

TONY MORRIS



PEDIGREE
ANALYSIS
Palace Malice

Palace Malice still to prove he's top of Classic pile in the States



Palace Malice's Belmont success is a breakthrough into the big time for his sire Curlin

THERE are some seasons when the Triple Crown races serve to deliver a reliable guide to the pecking order among America's top three-year-olds. This is not one of those seasons.

All three races provided an authoritative winner – Orb by two and a half lengths in the Kentucky Derby, Oxbow by a length and three-quarters in the Preakness, and, last Saturday, Palace Malice by three and a quarter lengths in the Belmont. As the latest evidence showed Palace Malice as clearly superior to second-placed Oxbow and third-placed Orb, it is tempting to award him the palm, but such hasty judgement might well prove erroneous.

The form of the Belmont Stakes can often mislead. Few American horses are properly equipped for a Classic test over a mile and a half, and victory sometimes goes to the one contender who truly gets the trip. Chances are that none of Saturday's 14 runners will ever be asked to compete again at what in the States is considered such an extreme distance, so if the three should clash on some future occasion, stamina will not feature as a significant issue.

We may even learn that none of the three is the real number one. My mind goes back to 1982, when Derby hero Gato Del Sol, Preakness winner Aloma's Ruler and Belmont victor Conquistador Cielo all showed up to do battle for the Travers Stakes at Saratoga, and the unconsidered Canadian raider Runaway Groom beat them all. We don't yet know enough about the current three-year-old crop for even a sound guess at the identity of the champion.

Palace Malice had won only a maiden – over six and a half furlongs at Saratoga last August – in seven starts before his Classic triumph, but he had several times hinted he might go on to better things, so his victory ranked as a mild surprise rather than a major shock.

Anyone with aspirations to win a Belmont Stakes could hardly do better than look to a product of Will Farish's Lane's End Farm. Remarkably, Palace Malice is the seventh winner of the Classic bred and consigned from the Versailles stud, after Bet Twice, A.P. Indy, Lemon Drop Kid, Jazil, Thunder Gulch and Rags To Riches.

A May foal, he featured in book three as a Keeneland September yearling, and a bone chip behind was

PALACE MALICE

b c 2-5-2010

Mr Prospector	Raise A Native	Native Dancer
		Raise You
Smart Strike	Gold Digger	Nashua
		Sequene
Classy 'N Smart	Smarten	Cyane
		Smartaire
Curlin	No Class	Nodouble
ch 2004		Classy Quillo
Deputy Minister	Vice Regent	Northern Dancer
		Victoria Regina
Sherriff's Deputy	Mint Copy	Bunty's Flight
		Shakney
Barbarika	Bates Motel	Sir Ivor
		Sunday Purchase
	War Exchange	Wise Exchange
		Jungle War
Theatrical	Nureyev	Northern Dancer
		Special
Royal Anthem	Tree Of Knowledge	Sassafras
		Sensibility
In Neon	Ack Ack	Battle Joined
		Fast Turn
Palace Rumor	Shamara	Dewan
b 2003		Palsy Walsy
Red Ransom	Roberto	Hail To Reason
		Bramalea
Whisperifyou dare	Arabia	Damascus
		Christmas Wind
Stellar Affair	Skywalker	Relaunch
		Bold Captive
	Fawn And Hahn	Grey Dawn
		Ecstatica

Bred by W.S. Farish in Kentucky. \$25,000 Keeneland September yearling; \$200,000 Keeneland April 2-y-o.

VERDICT

- ▶▶ Well suited by the Belmont distance and proved the point with an emphatic victory.
- ▶▶ Clearly one of the leaders of his generation, but no certainty to confirm the Belmont form over shorter trips.
- ▶▶ Rise to prominence focuses attention on his young sire, who may well impart more stamina than most American stallions.

probably off-putting for some, but not to Colin Brennan, who was delighted to secure him for only \$25,000. Reconsigned by Brennan's brother Niall in the same ring seven months later, the colt was a more impressive physical specimen who had worked well over the Polytrack there, and octogenarian Cot Campbell, the man who pioneered the idea of racing partnerships back in the 1960s, had to go to \$200,000 to obtain him for his Dogwood Stable.

Palace Malice ran only twice as a two-year-old, coming out of the second run with bucked shins. The first hint of his burgeoning talent came when he took third place in the Grade 2 Risen Star Stakes at Fair Grounds this spring. Unlucky in running when second favourite for another Grade 2 event, the Louisiana Derby, he then needed a prominent effort in the Grade 1 Blue Grass Stakes to secure a Kentucky Derby spot, and he duly produced one, forfeiting

victory only in the dying strides.

The belief blinkers would aid his cause at Churchill Downs proved a dreadful error, as they so lit him up that he set off at a furious rate of knots, ran himself into the ground and dropped back to finish 12th. The lesson was learned, the headgear removed, and in the Belmont the colt proved wholly amenable, lying handy all the way, shrugging off Oxbow on the turn for home and drawing clear, through beaten horses to claim third place.

PALACE MALICE represents a breakthrough into the big time for his sire Curlin, who has had a couple of Listed winners Stateside in Countless Curlin and Stopshoppingdebbie, and whose few runners here to date include Listed-placed Savanna La Mar and promising recent Lingfield maiden winner Butterfly McQueen. By a curious coincidence, Savanna La Mar's one disappointing – and rather wayward – performance last term came when she was fitted with first-time blinkers in the Group 3 Prestige Stakes at Goodwood.

Curlin stands alongside his sire, Smart Strike, at Lane's End, and has been available this year at \$25,000, a fee which might well be reckoned a bargain for a dual Horse of the Year, a seven-time Grade 1 winner and America's all-time leading money earner – the first to have banked over \$10 million. Now that he has a Classic winner from his first crop, which numbered 94, he will surely stand for a higher sum in 2014, perhaps as high as his own sire, who covers at \$85,000.

A big, strongly made individual, Curlin was unraced at two, but by earning upwards of \$5m at both three and four he ensured that Smart Strike would head the North American sires' list in 2007 and 2008. His Classic campaign featured a third in the Kentucky Derby, a victory in the Preakness, and a second, beaten only a head by Rags To Riches, in the Belmont. Subsequent triumphs in the Jockey Club Gold Cup and Breeders' Cup Classic underlined his quality and dominance in his crop.

Equally proficient as a four-year-old, Curlin scored a wide-margin victory in the Dubai World Cup and had a second success in the Jockey Club Gold Cup among three further Grade 1 wins at

home. He signed off with a fourth – his worst-ever finish – when bidding for another Breeders' Cup Classic, under three lengths off the winner, Raven's Pass. His career – 11 wins, two seconds and two thirds from 16 efforts – was one of consistent excellence.

Curlin had fetched only \$57,000 as a yearling, which reflected the fact his sire's merit was still not fully appreciated and his unraced dam had hitherto produced only moderate performers, albeit by sires of little consequence. His granddam was a Grade 2 winner, and quite close up in the female line there were several runners of note, although the fillies had tended to outrank the colts.

Palace Malice is the third foal of his dam Palace Rumor. Her previous offspring were Puritanka, a daughter of Tiznow who won in Russia, and an Elusive Quality filly, Lady June Bug, who won three sprints in ordinary company in the States. There is a two-year-old City Zip filly, as yet unnamed, and this year's foal is a son of New York-based Grade 1 winner Pomeroy, born on March 30.

Palace Rumor, a daughter of Juddmonte International winner Royal Anthem, was a useful performer on grass, winning five times while earning \$111,833, most notably a minor stakes event, the Audubon Oaks, over eight and a half furlongs at Ellis Park. She had two rather better half-brothers in Maya's Storm (by Stormy Atlantic) and Jumpifyou dare (by Jump Start), both multiple winners of stakes at unfashionable tracks, and there is a two-year-old Curlin colt, yet to race, closely related to the Belmont victor.

The standout name in recent generations in the female line is that of Rail Trip, a gelded son of Jump Start who won the Grade 1 Hollywood Gold Cup Handicap over a mile and a quarter as a four-year-old in 2009 and has earned in excess of \$1.5m. He is out of Sweet Trip, a juvenile winning half-sister to Whisperifyou dare, the granddam of Palace Malice, and he was one good reason – Curlin was obviously another – why the Belmont distance could be expected to suit its winner.

Ecstatica, the fifth dam of Palace Malice, is the most recent representative of the family to have featured notably on this side of the Atlantic. That daughter of Damascus won a Chester maiden and finished third in the Group 3 Fred Darling Stakes for Fulke Johnson Houghton in 1982.