



A Blast From The Past

Apple Valley: The Height Of Fame

by JACKIE BARNES

Over the years, well-known movie stars involved in horse racing have played a huge role in shaping the history of the sport in California. Such greats as Bing Crosby and Pat O' Brien, founders of the Del Mar Thoroughbred Club, and other famous names such as Betty Grable and her husband Harry James, Desi Arnaz, Ronald Regan and MGM Studio owner Louis B. Mayer have contributed greatly to the sport of kings.

In 1937, actress Barbara Stanwyck, her agent Zeppo Marx and Harry S. Hart purchased 130 acres of general crop land in the San Fernando Valley. Stanwyck and Marx each built residences on the property. Barns, paddocks, employee housing, crop fields and a six-furlong training track adjoined the homes.

The venture was short-lived when Stanwyck sold her share of the property after marrying Robert Taylor in 1939. Following numerous transactions over the next few years, the ranchland was sold to businessman John H. Ryan in 1943.

Ryan, along with his wife Annette, renamed it Northridge Farms and also restarted its breeding operations, housing up to 11 stallions, including the five-time leading California sire Alibhai (GB), Reading II (Aus) and Lucky Mel.

Apple Valley, a homebred by Eiffel Tower out of the multiple stakes-placed, seven-time winner Blue Alibi, an Alibhai full sister to 1945 stakes winner Style Prince, was foaled on Feb. 19, 1950. The bay colt, a half-brother to Reading II's Blue Reading who ended up winning 11 stakes races from 1949 to 1953, was a clumsy awkward sort but always displayed a lot of energy in his paddock.

Unraced at two, Apple Valley made his debut in Annette Ryan's silks at Tanforan on May 6, 1953. With Bill Shoemaker aboard, the R. H. "Red" McDaniel trainee scored a gate-to-wire head victory over Sir Lark in a field of 12 California-bred maidens.

In the 11th start of his 13-race sophomore season, Apple Valley won the \$16,750 Del Mar Derby Handicap at 1 1/8 miles on Aug. 22, defeating the stakes-winning filly Smart Barbara with the 1953 Santa Anita Derby winner Chanlea finishing third.

After a series of setbacks, he returned to Santa Anita Park at four to win a six-furlong allowance event on Jan. 23, as a prep race for the Santa Anita Maturity.

One week later, a field of nine went to post for the seventh running of the \$161,400 Santa Anita Maturity at the classic 1 1/4-mile distance. The race, later renamed the Charles H. Strub Stakes, was then the richest race in the world for four-year-olds.

Apple Valley, with jockey Merlin Volzke, went off at generous odds of almost 10-1, and coasted over a heavy track to an easy gate-to-wire, four-length victory over By Zeus and Cerise Reine, both stakes winners earlier that month.

The Ryan homebred did not race at five and only finished third once in seven starts at six. He was retired to stud at Northridge Farms where he stood for two seasons. He was relocated to Hill Top Farm in Oregon in 1962.

Blue Alibi, who was from her sire's first crop of 1942, produced a total of seven foals, six of whom raced and won, including another stakes winner in Alibi Blue and stakes-placed Bold Reading. Her full brother Style Prince won the \$13,755 Haggin Stakes and also set a new track record of :58 3/5 for five furlongs at Santa Anita while defeating the legendary Cal-bred filly Honeymoon.

These two Thoroughbreds established the Ryans as the first to breed a stakes winner by Alibhai and the first to own a stakes-producing mare by him.

Northridge Farms continued until 1956, when John Ryan was forced to disperse his holdings due to bad health. He died in 1960. By then, residential developers had already begun subdivision and construction of the land.

Today the area is now known as The Oakridge Estate and is a beautiful place. The story of Apple Valley, along with his owners the Ryans, is truly fascinating. Everyone involved from the beginning to present day have enriched all of us with this unique piece of history. 🐾



Apple Valley—\$161,400 Santa Anita Maturity—January 30, 1954