



Chilean-bred Thoroughbreds:

Hot on the World Stage

by Jane Henning and Nelson Sepúlveda

The transportation of thoroughbreds from one hemisphere to the other is now a routine occurrence, a practice with mixed results and problems which are only now becoming recognised. Acclimatisation to opposite weather patterns, synchronization with breeding cycles and suitability to our racing surfaces are the prime concerns of our racing and breeding industries with respect to the importation of Northern Hemisphere stock.

While New Zealand thoroughbreds have melded in with ours with ease, Australians have been slow to look further afield in our own hemisphere for horses which are proven in similar conditions.

Chile is one country whose thoroughbreds are gaining a worldwide reputation and particularly with regards to suitability to our climate, deserves our serious consideration.

If the recent importation of the 2005 Chilean Horse of the Year 'Cefalu' results in stakes wins in this country, it could open the floodgates. He is the first racehorse exported from Chile to race in Australia for 15 years and only the third in total.

Geographically, Chile's racing centre and capital, Santiago, sits on a very similar latitude to Sydney. Santiago itself boasts two racecourses; the very impressive turf track, Club Hipico and the dirt track Hipodromo Chile.

Club Hipico is the venue for El Ensayo - "The Test"- the second oldest race in the Americas. It is a set weight race for 3 year old colts and fillies over 2400 metres, which is the full circumference of this expansive track. This is roughly 180 metres more than Randwick's course proper, the largest track in New South Wales.

Like Australia, the turf industry in Chile is economically very important, with more than ten thousand people working in it and many thousands of fanatics in the country who bet on their 'TAB' type network called Tele Trak and a phone betting system called FonoTrak.

Chile currently only produces around 1500 foals per year, however the soil is considered amongst the best in the world for producing tough racehorses (as well as great wine!). Chilean racehorses often run weekly, doubling the number of starts required of them throughout their careers.

Chile's reputation began to grow in the 1950's, with some of its best racing stock being sold to the United States. Names like Babu (Brooklyn Hcp), Quilche (Century Hcp), Greco II (Sunset Hcp), Stravina (Santa Barbara Hcp) and Olhaverri (Del Mar Hcp) gave Chile its first US Grade One winners.

The first foreign horse to win more than US\$1 million on US tracks was a Chilean bred racehorse named Cougar (Cougar II in USA). Cougar II defeated the most important turf stayers in the States and for years was considered the best turf runner in USA. He broke three track records and was crowned Champion Turf Horse in 1972. Cougar II had 50 starts and won 20 of them. Cougar II later sired the Kentucky Derby winner Gato del Sol and several other stakes winners in USA.

Like Australia and New Zealand, Chile has built its bloodstock on the purchase of largely well bred but lesser performed stallions from the USA and the UK. And like the Antipodes, Chile has developed its own brand of superior racing and breeding stock from these beginnings. Chile's first "Reine De Course" is a mare named Naipur, who was only included in this world ranking in the last few years. She is the founder mare of the most important female line in the country, with a multitude of stakes winners to date. Her line is represented on every farm in the country.

Tizna was a multiple Grade One winner and Champion on Turf in the USA during the 1970's. She is considered now as a future Reine De Course by U.S. pedigree analyst Ellen Parker. Her grandson Cee's Tizzy (by Relaunch) is the sire of Tiznow who won the Eclipse Three Year Old Colt and Horse of the Year Awards and was Champion Older Horse in the USA the following season. Tiznow is the sire of the likely Champion Juvenile Filly 2005 winner, Folklore. Tizna is buried at Overbrook Farm, Kentucky.

During the 80's, Chile sent only a handful of its well performed horses to the United States, but they were all brilliant. The filly Infinidad was a Champion on Dirt (Vanity Invitational Handicap Gr1); Miss Brio (Maskette S. Gr1) defeated US champion and Kentucky Derby winner, Winning Colors; while Marimbula (Santa Margarita Invitational Hcp Gr1) was another brilliant mare on turf.

Tantoul, Mr. Long and Settlement Day were very successful sires in Chile and were on sold to USA in the 80's. The owners of Settlement Day bought Roy, and this sire is now recognised around the world. Roy won every stallion title in Chile over many years and he was the first Chilean based sire with more than 100 stakes winners in more than 9 countries. Roy was sold to the USA and shuttled to Brazil where he was the Champion Sire with just one year's production and a Champion Sire in Argentina, where he died last year.

Roy's reign was to be broken by another super sire, Hussonet, who was sold to Arrowfield Stud three years ago. Hussonet will have two stakes winning stallions at stud in the USA, Ile St. Louis and Seinne this year. Interestingly, matings of Hussonet over Roy mares has produced the likes of Host (Chilean Horse of the Year, Champion 2 yo Colt on Turf, Champion 3 yo Colt on Dirt and winner of the Shadwell Turf Mile Gr1, defeating Alinghi etc and still in racing); National Park, a dual Gr 1 winner and Petit Paris, a stakes winner now winning in Dubai.

In the 90's the Chilean breeders started to upgrade their breeding stock with stunning results. Names like Puerto Madero (Donn Hcp Gr1 defeating Silver Charm), Malek (Santa Anita Hcp Gr 1 and now at stud in the USA) and Memo (multiple SW and also at stud in the USA). The amazing Wolf was undefeated in ten starts, including the elusive Chilean Triple Crown, which is held on three different racetracks. Amongst his accolades was Chilean Horse of The Century. After a promising start on US and Canadian tracks (3rd Citation Hcp Gr2, 4th Rothmans International Can-Gr1), he was injured and retired to stud in Turkey where he proved a leading sire. Mash One won the Oak Tree Championship Gr1 and has returned to Chile for stud duties, siring the Champion 2 yo Colt on Turf, Porfido, in his first crop. Chilean Horse of the Year, Lido Palace captured the Gr1 Whitney Hcp and the Woodward Stakes (twice) in the USA and is now at stud in Ocala, Florida. On the distaff side, Noches De Rosa, a Chilean Oaks winner, won a Grade One event in the USA on turf and is now at stud at Diamond A Farms.

Meanwhile, other countries started to jump on the Chilean bandwagon – Aramus was named Horse of the Year in Sweden in 2001; Group One winner Tempranero was a succesful sire in Argentina, while dual Gr 1 winner Figurón is now a classic sire in Brazil. Last year another Chilean based stallion was sold to Argentina in Seeker's Reward.

Now Chilean bred racehorses can be found in Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, France, Ireland, Panama, Perú, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, Spain, Japan and of course, the United States.

Currently there are several Chilean bred horses racing at the top level in the USA. Total Impact, the Chilean Champion 2 Year Old Colt in 2000, was bought by Prince Sultan Mohammed Saud Al Kabeer and at 3 years, ran second in the UAE Derby Gr2 before moving the USA, where he counts the Hollywood Gold Cup Gr1 amongst his trophies. He has recently been announced as retiring to stud in North America in 2006.

Pompeyo, an El Ensayo winner in Chile, transferred codes in the USA and became Champion Steeplechaser and Eclipse Award winner in 2001.

India Divina won the Santa Maria Hcp (Gr1) and ran second in the Run For the Roses Gr 1. Of course Hussonet's son Host still carries the flag and has been invited to race in Dubai during their amazing carnival this season.

El Cumbres, a multiple Group One winning three year old by Hussonet and Group One 'El Ensayo' placed filly, Crystallize were recently sold to top stables in the US.

With burgeoning interest in the quality of stock produced in their country, the Chileans jokingly refer to the international buyers which are coming down with increasing regularity "Las Gruas", (the cranes), opening their jaws and carrying away the best Chilean horses for export.

Three Chilean mares were imported to Australia in the 1989 by Trans Media Park Stud, with two of them racing here. Grillita won three metropolitan races including the AJC Country Cup and ran 4th in the BTC XXXX Cup (Group 1) in 1991. She is the dam of the stakes placed Baykan Empire (by Snippets), who won 7 races and \$192,000.

One of the other mares, Receptora, is the granddam of Beaujolais Prince (by Jeune), who has the VRC Bagot Stakes amongst his 8 wins to-date.

The third mare, Moscona, only had three foals (all winners) before dying. One of them, Chile Snippets, was exported to Chile in foal to Danzero by Pedigree Dynamics in 2000. In January this year, her daughter Chileno Soy (by Columbus Day) won a stakes race. The other daughter, Little Shoes has had two to race for two winners to-date.

The next move was made by John Messara, of Arrowfield Stud. He purchased the outstanding sire Hussonet and imported the son of Mr. Prospector for stud duties in Australia in 2004. While seen as a bold move by the conservative Australian breeding industry, John has backed his decision with impressive statistics and research. Hussonet's first Australian progeny were well received at the 06 Magic Millions.

In 2005, Jane Henning (Pedigree Dynamics) and Nelson Sepulveda in Chile bought the Chilean Turf Horse of the Year, Cefalu, for OTI Management in Melbourne. OTI's Principals Terry Henderson and Simon O'Donnell have raced many stakes winners and have been importing top racing stock from the Northern Hemisphere over the past few seasons. Their horse portfolios have included the likes of Hugs Dancer, Doriemus, Dance the Day Away and many more smart winners.

Like John Messara, Terry and Simon thoroughly researched the idea before going ahead with their South American purchase. Cefalu's racing videos were closely scrutinized by champion jockey Damien Oliver, who gave the thumbs up, pronouncing the horse a very exciting prospect for Australian racing.

"It's a distinct advantage being able to buy a world class horse from the same hemisphere," said Terry Henderson. "We weighed it up and, if you can do it, it is a far better risk than buying from the Northern Hemisphere. We're very excited about this horse and intend to keep investigating the opportunities in Chile."

Cefalu arrived in Australia last month and is now in training with Lee Freedman. OTI have a Cox Plate and Melbourne Cup campaign planned for Cefalu.

Close on the heels of OTI in the pursuit of top Chilean racehorses is prominent Sydney trainer, Tim Martin. Having travelled to South America in November of last year to inspect several top racehorses not only in Chile, but also Argentina, Tim is convinced that these animals will adapt easily to Australian conditions.

“I was really impressed with the standard of animals they have there. I would have been happy to train several of the ones I saw. They are tough, durable horses and I really think they will be suited to Australian conditions. I’ve just got to convince some of my owners to bite the bullet.”

While the Australian breeding and racing industries already regards itself as global, it seems that there is another big step just about to be taken.