

FOREWORD

When *Champions: The Lives, Times, and Past Performances of the 20th Century's Greatest Thoroughbreds* was first published in July 2000, it set out to capture the first 100 years of the modern Thoroughbred era in words and past performances, to underline the greatness of racing immortals, and to revive the memories of those who, for one splendid season, were called champion.

Since then, the best-selling book *Seabiscuit: An American Legend* and its successful movie adaptation revived a piece of racing's great past, and the feel-good stories of Funny Cide and Smarty Jones helped raise the sport's profile to its highest level since the glory days of the late 1970's.

At first glance, Seabiscuit, Funny Cide, and Smarty Jones all seemed unlikely candidates to reach the pinnacle of the sport, but in reality, each had a pedigree that allowed him to excel at the highest level. The success of these horses confirms the cliché that "a good horse can come from anywhere."

And that is the common thread that runs through the nearly 500 horses whose past performances appear in this second edition of *Champions*. Equal treatment is given to the regally bred, such as Secretariat and Easy Goer, and to the products of seemingly haphazard matings such as Kelso and John Henry.

Champions has no barriers for longevity, either. It allows for the inclusion of Vindication, whose career was cut short after just four starts, though his last was a victory over the best of his division in the Breeders' Cup Juvenile, as well as Imp and Pan Zareta, each of whom made in excess of 150 trips to the post. And though it is rare among these pages to find the merely ordinary, those non-immortals still occupy space without prejudice alongside Cigar, Citation, Dr. Fager, Equipoise, Native Dancer, and Spectacular Bid.

All are measured by the single most important gauge used in the sport: the past-performance line. Over two dozen elements are used to define and summarize each race in the past-performance profile, yet a single glance can sometimes distill a historic moment such as Secretariat's unforgettable victory in the 1973 Belmont Stakes:

Secretariat

ch. c. 1970, by Bold Ruler (Nasrullah)—Somethingroyal, by Princequillo

Lifetime record: 21 16 3 1 \$1,316,808

Own.—Meadow Stable

Br.—Meadow Stud Inc (Va)

Tr.—L. Laurin

9Jun73- 8Bel fst 1½ :46'1.09" 1:59 2:24 Belmont-G1 1 1 1^{hd} 120 128 131 Turcotte R 126 b *.10 113-05 Secretariat126³1TwiceaPrince126½MyGIInt126¹³ Ridden out 5

Yet statistics often do not offer a complete picture of a moment, and certainly not of an era. To that end, *Champions* provides decade-by-decade accounts of Thoroughbred history by some of the sport's most celebrated journalists. Glenye Cain, Steven Crist, David Grening, Joe Hirsch, Jay Hovdey, Dave Litfin, Jay Privman, and Paula Welch provide a more elaborate context for the numbers, bringing the horses, and the people who nurtured and cajoled their talent, to life.

One very recognizable difference between the past performance in the first and second editions of *Champions* is the inclusion of Beyer Speed Figures for Eclipse Award winners beginning in 1992. First appearing in the late 1980's as part of a statistical service, Beyer Speed Figures emerged in wider distribution in 1991, when they were included in past-performance lines in *The Racing Times*. Their addition has been the single most important change in the evolution of past performances. They have leveled the playing field for the everyday handicapper, arming him with a tool to identify the fastest horse in a given race.

Equally important, at least to devotees of the sport and its history, is the fact that Beyer Speed Figures provide a way to compare the best horses of the past two decades against each other. Was Ghostzapper, who earned the highest speed figure in this book—a 128 in the 2004 Philip Iselin Handicap—superior to Cigar, whose career best was a 121 in the 1995 Oaklawn Park Handicap? Historians and supporters from both camps can debate deep into the night, but by the numbers, Ghostzapper was the faster horse.

Other spirited discussion is likely to arise from the rich vein of information in *Champions*. Throughout racing history, those inspired by the competition of great Thoroughbreds have earnestly discussed their relative merit, raising questions and setting the standards by which greatness is measured. The best indicators of the ultimate truth lie within these pages.

—Irwin Cohen