first start since finishing far back in the Poule d'Essai des Poulains in mid-May.

Moonlight Cloud was winning for the 11th time, having scored nine times in Pattern company, five at the top level. Her record at Deauville – five wins out of six – has made her a favourite there, but she also won last year's Prix du Moulin at Longchamp and almost embarrassed the undefeated Black Caviar in Ascot's Diamond Jubilee Stakes. All her races have been in the six-furlong to a mile range, and she has to be acknowledged as one of the best sprinter-milers of her sex in recent years.

Moonlight Cloud comes from the fifth crop of her sire Invincible Spirit, whose innings at the Irish National Stud began in 2003 at a fee of \in 10,000, but who was priced at \in 65,000 in the latest covering season. He was popular with breeders from the outset and their confidence in him was soon vindicated, but it must be doubted whether anyone then believed he would succeed to such a remarkable degree.

Invincible Spirit was a smart

Versatile Deauville star prime example of Invincible's stud power

MOONLIGHT CLOUD

Bred by George Strawbridge in England

two-year-old, when he broke his

maiden at Goodwood and turned in an

excellent performance at Ripon when

winning the Listed Champion Trophy

Stakes. An injury at the end of that

season meant he did not reappear at

three until September and he didn't

win again until the May of his

four-year-old campaign. A Listed

that he proved best, collecting a

Finishing with a career-best performance was inevitably a factor in

Haydock Sprint Cup.

success at Newbury and a Group 3

victory on the Curragh showed him in

good form, but it was as a five-year-old

Group 3 win in the Duke of York Stakes

before signing off with a short-head victory over Malhub in the Group 1

enabling him to attract 129 mares in

his first stud season, but it wasn't a

performance that identified him as a

superstar sprinter. The Racing Post

Rating he attained at Haydock was

>>The best daughter of her sire – and a better runner than her sire

>> Product of a family that regularly produces top-class performers

Blessed with a sharp turn of foot and possesses courage as well as class

only 120, and there was also another

that time, Green Desert had no

reputation as a sire of sires. Cape

was a big, strong, fine stamp of a

him, and they have been proved

has done just that.

horse, and out of a Classic-winning

mare in Rafha, chose to have faith in

correct. He was a stallion who might

get stock better than himself, and he

NVINCIBLE SPIRIT has now been

winners of 51 European Pattern

races, and 11 of those successes

responsible for 27 individual

there have been two top-level triumphs

Jockey Club) and one each by Fleeting

have come in Group 1s.

Alongside Moonlight Cloud's five,

by Lawman (including the Prix du

Spirit, Hooray, Mayson and Rosdhu

possible negative in the fact that, up to

Cross, Oasis Dream and Kheleyf were

still to come. The optimists, noting he

VERDICT

b m 5-3-2008

	Danzig	Northern Dancer	Nearctic Natalma
Green Desert Invincible Spirit b 1997 Rafha	Dalizig	Pas De Nom	Admiral's Voyage Petitioner
	Foreign Courier	Sir Ivor	Sir Gaylord Attica
		Courtly Dee	Never Bend Tulle
	Kris	Sharpen Up	Atan Rocchetta
		Doubly Sure	Reliance Soft Angels
	Eljazzi	Artaius	Round Table Stylish Pattern
		Border Bounty	Bounteous B Flat
Spectrum Ventura b 1998 Wedding Bouquet	Rainbow Quest	Blushing Groom	Red God Runaway Bride
		I Will Follow	Herbager Where You Lead
	River Dancer	Irish River	Riverman Irish Star
		Dancing Shadow	Dancer's Image Sunny Valley
	Kings Lake	Nijinsky	Northern Dancer Flaming Page
		Fish-Bar	Baldric Fisherman's Wharf
	Doff The Derby	Master Derby	Dust Commander Madam Jerry
		Margarethen	Tulyar Russ-Marie

Queen. His Australian-foaled daughter Yosei collected three Group 1 victories in Australia.

Moonlight Cloud's dam Ventura was bred by Vincent O'Brien and she has now returned whence she came, having been acquired by Coolmore for 900,000gns at the 2011 December Sales. The foal inside her then was the daughter of Makfi catalogued as Lot 89 at Arqana in two days' time. Before Moonlight Cloud, Ventura's best runner was the Galileo colt Cedar Mountain, who won three times, including the Listed Round Table Handicap, and was Grade 2-placed in the Sunset Handicap.

Ventura is a daughter of Spectrum, who got 2,000 Guineas and King George winner Golan in his first crop but failed to build on that promising start. She showed useful form for Charles O'Brien as a three-year-old, winning twice over a mile at Naas and earning a Listed place over the same trip in the Ruby Stakes at Tralee. At the end of that season she came into Strawbridge's possession, acquired for 500,000gns at Tattersalls.

It was neither her sire nor her merit

as an athlete that made Ventura such a valuable commodity. That was all about her family, which had a high profile then and has delivered top-class representatives ever since.

Her dam Wedding Bouquet, a daughter of Kings Lake, won the Group 3 Park Stakes in Ireland and the Grade 3 Monrovia Handicap in the US; she also had form at the top level, as runner-up in the National Stakes and third in the Phoenix Stakes. That was the record of a good racemare, but it made her only fourth-best of the nine winners produced by her unraced dam Doff The Derby.

Dual Derby hero Generous topped the list, Imagine, with her Classic triumphs at the Curragh and Epsom, ranked second, and Imagine's sister Strawberry Roan, unlucky as runner-up in the Irish 1,000 Guineas, took third billing.

Imagine earned further distinction at stud, with Horatio Nelson, Viscount Nelson and Kitty Matcham among her produce, and other notable performers from the immediate family in recent years include Cape Dollar, Talwar, Hawaafez and Probably.



prestigious Deauville double in the Prix Jacques le Marois last Sunday