



breeders' cup legend

ALYSHEBA



Unforgettable image:
Alysheba's twilight victory in
the 1988 Breeders' Cup Classic

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By Jacqueline Duke

One of the most charismatic racehorses of contemporary times took a while to find his best stride. But once he did, Alysheba delivered some of racing's most unforgettable performances and earned the title "America's Horse" for his dramatic twilight victory in the 1988 Breeders' Cup Classic.

A true scion of the Bluegrass, Alysheba was bred by well-known Lexington horseman Preston Madden at Hamburg Place. The historic property, founded by legendary horseman John E. Madden, had already produced five Kentucky Derby winners as well as other notable horses of the early 20th century.

Foaled in 1984, the son of Alydar went through the Keeneland sales ring the following July and brought \$500,000 from the Scharbauer family of Texas. The blue and white silks of Dorothy and Pamela Scharbauer would become indelibly linked with the regal bay colt.

Sent to Jack Van Berg, then the nation's leading trainer, Alysheba showed promise as a 2-year-old. He won a maiden race, finished third in the Breeders' Cup Juvenile, and then lost the Hollywood Futurity in a photo finish.

A disappointing start to his 3-year-old season led to the discovery of a throat problem. After corrective surgery, a much-improved Alysheba showed up for the Blue Grass Stakes at Keeneland, then just nine days before the Kentucky Derby. Although Alysheba had his number taken down for bumping another horse, he displayed a resolute running style that became his trademark. He also partnered with jockey Chris McCarron, who would be on board

for all 10 of the colt's stakes victories.

Alysheba headed into the Derby with only one victory in nine starts and was sent off at 8-1 behind post-time choice Demons Begone. The favorite pulled up halfway into the race, and Bet Twice, the Fountain of Youth winner, took command at the head of the stretch. Alysheba was closing quickly when Bet Twice swerved into his path. Stumbling and nearly falling, Alysheba managed to regain his footing and he and McCarron crossed the wire three-quarters of a length in front of Bet Twice.

Alysheba defeated Bet Twice again in the Preakness, renewing an exciting rivalry that would see them meet a total of nine times. On the brink of a Triple Crown sweep, Alysheba was unable to race in New York on his customary anti-bleeder medication Lasix; he could finish no better than fourth behind Bet Twice.

Alysheba's long season culminated in a highly anticipated Breeders' Cup Classic match with the previous year's Derby winner, Ferdinand. The two delivered a performance worthy of a showdown between Derby winners: They ran lockstep around the Santa Anita oval, neither relenting an inch. In the end Ferdinand bettered his younger rival by a nose.

Alysheba's exploits earned him the 3-year-old championship.

Alysheba started his superb 4-year-old season with three consecutive victories, including the Santa Anita Handicap. He lost again to Bet Twice in the Pimlico Special, then defeated his rival in the Iselin Handicap, beginning a four-race win streak that peaked in the Breeders' Cup Classic at Churchill Downs. Race caller Tom Durkin's emphatic declaration of Alysheba as "America's Horse" as he galloped home in near darkness remains one of the Breeders' Cup's most defining moments.

Alysheba was voted 1988 Horse of the Year and champion older male. Until two-time Horse of the Year Cigar came along, Alysheba was the world's richest Thoroughbred, with earnings of \$6,679,242. He started stud at Lane's End Farm in Kentucky, then went to the royal stables of Saudi's King Abdullah. The Hall of Fame champion spent his last months at the Kentucky Horse Park before his death in 2009. **KM**