

# TONY MORRIS'S BREEDING GREATS



*The ninth 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 HH Aga Khan III, who founded an equine operation which has been passed down through the generations*

**B**ORN in Karachi in 1877, Sultan Sir Mahomed Shah was the third holder of the title Aga Khan, which had been bestowed on his Persian-born grandfather by the British government and became recognised throughout the world.

As a young man he visited William Hall Walker's stud at Tully (now the Irish National Stud), an experience which fired him with the ambition to become a breeder of thoroughbreds, but many years passed before he took the first steps in that direction.

After the Great War he deemed that the time had come to embark on a project that he felt needed to be undertaken thoroughly and on an extensive scale. He approached George Lambton, asking him to become his trainer, but Lambton, committed to handling Lord Derby's string, had to decline. However, the Newmarket trainer did agree to buy yearlings for the Aga, and a start was made in 1921 with two filly acquisitions at Newmarket in July and eight more at Doncaster (then the flagship Tattersalls sale) in September.

Those initial purchases included Cos, the champion two-year-old filly of 1922, Paola, who was to win the 1923 Coronation Stakes, and Teresina, who excelled at four with wins in the Goodwood Cup and Jockey Club Stakes. Lambton's choices for his patron in the following year, when the brief included colts as well as fillies, proved exceptional. Among the males were Classic heroes Diophon (2,000 Guineas) and Salmon-Trout (St Leger), while the star filly was Mumtaz Mahal, a champion at two and three, still revered as one of the fastest of her sex ever foaled.

The seeds had been sown for the development of a hugely successful stud, contemporaneous with those of formidable rivals in Lord Derby's Stanley Stud and Marcel Boussac's Haras de Fresnay-le-Buffard.

As always throughout his life, the Aga was a dealer, and the first Classic winner he ever bred he actually parted with as a yearling at Deauville. She was Taj Mah, successful in the 1929 1,000 Guineas, but he was still buying yearlings, and Lambton's selections in 1928 included, at 4,100gns,

# The grand project that grew into a mighty empire

Blenheim, who gave him his first Derby victory.

From the start the Aga's horses had been in the care of Dick Dawson, but that arrangement came to an abrupt end after a stand-up row between owner and trainer at Newbury in 1931. The string left Whatcombe the following day and was soon installed at Newmarket with Frank Butters, and that relationship endured until Butters was knocked off his bicycle in 1949, suffering injuries that caused his retirement. After Butters had saddled Oaks winner Udaipur and four out of the first five home in the St Leger in 1932, that partnership always was secure.

That was the year in which Dastur finished second in all three colts' Classics, but it also saw the birth of his



half-brother Bahram, who would win all three and earn recognition as the best horse the Aga ever bred. Product of a mare bought on his behalf by Dick Dawson as a yearling for only 250gns, Bahram was a champion at two and three, retiring unbeaten after nine starts.

The Aga won a third Derby in 1936 with Mahmoud, a son of Blenheim and grandson of Mumtaz Mahal, whom he had tried unsuccessfully to sell as a yearling. Little more than a month after that Epsom triumph he did sell Blenheim, for £45,000 to a syndicate of US breeders, much to the disgust of European

breeders, who had further cause to deplore the Aga's evident readiness to accept the almighty dollar four years later.

The Aga spent World War II in neutral Switzerland, initially forming the view that the allies were unlikely to prevail. In 1940 he

instructed the British Bloodstock Agency to find buyers for both Bahram and Mahmoud, a task which naturally did not prove difficult, and disposed of all his yearling colts at a valuation of 400gns each. The price for Bahram was £40,000 and for Mahmoud £20,000, both finding new homes in America.

Courting popularity was never a high priority with the Aga, and the fact that he had sold all three of his Derby winners to the States early in their stud careers made him numerous enemies. He was particularly detested by Lord Derby, who also would not have been chuffed over the fact that his trainer had effectively set up the Aga's breeding empire and that his racing triumphs had been achieved with Butters, whom he had fired.

As it turned out, both Blenheim and Mahmoud had stellar careers at stud in the States, but Bahram proved a surprising failure. The last-named was eventually off-loaded again to Argentina, and his best sons, Big Game and Persian Gulf, were those left behind in England.

The most successful stallion bred by the Aga was the prodigiously gifted but wayward Nasrullah, whose principal triumph came in a wartime

Champion Stakes. He also wound up in America, where he became champion sire and got a multiple champion sire in Bold Ruler (sire himself of Secretariat), but it was Irishman Joe McGrath who was responsible for selling him to Claiborne Farm; McGrath had bought Nasrullah from the Aga several years earlier.

From the 1940s many of the Aga's horses were bred in partnership with his son, Prince Aly Khan, the studs in Ireland and France routinely delivering high-quality stock. It was Aly who negotiated the deal with French breeder Leon Volterra in May 1948 for a £15,000 half-share in My Love, who a fortnight later became the fourth colt to carry the Aga's colours to victory in the Derby.

The fifth and final Epsom success came more conventionally from a home-bred colt in 1952, a victory which gave jockey Charlie Smirke, who had been bullish beforehand, licence to commit the fearful pun: "What did I Tulyar?"

The mating of the mares in the operation was, from the start, a role entrusted to Jean-Joseph Vuillier, inventor of the so-called dosage system, and later assumed by his widow, Germaine. Just how much of the success derived from use of the system was always debatable, given that a top-class broodmare band was invariably treated to matches with stallions of high quality, but there was success right to the end.

When the Aga died in July 1957, there were still major triumphs to come from the last crops he bred, delivered by the likes of Petite Etoile, Saint Crespin, Sheshoon and Charlottesville.

Aly Khan's sudden death in a car accident in 1960 left the bloodstock empire in the hands of a young man who professed no knowledge nor even interest in it. Fortunately, Karim, Aga Khan IV, quite soon developed a real passion for the family business and took it to new heights, as next month's final part of this series will show.

## NOTABLE HORSES BRED BY AGA KHAN III

- gr f **Moti Mahal** (foaled 1923, *The Tetrarch - Maglona, by Fugleman*). Winner of the Coronation Stakes.
- pb c **Costaki Pasha** (1926, *Gainsborough - Cos, by Flying Orb*). Middle Park S., Cork and Orrery S.
- pb f **Taj Mah** (1926, *Lemberg - Taj Mahal, by The Tetrarch*). 1,000 Guineas.
- pb c **Rustom Pasha** (1927, *Son-in-Law - Cos, by Flying Orb*). Eclipse S., Champion S.
- ch f **Theresina** (1927, *Diophon - Teresina, by Tracery*). Irish Oaks.
- pb c **Ut Majeur** (1927, *Ksar - Uganda, by Bridaine*). Newmarket St Leger.
- pb c **Dastur** (1929, *Solario - Friar's Daughter, by Friar Marcus*). Irish Derby, Coronation Cup, Champion S. [dead-heat].
- ch f **Firdaussi** (1929, *Pharos - Brownhylda, by Stedfast*). Dewhurst S., St Leger S.
- br f **Udaipur** (1929, *Blandford - Uganda, by Bridaine*). Oaks S., Coronation S.
- pb c **Felicitation** (1930, *Colorado - Felicita, by Cantilever*). Champion older horse at 4; Middle Park S., Gold Cup.
- pb f **Mrs Rustom** (1931, *Blandford - Cos, by Flying Orb*). Dewhurst S.
- br c **Umidwar** (1931, *Blandford - Uganda, by Bridaine*). Champion S.

- pb c **Bahram** (1932, *Blandford - Friar's Daughter, by Friar Marcus*). Champion at 2 and 3, unbeaten; Triple Crown.
- pb c **Bala Hissar** (1933, *Blandford - Voleuse, by Volta*). Dewhurst S.
- gr c **Mahmoud** (1933, *Blenheim - Mah Mahal, by Gainsborough*). Champion 2-y-o; Derby S.
- pb f **Stafaralla** (1935, *Solario - Mirawala, by Phalaris*). Cheveley Park S.
- pb f **Queen Of Shiraz** (1937, *Bahram - Qurrat-al-Ain, by Buchan*). Irish Oaks.
- pb c **Turkhan** (1937, *Bahram - Theresina, by Diophon*). Irish Derby, St Leger S.
- pb c **Panipat** (1938, *Firdaussi - Penang, by Sir Cosmo*). Poule d'Essai des Pouliches.
- pb f **Uvira** (1938, *Umidwar - Lady Lawless, by Son-in-Law*). Irish Oaks.
- ch f **Majideh** (1939, *Mahmoud - Qurrat-al-Ain, by Buchan*). Champion 3-y-o filly in Ireland; Irish 1,000 Guineas, Irish Oaks.
- pb c **Ujiji** (1939, *Umidwar - Theresina, by Diophon*). Gold Cup.
- pb c **Nasrullah** (1940, *Nearco - Mumtaz Begum, by Blenheim*). Champion 2-y-o; Champion S.
- br f **Toro** (1954, *Tudor Minstrel - L'Horizon, by Bois Roussel*). Poule d'Essai des Pouliches.
- br f **Nashua** (1949, *Nasrullah - Dasaratha, by Dastur*). Irish 1,000 Guineas.
- br f **Yla** (1955, *Migoli - Skylarking, by Mirza*). Poule d'Essai des Pouliches.
- br f **Ginetta** (1956, *Tulyar - Diableretta, by Dante*). Poule d'Essai des Pouliches.
- gr f **Petite Etoile** (1956, *Petition - Star of Iran, by Bois Roussel*). Champion filly at 3 and 4; 1,000 Guineas, Oaks S., Sussex S., Yorkshire Oaks, Coronation Cup, Champion S.
- ch c **Saint Crespin** (1956, *Aureole - Neocracy, by Nearco*). Champion 3-y-o in France; Eclipse S., Prix de l'Arc de Triomphe.
- ch c **Sheshoon** (1956, *Precipitation - Noorani, by Nearco*). Champion older horse at 4 in France; Gold Cup, Grand Prix de Saint-Cloud.
- br c **Taboun** (1956, *Tabriz - Queen Of Basrah, by Fair Trial*). 2,000 Guineas.
- ch f **Charlettesville** (1957, *Prince Chevalier - Noorani, by Nearco*). Champion 3-y-o in France; Prix du Jockey Club, Grand Prix de Paris.
- br c **Venture** (1957, *Relic - Rose O'Lynn, by Pherozshah*). St James's Palace S., Sussex S.