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THOSE GOLDEN MOMENTS

This month we remember Attraction landing the Sun Chariot Stakes in October 2004

ONE of the annual highlights of October's racing calendar is undoubtedly Newmarket's Sun Chariot Stakes. This is a

Group 1 race over Newmarket's Rowley Mile, open to fillies and mares aged three years or older.

Established in 1966, it has been won by some hugely talented fillies, such as Time Charter, Indian Skimmer, Sky Lantern and Dress To Thrill, on whom the late, great, Pat Smullen won the race in 2002.

The race celebrates the phenomenal career of the filly Sun Chariot, who, when winning the St Leger by three lengths from the Derby winner Watling Street in 1942, became the first winner of the fillies' Triple Crown since Pretty Polly in 1904.

Sun Chariot won eight of her nine career races, her only defeat coming on her three-year-old debut when she virtually refused to race. Phil Bill, 'the Sage of Halifax', summed up her career, saying: 'She was a curious mixture of

extraordinary speed and stamina and tantalising wilfulness'.

On the occasion of her Oaks win, she attempted to emulate a dangerous episode from a training day when she attempted to quit the gallops in favour of a ploughed field; as the gate went up at Newmarket, she darted off to the left, catching her jockey Gordon Richards by surprise. The combination of great filly and great jockey not only survived this alarming episode but won the race too, in a time which Bull compared favourably with that set by Watling Street in the Derby the following day.

Arguably, Attraction possessed the same

blistering pace which Sun Chariot showed in her races. When the late Duke of Roxburghe's flying filly lined up at Newmarket for the 2004 renewal of the race, she had already made history by becoming the first filly to land the English and Irish Guineas and the Coronation Stakes, a Group 1 treble.

She had also finished runner-up to Soviet Song in the Falmouth and Matron Stakes, two other Group 1 events. For good measure, like Sun Chariot she had also won the Queen Mary Stakes as a

Tornado. The four-year-old Chic was on a roll for the Stoute/Fallon team, seeking a hat-trick after wins in the Hungerford Stakes and the Celebration Mile, while Andre Fabre's Nebraska Tornado, winner of the previous season's Prix du Moulin, had finished fourth in the Queen Anne and third in the Prix d'Astarte in the lead up to the race.

Majestic Desert, the Dubai Duty Free Stakes winner at Newbury, was also in the field; she had finished second in the Group 1 Prix d'Astarte in August, one of four

occasions in her career when she finished second at the highest level.

As ever, Attraction set out to make the running, utilising that early pace. Nebraska Tornado made a forward move to attempt to challenge two furlongs from home, but was soon seen off by Attraction. The great filly then had to dig deep on the rising ground in the closing stages, changing her legs several times, to hold off the determined Chic.

As they flashed past the post, Attraction had won by a neck



Attraction and Kevin Darley

juvenile.

The Sun Chariot had been upgraded that year to Group 1 status, and provided a suitable opportunity for Attraction to notch her fourth Group 1 prize of the year after she was taken out of the Queen Elizabeth II Stakes on account of Ascot's decision to water the track.

Indeed, the final go-ahead to run in the Sun Chariot was only given after Mark Johnston and Kevin Darley had walked the course to assess the 'good, good to soft in places' going on the Rowley Mile.

Five runners went to post for the race. Attraction faced two of the season's leading older milers, Chic and Nebraska

from Chic, with Nebraska Tornado a length and a half back in third. The race provided a significant milestone in Attraction's career. The fourth of her five Group 1 successes, it was the first time she had tasted victory against older fillies.

Speaking to the Racing Post in the build-up to Royal Ascot in 2017, winning jockey Kevin Darley tried to encapsulate the 'x factor' in Attraction's make-up.

'Her initial pace was frightening, and you would think you must be going too fast,' he explained, 'but she would just keep lengthening and keep finding for you. She was certainly the best filly I ever rode.' ■