



Attraction and Kevin Darley are clear of the rest in the 2005 Matron Stakes at Leopardstown

OUR trip down Memory Lane this month takes us back to Attraction's final racecourse appearance, the 2005 renewal of the Matron Stakes at Leopardstown.

The Duke of Roxburghe's amazing filly was to record her fifth and final Group 1 success in this race. But before looking at the race itself, let's remind ourselves of the historical context of the run.

Attraction's three-year-old career in 2004 had been nothing short of triumphal. After rattling off five unbeaten starts as a juvenile, she continued in the same vein at three. In quick succession, she secured a unique treble of Group 1 races - the 1,000 Guineas at Newmarket, the Irish 1,000 Guineas and the Coronation Stakes at Royal Ascot. Note the word "unique" in that last sentence; no other horse in racing history has ever won all three of those races.

She also finished runner-up in two other Group 1 events that year - the Falmouth Stakes (when she was later found to have been in season) and the Matron Stakes. On the back of such a successful season, connections decided to have a tilt at the Champions Mile in Hong Kong the following May.

This race was part of the Asian Mile Challenge, an initiative which saw a million-dollar bonus offered to any horse which could win this race and then Japan's Yasuda Kinen. Attraction's jockey Kevin Darley takes up the story.

"After winning four Group 1 races at three, and having lost nothing in defeat against the older fillies when finishing second twice to Soviet Song, it was decided that, because of the limited opportunities for 4yo fillies, Attraction would head to Hong Kong to take on the local hero Silent Witness in the Champions Mile. A combi-



Kevin Darley (left) with Attraction, groom Carrie Sanderson and owner-breeder the Duke of Roxburghe

Those Golden Moments

September 10, 2005 : Attraction wins the Matron Stakes

nation of the travelling and the change of climate saw the filly run well below par and it took her a long time to get over the experience." She had also injured a leg in Hong Kong and bruised a foot subsequently, after losing a shoe during a piece of work.

"That race was in May," continues Kevin, "and in August she was to reappear in the Group 3 Hungerford Stakes at Newbury. "The filly felt good and was happy bowling along in her customary fashion only to get tired inside the last two furlongs and finished a well-beaten fourth. She had her excuses that day as the ground had turned very soft.

"I was happy that it was only a case of her needing the race on ground that she didn't really like and I was confident after the race that she was on the way back.

"Next stop was the Matron Stakes at Leopardstown in which she had been beaten by Soviet Song the previous year. Cantering down to the start I could feel that the filly was really well as when something came to canter past her she grabbed a hold of the bit and wanted to get competitive; she usually lobbed down like an old jumper."

Perhaps because of her Hungerford run, there was some doubt prior to the race as to whether Attraction would run at all. The ground at Leopardstown was softer than ideal, albeit officially described as 'good to yielding'. Opposition was stern. The winners of the 1,000 Guineas (Virginia Waters) and Irish 1,000 Guineas (Saoire) were set to run, as was the filly who had finished third in the Pouliches (Miss Mambo). But favourite for the race was Sir Michael Stoute's five-year-old

Machiavellian mare, Chic. The pair had clashed in the 2004 Sun Chariot Stakes, and Attraction had won the day, holding on by a neck from Chic on whom Kieren Fallon was riding a characteristically strong finish.

Kevin takes up the tale again. "When conditions were right there was only one way to ride Attraction and that was to let her use her early speed.

"Conscious that a good break was essential, we bounced out of the stalls well and I pushed her in to the race for the first few strides just to get her rolling. We went a good pace and one thing I had learned with the filly was that if I felt I was going a stride too fast then the pace was probably about right.

"Between the four and three furlong markers she got a blow in to herself and when I asked her to lengthen approaching the straight she pinched a couple of lengths and had them all struggling approaching the two-furlong pole. It was just a case then of trying to keep her going. Leopardstown is a very stiff track and when I first gave her a backhand, I saw later on the re-run, she flashed her tail. I think that was just her telling me that she was doing all she could.

"In her usual style the filly kept galloping all the way to the line and although the ride by Christophe Soumillon on the fast-finishing Chic was later criticised, Attraction had beaten Chic with her early speed and

there was only ever going to be one winner," reckons Kevin. For the record, Attraction, under Kevin's measured ride, won by three-quarters of a length from Chic with Virginia Waters half a length away in third.

Effectively, this Matron Stakes win was the day Attraction proved to the world that she was just as good at four as she had been at two and three.

Plans to take Attraction to the Sun Chariot Stakes and then, perhaps, to America were shelved when the mare injured herself in the run-up to the Newmarket race, and the wise decision was taken by the Duke to retire her to Floors Stud. She has left us with many memories, and this Matron Stakes win is one of the most treasured. Five Group 1 wins and prize-money of just under £900,000 say it all about the mare that some tagged 'The Freak'.

We asked Kevin what it was like to ride the great horse?

"Her ungainly action was noticed by everyone," he recalls, "but when you were on board she felt as balanced as any other good-actioned horse I had previously ridden, with the only difference being the occasional glance of one or the other of her flailing front legs!"

His reply brought to mind Mark's analogy, reported in an issue of "Thoroughbred Owner & Breeder," when he was asked what it is someone is looking at when buying a Ferrari. "Are you looking at the wheels, at the hubcaps, at the headlamps? No, you're looking at the whole machine."

Well, at Leopardstown that day, Attraction was some machine! ■

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