



Racehorse 101

Thoroughbreds are a distinct breed of horse with a rich history

By Edward L. Bowen

Every racehorse you see in Keeneland's paddock and on the racetrack today has a traceable history going back farther than most people can recite their own ancestry. The Thoroughbred breed was gradually and somewhat haphazardly created several centuries ago in England, by combination of at least four strains—speedy little Irish horses, local running horses, imported stallions from Asia and, on occasion, a smuggled Arabian horse.

That varied mixture was eventually codified as a breed. In everyday usage, the word “thoroughbred” can be used interchangeably with “purebred,” as in a “thoroughbred Hereford.” In the horse world, though, it is a specific breed and the word is properly capitalized. The first Stud Book was published in England in 1791. James Weatherby, whose descendants still oversee the Stud Book in England-Ireland, listed in the original edition the pedigrees of 387 mares. Each traces to the stallions Eclipse, Matchem and Herod, and they in turn traced to the Darley Arabian, Byerly Turk or the Godolphin Arabian.

continued on page 6



Photo by Z

Thoroughbreds are prized for their beauty, speed, athleticism and competitive nature.

Racehorse 101

continued from page 4

Putting this matter into the context of your day at the races, the rules of the Kentucky Horse Racing Authority stipulate that “‘Thoroughbred racing’ means running contests between horses registered with the Jockey Club of New York, certified as having a Thoroughbred pedigree ...” The Jockey Club was organized in 1894 and took on various roles in the conduct of horse racing. Its role as keeper of the *American Stud Book* has remained fundamental. Today, The Jockey Club’s registry office is in Lexington, and corporate headquarters are in New York City.

Key wording in The Jockey Club’s *Principal Rules and Requirements of the American Stud Book* includes:

“A Thoroughbred is a horse which has satisfied the rules and requirements set forth herein and is registered in the *American Stud Book* or in a Foreign Stud Book approved by The Jockey Club and the International Stud Book Committee.”

Global industry

As Thoroughbred racing and breeding have become international pursuits, 65 countries now operate Stud Books which are granted the “seal of approval” by the International Stud Book Committee. In addition

to the founding country, England (whose stud book includes Ireland), and such major racing countries as France, Australia and Argentina, the countries with internationally recognized stud books also include smaller and more exotic lands such as Azerbaijan, Cyprus, Kazakhstan, Tunisia, Morocco and the United Arab Emirates.

When you see a suffix, such as (GB), (Fr) or (SAf) following a horse’s

2008 Keeneland spring meeting

April 4-25

First race 1:15 p.m.

No racing

on Mondays and Tuesdays

www.keeneland.com

name, that is an indication that his/her original registration was accepted in one of the other stud books, i.e., Great Britain, France or South Africa.

Proven family tree

Now, what does it take for a horse to be accepted into one of those pedigree registries?

The Jockey Club’s *Principal Rules and Requirements* spells it out thusly in Section V, Rule 1, paragraph C:

“A foal is eligible for registration provided it is shown to the satisfaction of the Stewards of The Jockey Club that the foal’s pedigree authentically traces in all its lines to horses recorded in *The American Stud Book* or a foreign stud book approved by The Jockey Club and the International Stud Book.”

The key phrase, of course, is “all its lines,” meaning that having a certified Thoroughbred as a sire, for example, but a dam (mother) who traced to another breed would not be sufficient for a foal to be registered.

Registration of Thoroughbreds today uses modern technology of DNA identification, electronic communication and water-marked paper stock. The origins of the first stud books, however, took place in different times.

In the United States, the untiring work of Sanders D. Bruce was one key element in creation of the stud book that The Jockey Club took over in the 1890s. Bruce had correspondence with hundreds of breeders and horse owners over the vastness of the emerging U.S. in order to set down records of mares and the sires and names of their foals. The Jockey Club

continued on page 8



Keensland Library

The foundation stallions of the Thoroughbred breed are (from left) the Godolphin Arabian, the Byerly Turk and the Darley Arabian.

Racehorse 101

continued from page 6

database now includes the names of more than four million horses, who trace back to the middle 1700s.

Sport, commerce, intrigue

Although the Thoroughbred can be considered uniformly beautiful and noble, the humans who developed it bore the usual ambitions and foibles of mankind as well as the finer

sporting instinct which is central to Thoroughbred racing. In his expansively researched book *Speed and the Thoroughbred*, historian Alexander Mackay-Smith launches the story insofar as England is concerned with the importation by Henry VIII of speedy little horses from Ireland. That these were known as Hobbies is perhaps unfortunate in the modern context of what is meant by the term a “hobby horse.”

Initially, horse races were staged in part to attract visitors to fairs where local wares were for sale, and so that

an entire race could be witnessed, they were short, straight dashes. Over time, the imported Hobbies were mixed with another strain, which Mackay-Smith refers to as English “running horses.”

The third sources of speed, as identified by Mackay-Smith, were imported horses from Asia known as Turks and Barbs, presumably related to today’s Akal Teke, which has been bred in the Russias for more than 500 years. After the Restoration of the monarch, King Charles II realized that the

continued on page 10

My Time.



My Airport.

Traveling from Blue Grass Airport is all about convenience. Flying from Lexington means not wasting time in traffic or waiting in long lines. Why spend time jockeying for position in big city airports when you can be out in front, leading by a furlong at Blue Grass Airport.

Blue Grass Airport

bluegrassairport.com

Thoroughbred timeline

Here are a few notable dates in the vast history of Thoroughbred racing in the United States:

1789: First racecourse is laid out in Lexington, Kentucky.

1852: In New Orleans, Union Race Course—today the site of Fair Grounds—is laid out, making it the oldest site of Thoroughbred racing in the United States still in operation.

August 3-6, 1863: Saratoga Race Course in Saratoga Springs, New York, holds its first Thoroughbred meeting.

May 17, 1875: Aristides wins the first Kentucky Derby during the first season of racing at the Louisville track that would become known as Churchill Downs.

February 9, 1894: The Jockey Club, the official breed registry for all Thoroughbreds in North America, is established in New York City. Today, The Jockey Club (www.jockeyclub.com) maintains offices in New York City and in Lexington and serves the industry through its family of companies and by providing support and leadership on a wide range of important industry initiatives.

1911: The Blue Grass Stakes is inaugurated at the old Kentucky Association track near downtown Lexington. The race is held from 1911-1914 and from 1919-1926.

October 15, 1936: Keeneland opens for its first season of racing, a nine-day fall meeting.

April 17, 1937: Opening day of Keeneland's first spring meeting of 11 days of racing.

April 29, 1937: Fencing wins the first running of the Blue Grass Stakes (now the Grade 1 Toyota Blue Grass Stakes) at Keeneland.

Sources: Churchill Downs Inc., Keeneland, The Jockey Club, New York Racing Association



Brownie Leach Photo, courtesy of Keeneland Library

Keeneland has attracted world-class Thoroughbreds and large crowds of racing fans ever since the track opened in October 1936.

Racehorse 101

continued from page 8

downfall of his father had been in part due to deficiency in the cavalry, so he was keen to upgrade. By the institution of races known as King's Plates, Charles II encouraged the breeding of better horses and emphasized stamina as well as speed. The English Turf thus began its alteration toward longer distance tests.

The imported stallions also had diplomatic uses, as they made excellent gifts for Sultans and Emperors of the Middle East to proffer upon European monarchs. Both Charles I and Charles II received Barbs from the Emperor of Morocco. These were horses with some Arabian ancestry that had been purchased in Egypt by the Emperors.

As early as the 16th century, Turkish Sultans had banned the export of

purebred Arabian horses, but the term "Arab" had a cache which prompted English importers to call a horse an "Arabian" if it had any Arab blood. The Godolphin Arabian, for example, was part Turkoman and part Arabian, but if a stallion in England were called an Arabian it could command a higher stud fee.

Later, in the 18th century, some true Arabians did reach English shores, three having been smuggled by a merchant from Aleppo named Thomas Darley. One of them, known as the Darley Arabian, was to join the Godolphin Arabian and the Byerly Turk as foundation stallions of the Thoroughbred breed. 🐎

Edward L. Bowen is president of the Grayson-Jockey Club Research Foundation and author of 18 books on Thoroughbred racing.

By the numbers

No other state produces more Thoroughbreds than Kentucky, where more than 30 percent of all foals were born in 2006. Here is a look at other figures that indicate the size and importance of the Thoroughbred industry in the United States in 2007:

- Total purses awarded to Thoroughbreds: \$1,180,587,881
- Total amount wagered on Thoroughbred racing: \$14,724,681,108
- Estimated number of Thoroughbreds born in the U.S.: 34,350
- Number of mares bred in Kentucky: 21,491
- Number of stallions standing in Kentucky: 345
- Number of horses sold at Keeneland: 9,124
- Total sales for Keeneland: \$815,401,000

Sources: The Jockey Club Online Fact Book and Keeneland