

# TONY MORRIS



Pedigree analysis  
**Summer Bird**

**W**E HAVE long known the identity of North America's best three-year-old filly of 2009. Rachel

Alexandra is out on her own among the distaff set, and in Saturday's Woodward Stakes she will be a hot favourite to claim her third Grade 1 win against colts and further demonstrate her dominance over the age-group as a whole.

Perhaps a serious challenger might emerge from that Belmont Park event at the weekend, but for the time being the comprehensive victory of Summer Bird in the Travers Stakes on the final card of the Saratoga meeting has satisfied most observers that he must be regarded as the outstanding male of his generation.

Unraced as a two-year-old, Summer Bird was not seen in action until March 1, when his greenness was evident in a maiden at Oaklawn Park and he came back fourth after a wide trip. But he learnt from that experience, collected his first win over the same track 18 days later, and trainer Tim Ice was sufficiently encouraged to let him have a shot at the Grade 2 Arkansas Derby there on April 11.

The colt obviously had to be a longshot in such company, but he belied his odds of 26-1 with a bold effort to take third place, close behind the more experienced Papa Clem and Old Fashioned. And the \$100,000 he garnered from that performance raised his earnings to a level that just qualified him for a run in the Kentucky Derby.

Considered a no-hoper again at Churchill Downs, Summer Bird was sent off at 43-1 in the Derby. His run there attracted little attention, overshadowed by the amazing last-to-first, rail-hugging trip engineered by Calvin Borel for Mine That Bird and that gelding's wide-margin success, but Ice took heart from Summer Bird's strong progress from 16th to an eventual sixth place and knew he had an improving colt.

The Preakness, in which Rachel Alexandra floored Mine That Bird, was never on Summer Bird's agenda; the Belmont was his target, and its 1m4f promised to suit. The wagering public gave him a chance this time too, noting the first-time application of blinkers, though at just under 12-1 he was still reckoned more likely just to hit the board than win.

The Belmont did not go smoothly for a long way. Summer Bird was hampered several times, and still had only one behind him at the half-mile pole. But from the moment that Kent Desormeaux moved him to the outside he made relentless progress, and having assumed command in the final furlong, he was going away at the finish, chased by Dunkirk and Mine That Bird.

The result of the Belmont did not automatically establish Summer Bird as the best three-year-old male, but it did suggest that he might be the most progressive, given his lack of experience. He was the best of the six colts in his next race, the Haskell Invitational Stakes, but it was a tall order, attempting to give Rachel Alexandra 5lb, and sure enough he was emphatically outrun by the filly, who romped home by six lengths.

The Travers did not look like a penalty kick for Summer Bird, with a revitalised Quality Road, back with a track record performance in the Amsterdam Stakes, and the improving Kensei, fresh from his win in the Jim Dandy, among his rivals, but it turned out to be something of a doddle.



Summer Bird flies home in the Belmont Stakes before his easy win in the Travers Stakes at Saratoga

## Lightly raced colt who could be a champion

Leading US three-year-old male represents first crop by Birdstone

### SIRE BIRDSTONE

Bred by Marylou Whitney Stables in Kentucky. Won 5 (6f-1m2f) of 9 races, viz. 2 (inc. Champagne S.-Gr1) out of 3 at 2 years, won 3 (inc. Belmont S.-Gr1, Travers S.-Gr1) out of 6 at 3 years. Earned \$1,575,600. Well-made, strong sort, 15.3hh.

High-class middle-distance performer at his best. Raced only on dirt. Well bred. The best son of his sire, a Kentucky Derby winner. Half-brother to numerous winners, inc. Bird Town (by Cape Town; champion 3-y-o filly). Dam stakes-placed winner, half-sister to stakes-winner Noactor. Granddam multiple Gr2 winner on grass, half-sister to stakes winner Plains and Simple.

Next two dams both major stakes-winners. Stands at Gainesway Farm, Lexington, Kentucky, at a (2009) fee of \$10,000. Sire of 2 crops of racing age, inc. notable winners: Livin Lovin (Gr3), Mine That Bird (Kentucky Derby-Gr1), Summer Bird (Belmont S.-Gr1, Travers S.-Gr1).

### DAM HONG KONG SQUALL

Bred by Dr. & Mrs. R. Smiser West in Kentucky. \$22,000 Keeneland September yearling. Ran 9 times, viz. unraced at 2 years, placed 3rd once from 2 starts at 3 years, placed 2nd once and 3rd once from 7 starts at 4 years. Earned \$11,421.

Showed modest form at around 1m on dirt and turf. Quite well bred. By a Preakness winner and effective sire. Half-sister to 6 winners, inc. Peninsula (by Meadowlake; Listed-placed). Dam minor sprint winner, half-sister to multiple Gr1 winner Rubiano, lesser stakes-winner Tap Your Heels (dam of Gr1 winner and successful sire Tapit), Gr3-placed winner High Cascade, and useful Wichitoz (dam of Gr3-placed stakes-winners Chitoz and Affirmatif), and to Secret Red (dam of Gr2 stakes-winner Dupleo).

Granddam stakes-winning sprinter, half-sister to Glitterman (Gr1-placed stakes-winning sprinter, useful sire). Next dam stakes-winning sister to Relaunch (Gr3 winner, Gr1-placed, notable sire).

Family of Auction Ring, Afifa, Golden Act, etc. To stud at 5 years and dam of: Hongkong (2002 c by Stark Ridge; winner), Oriental Beauty (2003 f by Proudest Romeo; winner), Oriental Storm (2004 c by Stark Ridge; winner), Summer Of Summers (2005 c by Proudest Romeo; winner), Summer Bird (2006 c by Birdstone; Classic winner), Indy Squall (2007 c by Jump Start; unraced to date). She has a yearling colt by Johar, and a filly-foal by Friends Lake.

### CONCLUSIONS

On current form stands out as the obvious favourite for honours as North America's champion three-year-old male.

### SUMMER BIRD

ch c 7-4-2006

	Unbridled	Fappiano	Mr Prospector Killaloe
		Gana Facil	Le Fabuleux Charedi
Grindstone		Drone	Sir Gaylord Cap And Bells
	Buzz My Bell	Chateaupavia	Chateaugay Glenpavia
Birdstone (b 2001)		<b>Northern Dancer</b>	<b>Nearctic Natalma</b>
	<b>Storm Bird</b>	<b>South Ocean</b>	<b>New Providence Shining Sun</b>
	Dear Birdie	Silent Screen	Prince John Prayer Bell
	Hush Dear	You All	Nashua Honey Dear
		<b>Northern Dancer</b>	<b>Nearctic Natalma</b>
	<b>Storm Bird</b>	<b>South Ocean</b>	<b>New Providence Shining Sun</b>
Summer Squall		Secretariat	Bold Ruler Somethingroyal
	Weekend Surprise	Lassie Dear	Buckpasser Gay Missile
Hong Kong Squall (ch 1996)		Alydar	Raise A Native Sweet Tooth
	Alysheba	Bel Sheba	Lt Stevens Belthazar
Hong Kong Jade		Nijinsky	<b>Northern Dancer</b> Flaming Page
	Ruby Slippers	Moon Glitter	In Reality Foggy Note

Bred by Drs K.K. and V.D. Jayaraman in Kentucky

Never far off the pace, he took the lead on the turn for home and powered clear to win by more than three lengths from Hold Me Back, with Quality Road a length and a half away in third.

If he had to face Rachel Alexandra again, few would allow Summer Bird a chance, but most would now concede that he has the beating of all his contemporary males. And as he has still had no more than seven races, there is reason to believe that he may yet make further progress.

Summer Bird, like Mine That Bird and the distant Kentucky Oaks runner-up Stone Legacy, comes from the first crop of Birdstone, who has stood for only \$10,000 in each of his first five seasons at Gainesway, but whose fee is surely now due for a substantial upward revision.

Birdstone, a half-brother to 2003's champion three-year-old filly Bird Town, was a good colt, though never an outstanding one. He announced his arrival on the scene with a wide-margin win in a Saratoga maiden, flopped after a mishap at the gate in the Hopeful Stakes, and his brief first season ended with a comfortable victory over Chapel Royal in the Champagne Stakes.

**A**T THREE he began with an easy allowance win at Gulfstream, then suffered from traffic congestion in both the Lanes End Stakes and Kentucky Derby, finishing far behind on both occasions. But he came back with a resolute showing to thwart Smarty Jones's Triple Crown aspirations in the Belmont, and followed with a decisive score over The Cliff's Edge in the Travers.

Those last two performances led to his starting third favourite for his final race, the Breeders' Cup Classic, but he was never in the hunt, finishing a well-beaten seventh behind Ghostzapper.

Despite his three Grade 1 successes, Birdstone was never a horse to catch the imagination of breeders, and it did not help that he was just about the only good runner by the fragile 1996 Kentucky Derby winner, Grindstone. He could not command a high fee, and would have to earn promotion by results at the track from the produce of ordinary mares.

Of course, he has now done that, while Grindstone's record has become no better; he was standing at only \$3,500 this spring. But history records numerous instances of an indifferent or poor sire getting one son capable of making a name at stud, and we already know that perceptions of Birdstone have changed; he had a yearling sold for \$400,000 last month, and we can expect plenty of high prices for his stock at Keeneland this month.

Summer Bird is out of Hong Kong Squall, a daughter of Summer Squall who cost only \$22,000 as a yearling, earned only half that amount while failing to win at the track, but has produced five winners from as many foals to race. His granddam was just an ordinary winner, but she was half-sister to a champion sprinter and respectable sire in Rubiano and to the minor stakes scorer Tap Your Heels, whose son Tapit won at Grade 1 level and has made a promising start as a sire.

Summer Bird is entitled to respect as a stallion prospect, as Rubiano and Tapit are not the only two from recent generations of his family to make an impression at stud. His third dam was half-sister to Glitterman and fourth dam sister to the influential Relaunch.