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FAREWELLS

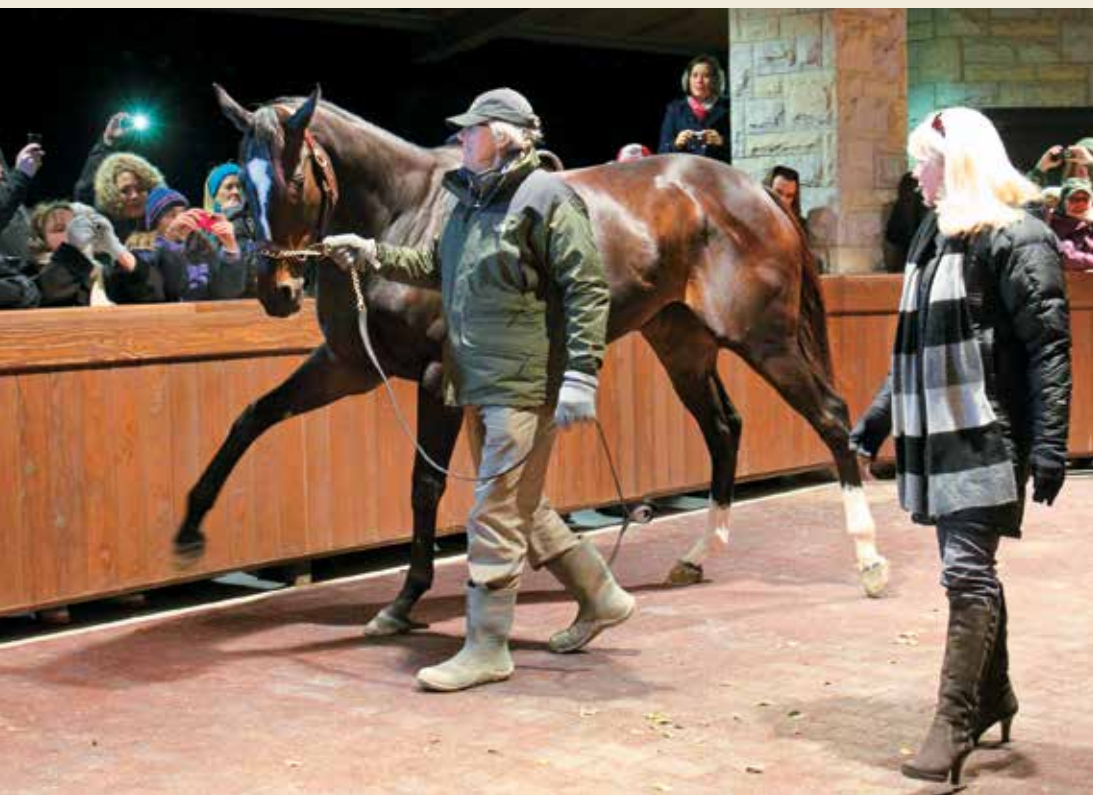
From Nashua to Zenyatta, many champion racehorses have taken their exit bows at Keeneland

By Cynthia Grisolia

In 2005 a dark bay filly circled the outdoor pavilion at Keeneland during the September yearling sale. A short time later, the auction hammer fell at a middling \$60,000 for hip No. 703, a lanky daughter of Street Cry with a distinctive blaze. A little more than five years later the horse had returned to the same pavilion, but this time as the legendary Horse of the Year Zenyatta, and she was surrounded by more than 1,000 devotees who came out on a frigid December night to bid her adieu.

Thronged by adoring fans, Zenyatta appears at Keeneland in December 2010 before beginning her new career as a broodmare.

fond farewells



Zenyatta produces her famous strut as trainer John Shirreffs leads her on her farewell walk as Shirreff's wife, Dottie Ingordo, looks on.

The mare had run her 20th and final race just weeks before and was headed to life as a broodmare. "It was an incredible thing," said Jerry Moss, who owns Zenyatta with his wife, Ann. "There were a lot of people waiting to see her on this final visit, and it was an incredible night for them and for us. It made us look at what she'd given us, what she'd given racing, what she'd given the world."

While Keeneland has long been famous for launching the careers of extraordinary horses, whether in the sales ring or at the races, in its 80-year history it has also been the venue for many such final salutes to Thoroughbreds that have captured our hearts.

That honor started back in 1937, just a year after the track swung open its gates for the first time. Then, fans tipped their hats to seven champion geldings that were paraded over the track, among them future Hall of Famer Sarazen and the 1929

Kentucky Derby winner, Clyde Van Dusen. In 1956 Keeneland had the privilege to present the final bow of the charismatic Nashua, the three-time champion who was ending his career after 30 starts, one of which was the newsworthy match race

against his turf rival, Swaps, the horse who denied him the 1955 Run for the Roses. This was Nashua's final public appearance before entering stud at Lexington's Spendthrift Farm, and it was as much a farewell to racing as it was a welcome from the stallion's new hometown. Long-time jockey Eddie Arcaro climbed into the irons for the last time and took the champ around a quarter mile. "Arcaro let him roll through the stretch," Edward L. Bowen wrote in his *Thoroughbred Legends* biography *Nashua* "and the colt seemed to revel in his last chance to show a crowd his speed."

As the years rolled on, five-time Horse of the Year Kelso, Kentucky Derby winner Foolish Pleasure, seven-time Eclipse-Award winner John Henry, Kentucky Derby and Preakness victor Silver Charm, and Kentucky Oaks winner Plum Pretty, just to name a few (see sidebar), counted among the turf legends that celebrated the close of their racing careers at the Lexington oval.

"These events certainly fall in line with our mission to promote the best in Thoroughbred racing," said Keeneland President and CEO Bill Thomason. "Fans often



Keeneland's salute to racing greats making final public appearances begins in 1937 with a parade of seven champion geldings.

develop a connection to horses they've watched compete. Through these tributes, they are able to acknowledge the horses and Keeneland is able to thank their connections."

Indeed. A live, fond farewell, whether it's a bittersweet last gallop or a showcase in the paddock, are momentous "fan" events. Once a horse's racing career comes to an end, often so does its relationship to the public. A last goodbye, especially one that's up-close-and personal, is both memorable and meaningful. Think of it as closure.

"Getting a chance to see them one last time before they retire is not only great for fans, but, to me, it also shows that the owners of the horses have respect for the people who have cheered and supported their horse throughout its career," said Rick Capone, sports editor of the *Woodford Sun* and attendee at several of Keeneland's farewell tributes. "I also believe such events have the potential to bring new fans to the races and cheer on champions of the future."

For some devotees, it's even a bonding experience. "There is a kind of harmony among strangers at these events," said Laura Battles, a photographer who was on hand for the parades of Silver Charm and Zenyatta. "You automatically have a common topic of conversation and can share memories."

A few of the retirees that have walked the walk (or, in



Horse of the Year Nashua makes his final public stop at Keeneland before heading to Spendthrift Farm. Above, his legendary trainer, Sunny Jim Fitzsimmons, joins him in the paddock with Spendthrift Farm's Leslie Combs.

this case, galloped the gallop) at Keeneland have had the added advantage of being local heroes, which made their goodbye parties all the more special — not only for fans but also, as Thomson noted, for the horse's connections. Two-time Horse of the Year Wise Dan captured seven of his 23 victories over the Keeneland course, including two editions of the grade I Shadwell Turf Mile, and back-to-back wins in the grade I Maker's 46 Mile Stakes. The chestnut superstar had also trained there under conditioner Charles LoPresti throughout his career.

Dan's appearance during opening weekend of the 2015 fall meet was "just so special," said LoPresti. "That was Dan's home, that's where he lived, and we were very proud to be there. It was

emotional, too," LoPresti added. "Bringing him to the winner's circle and making that walk home with him ... but it felt really good to do that for the last time at Keeneland."

Trainer William "Buff" Bradley reports a similar experience when his grade I winner Brass Hat made his swan song. Brass Hat, long a fan favorite having raced until age 9, was a home-bred for Bradley's late father, Fred. The gelding competed six times at Keeneland and won the grade III Sycamore Stakes in 2010, his final career win.

"We had a great run with Brass Hat, and the icing on the cake was winning his last race at Keeneland," said the younger Bradley. "My father always wanted to win there, as it's our back yard. So when Brass Hat was honored at the track he felt so very pleased."

There is, perhaps, one downside for champions making public appearances. The lure of the starting gate is sometimes a little too strong. "When they left the paddock, and he didn't go, he got a little on the engine," said LoPresti of Wise Dan. "He got a little mad."

The connections of both Kelso in 1965 and John Henry in 1986 report comparable reactions. "Every time he went out on the track in public he thought he was going to the post again," Kelso's trainer Carl Hanford told the press at the time. "He'd look around for the other horses, and he'd get mad as hell when he didn't see any.



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Champion geldings Forego, top, and John Henry parade before fans on their way to their respective retirements.

He wanted something to beat!"

As Wise Dan and Brass Hat are geldings, life in the breeding shed was not in their future. But both LoPresti and Bradley retired the champs to their respective, local farms where they still welcome visitors. Brass Hat has also taken up a new career in the show ring, still under Bradley's watch, and Wise Dan has been making "ambassador" appearances at tracks and equine events.

"We need these older horses; we need these horses to have a fan base, so we try to make him as accessible as we can," said LoPresti. "I want people to realize that

NOTEWORTHY SWAN SONGS

Since 1937 Keeneland has been conducting farewell salutes to some of racing's most famous horses. Here, a look at notable appearances over the years:

APRIL 20, 1937

Seven famous retired geldings are honored — Cherry Pie, 1929 Kentucky Derby winner Clyde Van Dusen, Jolly Roger, Merrick (34 years old at the time), Mike Hall, Osmand, and Sarazen.

OCT. 18, 1956

1955 Horse of the Year Nashua makes his final public appearance under saddle at Keeneland prior to entering stud at Spendthrift Farm.

APRIL 25, 1965

Five-time Horse of the Year Kelso appears as part of his fundraising tour of American tracks. Proceeds from the tour are used for equine research.

OCT. 29, 1976

Champion and 1975 Kentucky Derby winner Foolish Pleasure gallops between races before heading off to Greentree Stud near Lexington.

APRIL 5, 1986

The 1981 and 1984 Horse of the Year John Henry parades. Kentucky Gov. Martha Layne Collins presents a silver julep cup to owners Mr. and Mrs. Sam Rubin.

OCT. 16, 1999

1997 Kentucky Derby and Preakness winner and champion Silver Charm parades on Three Chimneys Spinster Day.

DEC. 6, 2010

2010 Horse of the Year Zenyatta appears at a farewell party at the outdoor show ring near the Keeneland sales pavilion before she begins broodmare career at Lane's End.

APRIL 16, 2011

Keeneland's "Breakfast with the Works" recognizes Old Friends Thoroughbred retirement farm with an appearance by Ball Four. Another Old Friends retiree who has appeared at Keeneland is Danthebluegrassman.

OCT. 20, 2011

Keeneland fan favorite and gr. I winner Brass Hat parades in the paddock and walking ring on the day of the Sycamore, which he won in 2010.

APRIL 15, 2012

Horse of the Year Havre de Grace appears in the paddock. She is training at Keeneland in preparation for her next start in the La Troienne Stakes at Churchill Downs on May 4 but is retired before that race.

OCT. 14, 2012

2011 Kentucky Oaks winner Plum Pretty parades in the paddock before the fifth race. A month later at Keeneland's November breeding stock sale, she sells for \$4.2 million to Whisper Hill Farm.

APRIL 18, 2014

Longshot 2009 Kentucky Derby winner Mine That Bird parades in the paddock as part of the cross-country tour to promote the movie *50 to 1*. Joining him are his connections and actors and directors from the movie. That evening, Mine That Bird and 2003 Kentucky Derby winner Funny Cide appear at the "It's My Derby" fundraiser for the Kentucky Derby Museum at the Keeneland sales pavilion.

OCT. 3, 2015

Keeneland-based two-time Horse of the Year Wise Dan parades between races on the day of the Shadwell Turf Mile, which he won in 2012 and 2014.

fond farewells



KEVIN THOMPSON

racehorses can have a life after racing; they can do other things.” (Likewise, after racing Kelso became a hunt horse for his owner, Allaire DuPont, and John Henry took up public life as the main attraction at the Kentucky Horse Park’s Hall of Champions.)

What Keeneland and the connections of these great horses all seem to agree on is that in Thoroughbred racing “the fan’s the thing.” And there’s a booming movement, not only at Keeneland but throughout the Bluegrass, to unite great horses whose racing careers have ended with their still-devoted followers.

In September 2015, Taylor Made Farm hosted three “California Chrome Days,” giving flocks of fans a chance to meet the flashy Kentucky Derby and Dubai World Cup winner. Near Georgetown, Old Friends, a non-profit Thoroughbred Retirement Facility, hosts nearly 20,000 visitors annually who come out to see such former champions as Silver Charm and 2002 Derby winner War Emblem. And in the last year Horse



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Hometown favorite Wise Dan, shown winning the 2014 Maker’s 46 Mile, strolls his stomping grounds for a final time at the fall 2015 meet.



KEENELAND

Five-time Horse of the Year Kelso makes a noteworthy appearance at Keeneland in 1965.

Country Inc., a non-profit central booking office organizing tours to more than 20 area breeding farms — most of which were rarely open to visitors before — has been doing gang-buster business. “We know how exciting it is to get a chance to meet a hero,” said Anne Sabatino Hardy, executive director of Horse Country. “Our goal is that the experience be authentic and engaging, so that visitors fall in love with the horse, the people, the stories, and make that emotional connection. That’s what drives true fandom.”

The emotional connection between human and Thoroughbred was, perhaps, no more apparent than at Keeneland’s fond farewell to Zenyatta. Having competed for much of her career on the West Coast, it was an exceptional opportunity for many to see the imposing mare in person. But in the darkness and icy cold (reports at the time put the temperature around a crisp 18 degrees) it wasn’t pandemonium among fanatics. It was, rather, an eve-

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I want people to realize that racehorses can have a life after racing; they can do other things.

CHARLIE LOPRESTI, TRAINER OF WISE DAN

ning of quiet reverence, showing respect for the horse's need for calm.

“When I walked Zenyatta, I walked her close to the edge of the ring so fans could feel her strength and power,” said John Shirreffs, who trained Zenyatta for her entire career. “This ceremony was a time for appreciation, for Zenyatta to show her love to the fans, and I wanted them to have a chance to touch her,” Shirreffs added.

And people did, putting out their hands to pet her face, extending a finger to skim her flank, because in the end, when it's time to say goodbye, there's nothing better than a true brush with greatness. **KM**



Clockwise from top left, Plum Pretty takes a farewell walk around the Keeneland paddock in 2012 before lighting up the board at the November breeding stock sale. Popular gelding Brass Hat wins his final race at Keeneland for owner Fred Bradley (far left) and trainer son Buff (third from left).

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Phone: (239) 302-6062
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