



ANNE M. EBERHARDT

Classic Beginnings

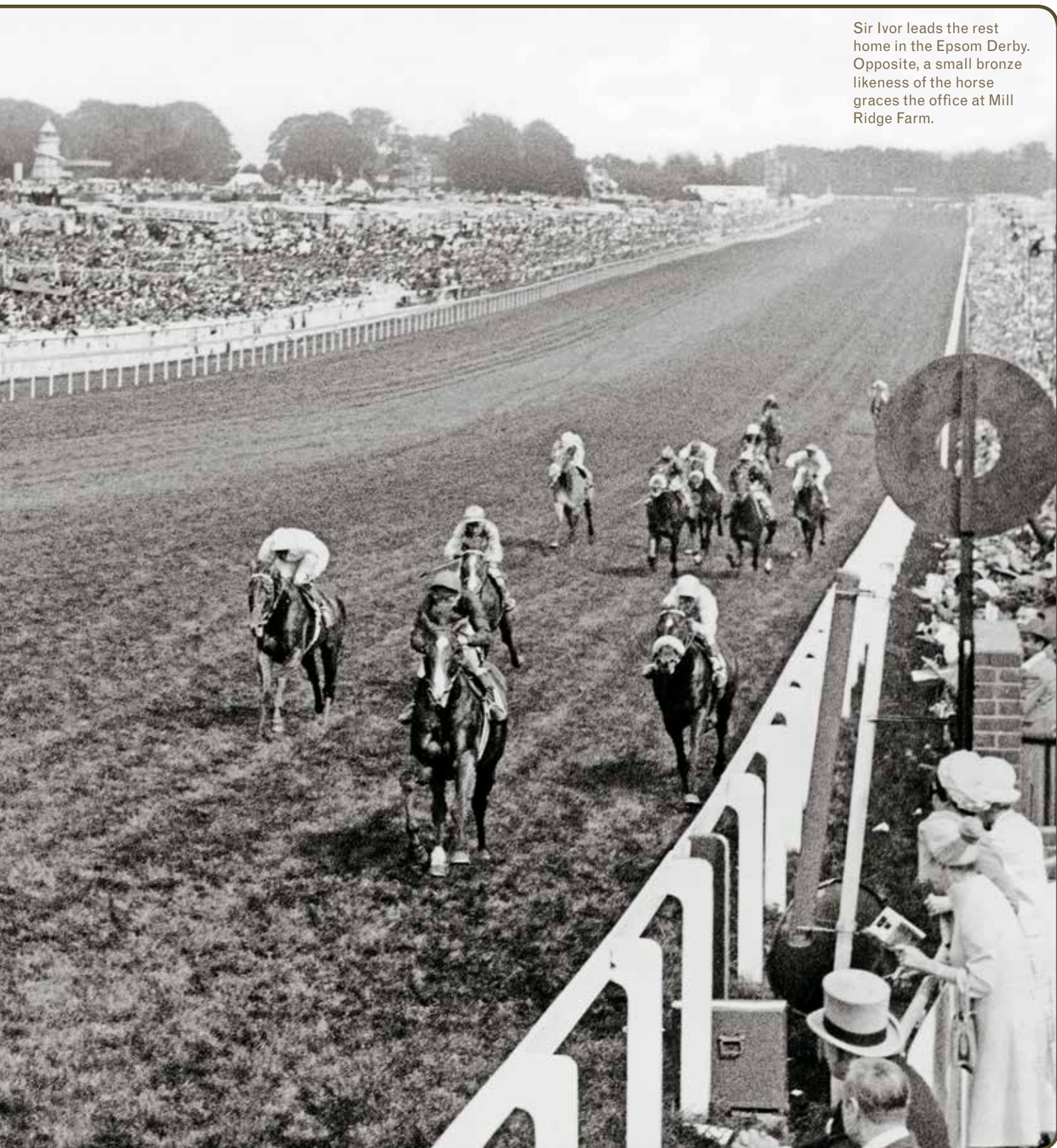
Sir Ivor's 1968
Epsom Derby win put
the Keeneland sales
on the world stage
as a source
of classic winners

By Edward L. Bowen



JOHN SLATOP





Sir Ivor leads the rest home in the Epsom Derby. Opposite, a small bronze likeness of the horse graces the office at Mill Ridge Farm.

Successes in international racing generally involve two elements: an owner with plenty of sporting spirit and the right horse for the assignment of adjusting to unusual situations. Often backing up that combination are some pivotal bloodstock decisions made in the past.

The career of Sir Ivor called upon all those elements, and, perhaps more importantly, was a harbinger of the future. His rousing victory in the 1968 Epsom Derby signaled that American-bred Thoroughbreds could compete with — and beat — Europe's best. Three additional North American-bred Epsom Derby winners followed him within four years: Nijinsky II, Mill Reef, and Roberto. Four more years later came another, Empery, in 1976.

By 1973, only five years after Sir Ivor's Epsom triumph, the prestige of American-breds was accompanied by a new trend at American auctions. At Keeneland's July yearling sale, then the peak of fashion in the sale company's yearly schedule, the four top buyers by gross involved foreign investment, topped by the British Bloodstock Agency (Ireland) with \$1.7 million in purchases.

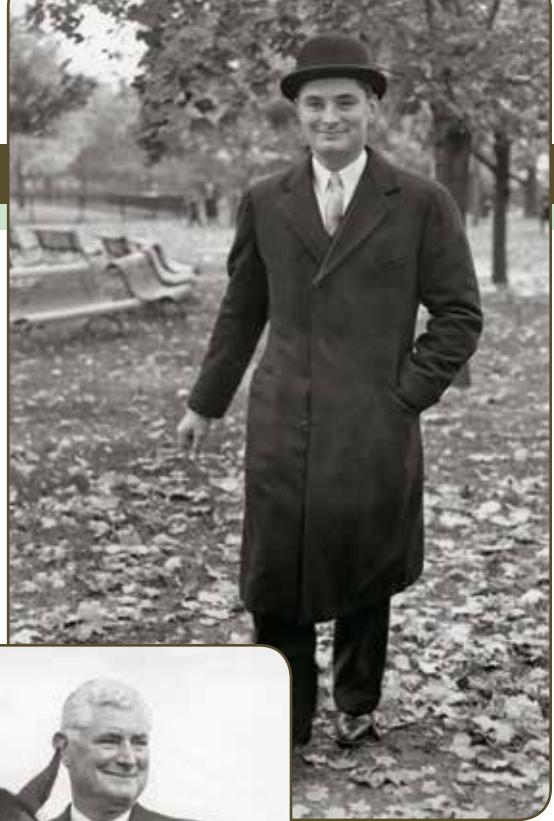
International buyers would come to dominate the Keeneland auctions for many years due to the success of its sales graduates across the globe.

Before that pivotal year of 1968, American Raymond Guest had made selective yet fruitful purchases at Keeneland.

Born into distinguished circumstances from a sporting and social perspective, Guest added to his family's distinctions. His father was the Right Hon. Frederick Guest, a cousin of Sir Winston Churchill. His mother was the former Amy Phipps, whose family continues its importance on the American Turf today.

An appreciation of Raymond Guest as a personality comes down from a commentary by Tom O'Reilly in Daily Racing Form. Recalling a 1956 meeting with Guest, O'Reilly wrote that, "All the vitality of a champion athlete seemed to flow across the luncheon table, as this handsome, prematurely gray ex state senator from the Old Dominion gracefully inclined his six-foot, two-inch

A keen sportsman, Raymond Guest hailed from a prominent family with roots on both sides of the Atlantic.



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Guest's American champion Tom Rolfe represented his owner in the Prix de l'Arc de Triomphe. Below, Mill Ridge Farm's Alice Chandler bred Sir Ivor.



LEXINGTON HERALD-LEADER

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frame forward and fixed the listener with his keen, smiling, quail-shooter eyes."

Years later, after Guest's death in 1992, The Blood-Horse extolled that "his grandfather founded a family fortune, and the young man went to schools with the names of Saints and other good fellows, St. George's and Phillips, and thence on to Yale. If this background created the possibility of a cloistered existence, Guest's sense of verve would have none of it. He was a football scrub at Yale and an eight-goal polo player, playing with the likes of Stewart Iglehart, Jimmy Mills, Tommy Hitchcock, Mike Phipps, and brother Winston Guest. He was also a pilot and safari hunter."

Guest's sporting tradition had deep roots in

Thoroughbred racing, in Europe as well as in the U.S. Three years before Sir Ivor's Derby, Guest had been game enough to send his little American 3-year-old champion Tom Rolfe for a tilt at France's emerging international catnip, the Prix de l'Arc de Triomphe. The colt finished fifth behind the great European champion Sea-Bird II.

A planned campaign

Unlike his one-race invasion with an American-based colt, Guest was making a prolonged program out of running Sir Ivor abroad. He had purchased the son of Sir Gaylord—Attica, by Mr. Trouble, at the 1966 Keeneland July yearling sale and sent him to trainer Vincent O'Brien's Irish headquarters. Sir Ivor was bred by Alice Headley Bell (later Alice Headley Chandler). Therein lies another of the elements backing up so much of international patterns in Thoroughbred racing.

Mrs. Chandler's father was noted Kentucky horseman Hal Price Headley.

If Guest represented the epitome of one element of sporting families, Headley was the quintessence of another—the horsemanship traditionally associated with the term "Kentucky hardboot." The fact that the term embraces a bit of worldliness to accompany some rudimentary agricultural toiling is illustrated by Headley's traveling to England, looking to purchase a stallion prospect from the vaunted Lord Derby stock. Arriving at Lord Derby's property as darkness settled in, Headley was reluctant to appear too anxious to close the deal on Pharamond II so he would not ask Lord Derby's employee to bring the colt out of the stall. While this did not give Headley as good a look at the young stallion as he might have wished, the ploy helped him purchase the horse. The story passed down through the years is that Headley got Pharamond II for 40 percent of the original 10,000 pounds asking price.

At Headley's Kentucky farm, Pharamond II succeeded as a stallion, and his

offspring included Headley's homebred champion Menow, later the sire of the great Tom Fool. Headley also became revered for his pivotal role in the creation of Keeneland as both a jewel of a racetrack and ultimately a giant in the auction world.

Headley dispersed many of his mares in 1953, nine years before his death, but some of the stock had been given to his children. In due time, Mrs. Chandler bred the stakes winner Attica from her father's bloodstock, specifically from a



Hal Price Headley's shrewd bloodstock purchases yielded, among others, his champion Menow, whose dam was an ancestress of Sir Ivor.

female family going back to the farm's champion filly, Alcibiades. The import, Pharamond II, had a role, as well, as the sire of Attica's dam, Athenia.

In 1964 Alice bred Attica to the major winner Sir Gaylord. A son of the Irish-bred Turn-to, Sir Gaylord was a well-established stallion at the time he sired Sir Ivor. But not until the next decade did his dam, Somethingroyal, polish the family shield by foaling Triple Crown winner and two-time Horse of the Year Secretariat.

Bull Hancock, who had purchased Turn-to for another owner, was also involved in the sale of Sir Ivor. On Guest's behalf, he bid \$42,000 for the colt, which had been foaled and raised at Mrs. Chandler's Mill Ridge Farm, the name she chose for the part of the



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With Guest leading him in, Sir Ivor presaged his Derby victory with a triumph in the 1968 Two Thousand Guineas.

Headley acreage that had become hers.

Delivered to Vincent O'Brien's training yard in Cashel, County Tipperary, Ireland, the handsome young Sir Ivor showed form to generate hopes for the Epsom Derby. Guest had already won a Derby, taking the 1962 running with Larkspur, a colt he had purchased as a yearling in England. At 2 in 1967, Sir Ivor won three of four races. In Ireland, wins came in the Probationers and National Stakes, and O'Brien then took him to France, where he won the premier juvenile race, the Grand Criterium at Longchamp.

Classic day in a classic campaign

O'Brien returned Sir Ivor to racing at 3 in the Two Thousand Guineas Trial at Ascot, which he duly won to lead into his first classic, the one-mile Two Thousand Guineas itself. Sir Ivor won the Guineas handily, by 1½ lengths over the high-class Petingo. Next came the Derby, at that time still seeming a bit farther than Sir Ivor's genetics might prefer. Nevertheless, Sir Ivor was favored.

Mrs. Chandler journeyed to England, as did Bull Hancock. She later regaled readers of *The Blood-Horse* with her quoted impressions of the historic Epsom classic: "I looked down that course, and it was awesome. It looked like it was a mile home from Tattenham Corner [downhill turn into the stretch]. I marked this race by a red double-decker bus that was sitting [in the infield] about 100 yards from the finish line. Sir Ivor was in a bad pocket, laying in on the rail. I didn't think Lester [Piggott]

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was ever going to get him [Sir Ivor] out, and neither did anyone else.

"Bull turned to me and said, 'He's beat,' and I said, 'I know.' But then Bull said 'He's out!' And I said, 'Oh, yeah?' Then he said, 'He's going to be fourth. He's going to be second. By God, he's going to win it!'

"It makes my hair stand up. I can look at [film of] that race now and give you 6-5 that there's no way Sir Ivor is going to win. I have never seen a horse close like he did." Sir Ivor won by 1½ lengths over Connaught.

An ironic melodrama attended the occasion: Guest, at the time the United States Ambassador to Ireland, was unable to reschedule a ceremony in Dublin and thus was tending to the planting of a tree in honor of John F. Kennedy as Sir Ivor planted himself in the winner's circle.

European horsemen generally regard the 1½-mile course at Epsom as less demanding than some of the other undulating courses that challenge their stars. Sir Ivor's subsequent losses at the distance in the Irish Derby and in the Arc presumably chipped away at the most exalted immediate impressions of his Epsom glory. Moreover, he lost two other races before winning the Champion Stakes at 1¼ miles.

His sporting owner's final international challenge for him found the heart of Raymond Guest again matched by the heart of the horse himself. Sir Ivor and champion jockey Piggott dashed home victoriously in the Washington, D. C., International in his home country. England's 1968 Horse of the Year, Sir Ivor had a career record of eight wins in 13 races and earnings of \$561,323. For The Blood-Horse Free Handicap for 3-year-olds, the sage racing secretary Jimmy Kilroe honored Sir Ivor by assigning him 130 pounds, equal as a topweight with the American champion Stage Door Johnny.

Sir Ivor had a long stud career until 1995 at Claiborne Farm, where he was known among horsemen for siring more than 90 stakes winners and among farm visitors for his beguiling invita-



Sir Ivor helped bring Chandler and Mill Ridge renown.

tions to tug gently on his proffered tongue.

The international sporting chapters for Raymond Guest reached even a greater high, he declared, with the career of his steeplechaser L'Escargot. In 1975 L'Escargot was a half-dozen years since a championship steeplechase season in the United States. In the interim he had won two runnings of the revered Cheltenham Gold Cup, and finally, in his third attempt, he won what many regard as the greatest jumping race of all, the English Grand National.

Lasting impact

For his breeder the advent of Sir Ivor helped open a new and lasting chapter of international prominence. Recalls Headley Bell, one of the sons of Alice Headley Chandler:

"Sir Ivor allowed Europeans to become aware of Mom's and her father's backgrounds. Also, a great conduit was Dr. John Chandler [Alice's husband] who had practiced veterinary medicine in Newmarket and had a lot of European clients."

A key component in international bloodstock in the last four decades has been the huge investment in farms, bloodstock, and runners made by various sportsmen of the Arab world. The timing of their entrance into the highest echelons also impacted Mill Ridge Farm.

"Before they had farms of their own in Kentucky," Bell continued, "Sheikh Mohammed, Sheikh Hamdan, and

Prince Khalid Abdullah kept some mares at our farm."

Also, Queen Elizabeth II and Lord Howard de Walden became clients, and the latter sent the Middle Park Stakes and Dewhurst Stakes winner Diesis to stand at Mill Ridge.

As Mill Ridge's profile rose, Keeneland's July yearling sale continued to yield future European champions.

The year 1975 marked the purchase of future Epsom Derby winner The Minstrel (1977) by a powerful investing organization led by Robert Sangster of the UK. These years coincided with the rise



Mrs. Raymond Guest leads in the Derby winner.

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DELL HANCOCK

Sir Ivor had a long and successful stud career at Claiborne Farm.

in international prestige of Northern Dancer, although he, like Sir Ivor, presented a pedigree element then seen as a question mark on the stamina potential of his offspring.

Northern Dancer had won the Kentucky Derby and Preakness, but failed in the 1½-mile Belmont. Nev-

ertheless, trainer Vincent O'Brien, only two months after winning at Epsom with the supposedly stamina-limited Sir Ivor, set a Canadian record \$84,000 to acquire a Northern Dancer colt for American industrialist Charles Engelhard. This was Nijinsky II, the colt that carried his sire's



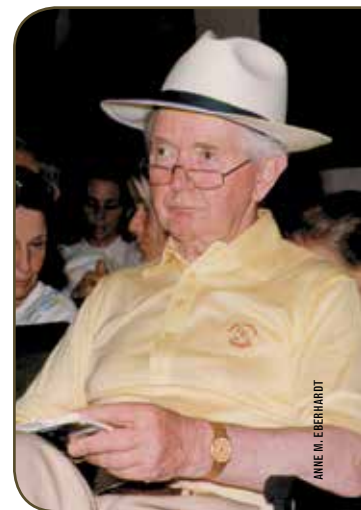
ALEC RUSSELL

For American Charles Engelhard and trainer O'Brien, Nijinsky II swept the English Triple Crown.

blood to win not only the Epsom Derby in 1970 but also England's Triple Crown — requiring the even longer 1¾-mile route of the St. Leger.

Sangster and O'Brien also enjoyed further Epsom Derby success in 1982 with Keeneland purchase Golden Fleece while O'Brien's son David won the 1984 edition with Secreto, also a Keeneland July yearling. In more recent times Kris Kin, a \$275,000 September 2001 yearling, won the 2003 Epsom Derby for owner Saeed Suhail and trainer Sir Michael Stoute.

Fifty years after a sporting owner and the right horse combined to take England's greatest racing prize, the Keeneland yearling sales remain a source of competitive runners the world over. **KM**



ANNE M. LEBERHARDT

Trainer Vincent O'Brien attended many Keeneland yearling sales.



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The Minstrel won the 1977 Epsom Derby.