

TONY MORRIS



Pedigree analysis
Virtual

SOME commentators were knocking this year's Juddmonte Lockinge Stakes before the race, complaining of a lack of quality in the field, and afterwards nobody seemed to want to say anything positive about it beyond the fact that it had been a thrilling spectacle.

It certainly did produce a tremendous finish, but what if the rains had not come? What if Frankie Dettori had not dropped his whip a furlong from home on Alexandros? What if the winning post had come a stride sooner, or even later?

Poor Virtual, for his tremendously game effort under severe pressure, seemed to be entitled only to praise with faint damns.

Okay, it probably would have been a different race, perhaps with a different result, on faster ground. But the suggestion that Paco Boy was the only proper Group 1 horse on parade was irresponsible when among his opposition were a number who might be considered open to improvement, including the three who, as it turned out, finished in front of him.

And let us be clear on one thing. Paco Boy cannot be said not to stay 1m without qualification; he has proved that he stays the trip more than once. More accurately, we should recognise that he is vulnerable at the distance in testing conditions at the top level, but is quite capable of kicking most milers out of the way.

Virtual undoubtedly had underfoot conditions that suited him on Saturday, and in those desperate final strides the fact that Jimmy Fortune could – and did – wield a whip, while his principal rival had only his own formidable brute strength as counter may well have made the inch or two's difference revealed on the photo-finish print.

Even so, we should acknowledge that Virtual is a highly progressive individual for whom 1m is a bare minimum these days. He was a cosy winner over 1m1f at Maisons-Laffitte last term, and John Gosden had no hesitation in nominating the Coral-Eclipse Stakes as his midsummer target. The colt will need to improve again to feature prominently in the company he can expect to meet there, but it is unlikely that he will be beaten there for want of stamina.

When Pivotal went to stud in 1997 it might have seemed long odds against any of his progeny excelling as milers, let alone proving effective over longer distances. In a brief career of only six starts, his principal achievements had come over the minimum distance, highlighted by victories in the Group 2 King's Stand and Group 1 Nunthorpe Stakes.

He had won over 6f in maiden company at Newcastle as a juvenile, but when he tried that trip again at the top level in his second season he could finish no nearer than sixth of ten behind Anabaa in the July Cup. Anyone might have been pardoned for assuming that he was an out-and-out sprinter – and for predicting that if he were to achieve anything at stud, it would be as a sire of cheap speed.

But Pivotal was not bred to be a 5f specialist. His sire, Polar Falcon, had been a high-class sprinter, recording his top prestige win in the Group 1 Haydock Sprint Cup, but he had also been formidable as a miler, with a victory in the then Group 2 Lockinge Stakes to his credit. In addition, Pivotal's dam, Fearless Revival, had been a winner over 1m2f, and she was out of a Bustino mare, Stufida,



Virtual (nearside) noses out Alexandros and company to win the Group 1 Juddmonte Lockinge Stakes

Virtual yet another to hit heights for Pivotal

Colt will need to improve to win Eclipse but stamina is not an issue

SIRE PIVOTAL

Bred by Cheveley Park Stud Ltd in Britain. Won 4 (5-6f) of 6 races, viz. 2 out of 3 at 2 years, 2 (King's Stand S.-Gr2, Nunthorpe S.-Gr1) out of 3 at 3 years. RPR 103 at 2, 120 at 3. Earned £148,023.

Powerfully built, attractive sort, 16.3hh, who always impressed in appearance and condition. High-class sprinter on fast ground. Best form at 5f, but probably capable of running to same mark at 6f.

By a high-class sprinter-miler who died young, having made a promising start at stud. Half-brother to Listed-placed winner Brave Revival (f by Dancing Brave; dam of Listed-placed winner Bravado).

Dam smart performer, 2yo winner, Gr3-placed. Granddam Gr1 winner over 1m2f in Italy, half-sister to seven other winners. Third dam won twice at two, daughter of Listed 2yo winner. Good, if not exciting, family. Stands at Cheveley Park Stud, Newmarket, at a fee of £65,000. Sire of 10 crops of racing age, inc. Gr1 winners: Golden Apples (Del Mar Oaks, Beverly D S., Yellow Ribbon S.), Kyllachy (Nunthorpe S.), Silvester Lady (Preis der Diana), Chorist (Pretty Polly S.), Megahertz (John C. Mabee H., Yellow Ribbon S.), Somnus (Haydock Sprint Cup, Prix Maurice de Gheest, Prix de la Foret), Peeress (Sun Chariot S., Lockinge S.), Saoire (Irish 1,000 Guineas), Excellent Art (St James's Palace S), Falco (Poule d'Essai des Poulains), Halfway To Heaven (Irish 1,000 Guineas, Nassau S., Sun Chariot S.), Virtual (Lockinge S.).

DAM VIRTUOUS

Bred by Cheveley Park Stud Ltd in Britain. Won 1 (1m) of 6 races, viz. 1 (Nottingham maiden) out of 4 at 2 years, 0 out of 2 at 3 years. Also 3rd in Listed race at 3 and 4th in Gr3 at 2. RPR 92 at 2, 94 at 3. Earned £8,503.

Useful performer, not quite up to Pattern calibre, but genuine. Stayed 1m3f well.

Well bred. Half-sister to 3 winners, to the dam of Listed winner Dance Partner, and to the granddam of Gr2 winner Lahaleeb. Dam 2yo winner, half-sister to 9 other winners, inc. Entrepreneur (2,000 Guineas), Exclusive (Coronation S; dam of Gr1 winner Echelon and Gr2 winner Chic), Dance A Dream (Classic-placed), Sadler's Image and Irish Order (both Listed winners). Granddam Gr2 winner in France. Excellent family.

To stud at 4 years and dam of: Peace (2000 f by Sadler's Wells; winner), Liberty (2001 f by Singpiel; winner), Iceman (2002 c by Polar Falcon; Gr2 winner), Virtuosity (2003 f by Pivotal; winner), Staid (2004 c by Singpiel; unraced), Virtual (2005 c by Pivotal; Gr1 winner), Purity (2006 f by Pivotal; unraced), Judicious (2007 c by Pivotal; unraced to date). She has a yearling filly by Pivotal, a filly foal by Dansili, and has returned to Pivotal.

CONCLUSION

Admirably progressive, game performer. Gets 1m1f well, should be well suited by Eclipse trip.

VIRTUAL

b c 10-5-2005

	Northern Dancer	Nearctic Natalma
Nureyev	Special	Forli Thong
Polar Falcon	Jefferson	Charlottesville Monticella
Marie D'Argonne	Mohair	Blue Tom Imberline
Pivotal (ch 1993)	Caro	Fortino Chambord
Cozzene	Ride The Trails	Prince John Wildwook
Fearless Revival	Bustino	Busted Ship Yard
Stufida	Zerbinetta	Henry The Seventh Yucatan
	Riverman	Never Bend River Lady
Irish River	Irish Star	Klairon Botany Bay
Exit To Nowhere	Halo	Hail To Reason Cosmah
Coup De Folie	Raise The Standard	Hoist The Flag Natalma
Virtuous (b 1995)	Nijinsky	Northern Dancer Flaming Page
Shadeed	Continual	Damascus Continuation
Exclusive Virtue	Exclusive Native	Raise A Native Exclusive
Exclusive Order	Bonavista	Dead Ahead Ribotina
	Bred by Cheveley Park Stud in Britain	

who had registered a Group 1 success over that trip in Italy.

With that kind of background, Pivotal was entitled to get stock capable of winning over a variety of distances, and that is precisely what he has done. And we have long since ceased to be surprised when they have turned out to possess an abundance of class.

But there were surprises aplenty in the early years. Covering at £6,000 in his first two seasons at Cheveley Park, and only £5,000 in the following three, he could not expect to get mares of real distinction, aside from those supplied by his home team, and that was how it was, but remarkably there were Group 1 winners from all five of those crops.

Among the first batch were sprinter Kyllachy at home and middle-distance performers Golden Apples and Silvester Lady abroad, and from the second came Chorist in Ireland and Megahertz in the States, both successful at 1m2f. Somnus led the third crop with his wins in the Haydock Sprint Cup and Prix de la Foret, the fourth featured Peeress and the fifth Saoire, both excelling as milers.

Higher fees and bigger books of better quality inevitably ensued, with Excellent Art as the star of the crop conceived at £25,000, and Virtual is the third to have reached Group 1 standard, after Falco and Halfway To Heaven, from the 2005 crop, products of £40,000 matings. All scored top-level wins at 1m, with Halfway To Heaven also successful in the Nassau Stakes, over 1m2f.

PIVOTAL is still without a Group 1 winner at 1m4f, but that is an omission that might soon be rectified by Sariska, strongly fancied for the Investec Oaks after her impressive victory in the Tattersalls Musidora Stakes at York last week. That filly, from a stout female line, races as though the distance of the Epsom Classic will hold no terrors for her.

Virtual's dam, Virtuous, won only once, in a 1m maiden at Nottingham, but the best performance of her career came when she finished third in the Oaks Trial over Lingfield's 1m3½f. She has now produced five winners from as many runners, two (including the ill-fated Coventry Stakes winner Iceman) at 6f and two over 1m2f.

The family is one that has thrived at Cheveley Park since the acquisition at Keeneland in November 1987 of Exclusive Order, a former winner of the Prix Maurice de Gheest. Then eight years old, and in foal to Shadeed, she cost the hefty sum of \$825,000, but it has turned out to be money well spent.

The filly inside Exclusive Order at the time was Exclusive Virtue, who won at two and was to become Virtual's granddam, but among the mare's other products were several who have attained distinction, headed by Entrepreneur, the 2,000 Guineas hero of 1997. He, like Coronation Stakes heroine Exclusive and her daughters Echelon and Chic, was essentially a miler, but there were also the likes of Sadler's Image, who was third in the Chester Vase, and Dance A Dream, runner-up in the Oaks after a success in the Cheshire Oaks.

This is essentially a family more noted for speed than stamina, but every representative has to be considered as a unique individual, and Virtual's performances allow hopes that he will stay 1m2f. Whether he proves up to Eclipse Stakes standard remains to be seen.