

Secretariat – The Rest of the Story: Emmett Turner

By now I suspect that every CDCTA member has seen the movie Secretariat. If not, shame on you. If you like horses, you should see this movie about one of the greatest race horses of all time. You all know the basic story. Secretariat's breeding rights are syndicated after a successful 2-year old campaign, he wins the Triple Crown as a 3-year old, and the money saves the Chenery family farm located a few miles north of Richmond, Virginia. This article is about things you would not have learned from the movie.

In 1972, one year before Secretariat, Riva Ridge also owned by the Chenery's Meadow Stables, won the Kentucky Derby and the Belmont Stakes. He was a great race horse, certainly paid a lot of the family bills, had a good career as a stallion, and gets not a single mention in the movie. I know it was not the story the movie makers wanted to tell, but Riva Ridge deserved better.

I think Secretariat's Belmont Stakes is the most astonishing horse race ever. He set records for time and margin of victory that may never be broken. However, Secretariat's Kentucky Derby win is more revealing about Secretariat the race horse. In the Derby, as shown in the movie, he breaks somewhat late from the gate and moves gradually back into contention before pulling away to the win in the stretch. Horses do this all the time, but they do not do it as Secretariat did. He ran every quarter mile over a mile and a quarter faster than the previous quarter mile. Even famous stretch runners slow down, when you look at the clock instead of believing your eyes, they just slow down less than other horses in the race. This is a major clue to his record as a breeding stallion.

While the family farm is saved in the movie, it was not saved for long. Though I do not recall the year, the horses were all soon sold in a dispersal sale. I later bought one of the mares from that sale and bred her to Le Cavalier. The best looking foal he ever produced is from that mare and now belongs to Hayley Royston a long time CDCTA member. The farm itself went through many twists and turns before becoming the site for the Virginia State Fair at around 2010 or 2011. The site also was to be used for lease for horse shows. The CDCTA Board considered trying to run a schooling show there but it was too far away. We did not have a potential show manager in that area. In 2012, it was to be the site of a dressage show on the same date as the CDCTA spring dressage show at Morven Park. The site went into bankruptcy, the show was canceled, and we no doubt benefited from entries that might otherwise have gone to that show.

At the end of the movie, I am sure all of the investors in Secretariat's breeding syndicate were thrilled with their decision. That did not last for long. In his early foal crops, only the colt General Assembly looked and ran even a little like his sire. In General Assembly's best race he won the 1979 Travers Stakes in stakes record time. Risen Star won the 1988 Preakness and Belmont Stakes and is generally regarded as the best of Secretariat's male offspring. But, the very best of his produce were mares. The best of these were the gray mares Lady's Secret (1986 Horse of the Year) and Terlingua. Therein was another clue to his value as a stallion. If you recall the movie, much was made of the fact that Secretariat's dam Something Royal was by the stallion Princequillo. Princequillo was for many years the gold standard for brood mare sires.

In the early years after Secretariat went to stud service, he was widely derided as a failure. Slowly but surely the view of his value turned on the produce of his mares. Three of the resulting stallions must be mentioned above all others. The first is A. P. Indy by the Triple Crown winner Seattle Slew and out of the mare Weekend Surprise by the Triple Crown winner Secretariat. How could he not be special? A.P.

Indy became a two-time North American leading sire by money winnings. The second is Storm Cat. Through 2010, Storm Cat sired 462 yearlings sold at auction for an average of \$692,192. Storm Cat is by Storm Bird by the all time great stallion Northern Dancer. Storm Cat's dam was the already mentioned racing mare Terlingua. The third is Gone West. Gone West is by the very famous stallion Mr. Prospector and out of the Secretariat mare Secretame. Gone West is the sire of more than 95 stakes winners.

To focus on Secretariat's continuing impact through his mares, I have looked at the Blood-Horse listing of the 2012 leading sires by money winnings of their produce, focusing first on just the top 15 stallions. The number 2 stallion in the world and 1st in North America is Giant's Causeway producing money winnings of \$9,515,074. Giant's Causeway is a son of Storm Cat. Number 3 on the list is Speightstown with winnings of \$9,511,654. Speightstown is a son of Gone West. Number 4 is the stallion Tapit with winnings produced of \$8,684,322. Tapit is a son of Pulpit and Pulpit is a son of A. P. Indy. The next hit on the list is Malibu Moon at number 7, again by A. P. Indy, with winnings produced at \$7,640,810. The next hit comes in at number 10, Lion Heart with winnings of \$7,148,167. Lion Heart is by Tale of the Cat, by Storm Cat. Lucky number 11 on our list is Harlan's Holiday at \$7,081,134. Harlan's Holiday is by Harlan by Storm Cat. The beat goes on to number 12 Stormy Atlantic at \$6,961,555. The name is the give-away. Stormy Atlantic is by Storm Cat. Our final hit at number 15 is Elusive Quality by Gone West with winnings from his produce of \$6,496,253.

Secretariat was not successful in reproducing himself. Instead, he pretty much stepped into the shoes of his dam sire Princequillo as one of the most successful brood mare producers of the Thoroughbred Registry. From Blood-Horse statistics, Secretariat is credited as the brood mare sire of 338 dams of 3,128 foals, of which 51 percent were winners and 171 were stakes winners in the U.S. and abroad. Looking at a list of the current top 150 stallions in the world, none of them are in the direct sire line of Secretariat. However, through his mares, Secretariat appears 59 times in the 4-generation pedigree of the top 150 stallions. In a sire of sires listing, Secretariat appears 77 times through A. P. Indy, 163 times through Storm Cat, and 58 times through Gone West. Overall, the benefits of Secretariat's service as a stallion might be declared to be astronomical, it's just that very few of those benefits accrued to the original investors in his syndication.

How could all of this come to pass? Breeders understood this pattern more fully after Secretariat's death. It was found at his autopsy that his heart was far larger than the heart of a normal thoroughbred race horse. While we often praise athletes for having heart, it is reasonable to conclude that Secretariat truly had heart, a heart that could pump so much blood to his muscles that he had nearly unlimited stamina to compliment a genetic heritage for speed from his sire Bold Ruler. An unusually large heart has been reported after autopsy of some exceptional race horses. This condition is believed to be the result of some genetic factor known as the "X-factor" that it is linked with the X-chromosome and thereby is passed only through the mare lines. A similar finding was reported after autopsy of Eclipse in 1789 (Wikipedia, Secretariat). The dam line of Secretariat has been confirmed as tracing to a daughter of Eclipse. Only in his passing does it make sense that he could run a mile and quarter in the Derby and run each quarter mile faster than the previous, set a record at a mile and a half in the Belmont Stakes that many racing experts expect never to be broken, and establish a racing heritage that is associated exclusively with the influence of his daughters.