A man whose colts became basis of the modern thoroughbred

TONY MORRIS’S BREEDING GREATS

The seventh in a monthly series celebrating the achievements of ten breeders who have enjoyed outstanding success and played crucial roles in the development of the thoroughbred in the course of the last 200 years. This month’s subject is Edward Derby, 17th Earl of Derby, who bred a record 19 British Classic winners and was the leading breeder ten times

There seemed to be considerable potential among the mares, but Lambeon was conscious of a need for more speed and toughness, so Alston was charged with the task of recruiting stock that would impart those qualities. In 1911 Bromus was required for 3,200gns, in the following year Anchora for 1,300gns and Gondolette for 1,550gns. None of them had obvious credentials for success as a broodmare, but Alston had his reasons for liking their pedigrees and had strategies in mind as to how to mate them. Bromus had won only one of her ten races and was the only winner out of her dam; her first two foals had run a total of 17 times without a single victory. But she was inbred 2 x 3 to Polymelus and the outcome was Phalaris, who duly proved himself the fastest horse of his day, a great weight-carrier, and twice the top older horse in training. Better than that, he became twice champion sire and in due course was acknowledged as the most important sire of the 20th century. Anchora was by no means fashionably bred, but she had been enough to run 51 times over six seasons in training and had eight wins to her name. Her first mating was with Chaucer and the result was Scapa Flow, won Stakes. A repeat of that mating five years later yielded Fairway, who won the St Leger, an Eclipse and two editions of the Champion Stakes. But she was inbred 2 x 3 to Polymelus and the outcome was Phalaris, who duly proved himself the fastest horse of his day, a great weight-carrier, and twice the top older horse in training. Better than that, he became twice champion sire and in due course was acknowledged as the most important sire of the 20th century. Anchora was by no means

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H E N Edward Stanley, 17th Earl of Derby, who died in 1944, the authoritative Bloodstock Breeders’ Review commented: “The long history of the British Thoroughbred has raised in more than one breeders and exercised more influence on the breed than the late earl.”

Harem and Charmer were famed words were well merited, reflecting the fact that Derby’s impact was noticed not just in the extraordinary success he enjoyed on the racecourse with the products of his Stanley Stud, but also that among the colts he bred were those who became outstanding sires, duly recognised as staple ingredients of the breed.

It was the 12th earl who was instrumental in founding the Derby and the Oaks in the late 18th century, his masterplan being to merge the Persimmon filly Keystone, and the 16th determined to re-establish the 17th earl with his first great triumphs. The Persimmon filly Keystone, and the 16th determined to re-establish the

Also inherited, and key influences on the development of the stew, were Lambeon as trainer, Walter Alston as manager and pedigree guru, and John o’ Gaunt who would provide the 17th earl with his first great triumphs as an owner. That colt was Swynford, whose victory in the St Leger provided the first of his 20 Classic victories as an owner and was the best horse in the world at 4 and 5. He became twice champion sire and sire on four occasions, while Pharos also excelled as a stallion, most notably with two great unbeaten sons in Nearco and Pharsite. The Nile, successful in the Cheveley Park Stakes, and repeated that feat in the following season with the Nassau and Park Hill Stakes among her successes. Considered too small as a yearling to be worth of Classic entries, she was nevertheless the best of her sex at three. Tranquil, Selene’s year-younger half-sister by Swynford, was engaged in the Classics and she won two of them, the 1,000 Guineas and the St Leger, in which she comfortably beat Derby hero Papyrus. The best of Selene’s sons was the Son-In-Law colt Bosworth, beaten a short head in the St Leger, but successful at four in the Gold Cup. While Tranquil’s stud career proved disappointing, Selene’s was triumphant. Her first two foals were Sickle and Pharamond, high-class performers who underlined the efficacy of the Phalaris-Chaucer cross and were later to enjoy great success at stud in America, but far more impressive was his mating with Gainsborough that resulted in Hyperion, who might be termed the cornerstone of the Stanley Stud. Probably the best horse anyone had seen up to that point in the 20th century, Hyperion won the 1933 Derby and St Leger by wide margins before accruing six times champion sire and home and represented by successful sons at stud all over the world.

Phalaris, who gave Derby two other stars out of Chaucer mares in Colorado (2,000 Guineas, Eclipse Stakes) and Caerleon (Eclipse), died in 1920, and two other conclusions were severed two years later with the death of Walter Alston and the surprising collapse of the wake of Hyperion’s St Leger triumph, of Lambeon. Things were never quite the same again, though there were plenty more notable successes, many with the products of Fairway and Hyperion.

Derby was leading breeder on ten occasions, and leading owner on seven. He bred the winners of 19 British Classics and owned the favourite of 25, equalling the record in both spheres. And what made those tallies so remarkable was that his breeder, who habitually exceeded 25, far fewer than rivals such as the Aga Khan and Marcel Boussac possessed. In his lifetime, Stanley Stud stallions beaded the sires’ list 13 times, and many times accrued after his death. Hyperion’s last champion came in 1953, and the last two notable triumphs, the deal by Alphonson and Mossborough, had turned at the top, in 1953 and 1958. Nobody ever doubted that Derby owed an enormous amount to Alston, who was responsible for buying some of the key mares, and for many years devised the matchings and managed the stallions. Hyperion’s success, and for applications for their services. With the mares, Alston favoured inbreeding to influential ancestors, and he thought that a mating was right, he was content to repeat it, even if it did not achieve the desired result at first. His employer had every reason to trust his judgement.

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Notable horses bred by the 17th Earl of Derby