

10 GREATEST SPRINTERS

ever

SUPER MARE BLACK CAVIAR CONTINUES TO CARRY ALL BEFORE HER AFTER BEING JUDGED AUSTRALIA'S GREATEST EVER SPRINTER FROM A LIST OF OUTSTANDING GALLOPERS

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The sensational triumph by BLACK CAVIAR at Royal Ascot in the Diamond Jubilee Stakes augmented her unbeaten record in Australia where she has achieved a clean sweep of the nation's feature sprint races, but does this make her the greatest sprinter Australia has ever seen?

To resolve this question and at the same time determine the '10 Greatest Sprinters Ever', a statistical analysis of Black Caviar's racing career was undertaken along with those of the champion sprinters in Australian racing history.

The methodology used was based on that developed for my article entitled 'The 10 Greatest Thoroughbreds Ever' which appeared in the November 2011 edition of Racing NSW Magazine (refer to that article for a full explanation of this method and its application).

The following modifications were made to that system of analysis in order to apply it to the more specific subject of sprinters:-

- Only races up to 1400-metres in Australia were included (being broadly accepted as defining a sprint race);
- At least 10 such races were to have been contested (a minimum number to be considered a fair measure of performance); and
- Horses which competed as two and three-year-olds only were included, provided they won a Group One (or equivalent) race in open age company (proving their ability to compete beyond their own age group).

A 'great' thoroughbred racehorse in this context was considered to be one that must have demonstrated the following characteristics:-

- Versatility of performance (winning at the highest level on dry and rain-affected surfaces, in both directions, and at least once at a first run back from a spell);
- Quality of performance (winning the best sprint races and defeating the best performed sprinters of their contemporaries); and
- Consistency of performance (producing this quality season after season and only rarely, if ever, performing below their best).

The resultant analysis ranked the 10 greatest sprinters in the history of Australian racing in the following order:-

1. **BLACK CAVIAR**
2. **MANIKATO**
3. **VAIN**
4. **AJAX**
5. **TODMAN**
6. **LUSKIN STAR**
7. **BAGUETTE**
8. **SKY HIGH**
9. **ROYAL GEM**
10. **GOTHIC**

Black Caviar's place as the greatest ever was achieved by a considerable margin; her remarkable career a

consequence of her unparalleled record in never having experienced defeat, coupled with more than half (11) of her victories on Australian soil occurring in Group One events.

MANIKATO's rating as the second greatest was assisted by the longevity of his career during which he scored 17 Group One sprint race wins. From a two-year-old to a seven-year-old, his consistency never faltered, recording a ratio of placings in Group One races – as well as all Stakes races – of over 85%.

This ranked him only marginally above VAIN who contested only 11 sprint races in his short career and was defeated only once, when second to Beau Babylon in the AJC Sires' Produce Stakes; one of the biggest upsets in Australian racing history.

Vain was the first Australian sprinter to be unofficially labelled "the best in the world" – more than 40 years before Black Caviar's official title was awarded in the World Thoroughbred Rankings.

The inclusion of AJAX at number four is a testament to his extraordinary abilities as a thoroughbred racehorse.

He was better known as a middle-distance champion, but still managed six Group One equivalent sprint race victories, whilst always maintaining his consistency.

TODMAN, LUSKIN STAR, BAGUETTE and SKY HIGH filled fifth to eighth placings on the list of the greatest sprinters; all sharing brilliance at two and each winning the Golden Slipper Stakes, among other juvenile feature races, before racing on to record major sprinting victories.

Only Sky High was famed for success at longer than sprint distances, holding the distinction as the only horse ever to win the Golden Slipper-Victoria Derby double.

ROYAL GEM and GOTHIC raced in the 1940's and 1920's, respectively; a time when a strong focus on Classic and staying events prevailed, making their inclusion all the more impressive with more limited opportunities being available for sprinters than in subsequent decades.

So why did some of Australia's other famous sprinters not make the 10 Greatest Sprinters Ever?

The standard of competition for inclusion required success in at least two of the nation's highest quality sprints, primarily: the Newmarket Hcp, VRC Stks, Lightning Stks, Oakleigh Plate, Futurity Stks, C F Orr Stks, William Reid Stks, and the Golden Slipper.

Victory in such races, however, was no guarantee if those gallopers did not perform consistently over their entire career.

Horses analysed for the study who fell into this category included the following (their major sprint victories noted in brackets):-

- AQUANITA (Futurity Stks, C F Orr Stks and Doomben 10,000)

- BLACK ONYX (Newmarket Hcp, Lightning Stks and Doomben 10,000 twice)
- CENTURY (Newmarket Hcp, Lightning Stks and Ascot Vale Stks)
- HIGH CASTE (Futurity Stks, C F Orr Stks and Ascot Vale Stks)
- MAYBE MAHAL (Newmarket Hcp and Lightning Stks twice)
- SAN DOMENICO (Futurity Stks carrying 65.5kg and the Oakleigh Plate)
- SCHILLACI (Newmarket Hcp, Futurity Stks and Lightning Stks twice)
- TAKEOVER TARGET (Newmarket Hcp, VRC (Salinger) Stks and T J Smith Stks)
- WENONA GIRL (Futurity Stks, C F Orr Stks and Lightning Stks twice)

Conversely, BERNBOROUGH and PLACID ARK did not lack consistency, but neither contested a sufficient number of Group One sprints to enable an overall high enough level of quality in their performance to rank amongst the 10 greatest.

For the record, Bernborough started in three Group One sprints, winning the Newmarket Handicap carrying 63kg, the Futurity Stakes carrying 64.5kg and the Doomben 10,000 carrying 66.5kg, and Placid started in four, winning three; all of which were in succession (the Lightning Stks, the Oakleigh Plate and the Newmarket Hcp).

DUAL CHOICE, an outstanding Victorian filly of the early 1970's, winner of the Oakleigh Plate twice as well as the Lightning Stakes, did not satisfy the versatility criteria because she did not record a victory in her only two attempts competing in the clockwise direction, when third in Baguette's Golden Slipper and unplaced in the Doomben 10,000.

Apart from Ajax and Sky High noted above, several great racehorses who were accomplished sprinters, but chiefly middle-distance runners or stayers, were excluded by the 'minimum 10 sprint race' qualification.

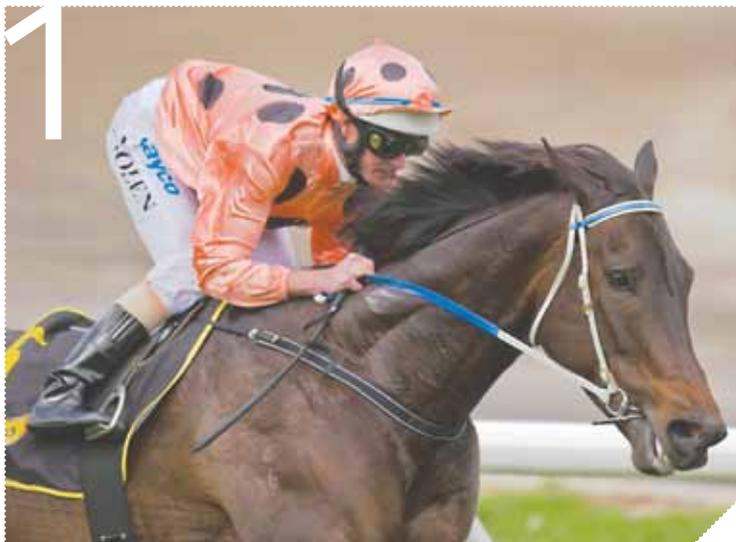
The most obvious example was KINGSTON TOWN who raced in only nine sprints and won all but one.

In fact "The King" was undefeated in the seven Stakes races at distances up to 1400m which he contested throughout his illustrious career, including three consecutive AJC Warwick Stakes.

Perhaps the most significant influence on the make-up of the 10 Greatest Sprinters Ever was the fundamental shift in emphasis of thoroughbred breeding and racing from stayers to sprinters, and especially two-year-olds, which began in the early 1950's.

Seven out of the 10 raced post 1950, and six of those were Golden Slipper-winning champion two-year-olds; the exception being the freakish Black Caviar – yet another reason for her greatness.

It may be of some surprise then that not one of the 10



Black Caviar won hands down as Australia's greatest ever sprinter. Picture by Bronwen Healy

greatest raced between Manikato's retirement in 1983 to Black Caviar's debut in 2009.

The principal explanation may be found in the increased competition amongst sprinters and overall higher quality of sprint racing that had evolved by the mid-1980's as a consequence of more than 30 years of almost exclusive dedication by Australian stallion and broodmare owners to 'breed for speed'.

It could be argued that this created an environment in which it has become far more difficult than in previous eras for one horse to dominate its peers.

Only the arrival on our racetracks of the mighty mare Black Caviar could overcome the very obstacles that several top class sprinters had failed to do over the preceding 25 years; further evidencing the magnitude of her achievements and guaranteeing her place in Australian racing history as the Greatest Sprinter Ever.

1. BLACK CAVIAR

Brown Mare, born 2006 (Bel Esprit/Helsingje)

**Sprint Race Record - 22: 22-0-0 (won all)
Stakes Races - 22 Starts: 22 wins (100%)
Major Race Wins - VRC Newmarket
Handicap with 58kg, VRC Stks (Patinack
Classic) twice, VRC Lightning Stks twice,
ATC T J Smith Stks, MRC C F Orr Stks**

BLACK CAVIAR not only holds the record for the most consecutive metropolitan wins by a racehorse in Australasia, but also for the most wins of any horse that has won every career start. Her trademark has been the ease with which she has recorded her victories, including her Newmarket Handicap victory in what was widely described to be "little more than a canter", despite carrying 58kg against the nation's best sprinters.

2. MANIKATO

Chestnut Gelding, born 1975 (Manihi/Markato)

Sprint Race Record - 39: 26-7-2 (4 unplaced) Stakes Races - 37 Starts: 24 wins (65%) Major Race Wins - MVRC William Reid Stks five times, VATC Futurity Stks four times, VATC C F Orr Stks three times, STC George Ryder Stks twice, BATC Doomben 10,000 with 58kg

MANIKATO commenced his racing career as a champion two-year-old and proceeded to dominate feature sprint races for the ensuing five years; best evidenced by his five consecutive wins in the William Reid Stakes from 1979 to 1983 – a feat never seen before or since in Australian racing history. Manikato was remarkable for maintaining his quality of performance at the same high level for his entire seven-year career, despite constant leg problems.

3. VAIN

Chestnut Horse, born 1966 (Wilkes/Elated)

Sprint Race Record - 11: 10-1-0 (placed all) Stakes Races - 11 Starts: 10 wins (91%) Major Race Wins - VRC Stks (Craven A Stks) by 12 lengths, STC Golden Slipper Stks, AJC Champagne Stks by 10 lengths VRC Linlithgow Stks (course record), VRC Maribyrnong Plate by 8 lengths

The only loss ever suffered by VAIN in any sprint race was his second in the AJC Sires' Produce Stakes, however, he proved his brilliance a week later by winning the Champagne Stakes by 10 lengths in Australian record time for a two-year-old. He returned as a spring three-year-old to win by an extraordinary 12 lengths in the VRC (Craven A) Stakes and five days later ran a course record and won by 6 lengths in the Linlithgow Stakes; both open age events.

4. AJAX

Chestnut Stallion, born 1934 (Heroic/Medmenham)

Sprint Race Record - 14: 11-1-1 (1 unplaced) Stakes Races - 14 Starts: 11 wins (79%) Major Race Wins - VRC Newmarket Handicap 57kg (3yo), VATC Futurity Stakes three times, AJC Sires' Produce Stakes (race record), AJC Champagne Stakes, AJC C W Cropper Plate three times

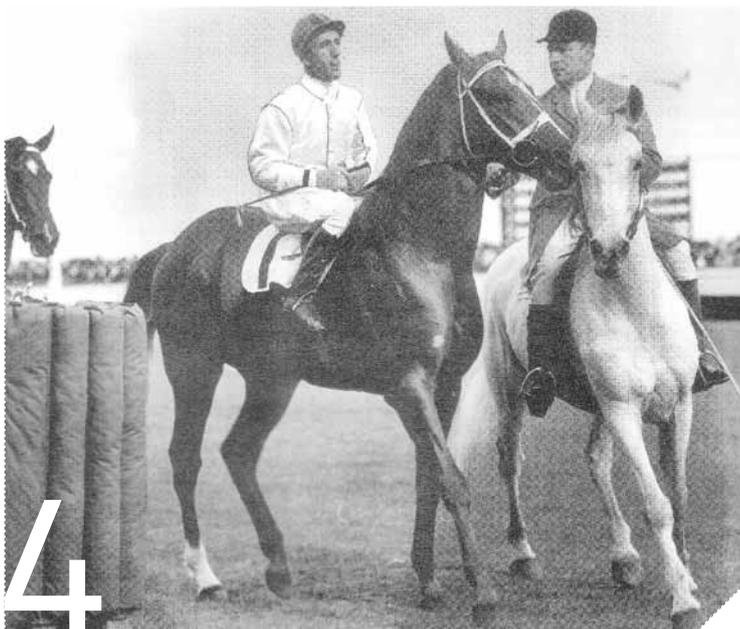
AJAX was one of Australia's best middle-distance performers, however, he was fast enough at two to win the AJC Sires' Produce Stakes by 5 lengths in race



The 'Big M' – Manikato in full cry at Caulfield



Pat Hyland salutes the crowd after winning the Golden Slipper aboard Vain



Ajax returns to scale

record time, which also equaled the Australian record. Ajax continued to excel at sprint distances at three by taking the Lightning-Futurity-Newmarket treble, and through the remainder of his career, winning his third consecutive AJC C W Cropper Plate as a five-year-old.

5. TODMAN

Chestnut Stallion, born 1954 (Star Kingdom/Oceana)

Sprint Race Record - 10: 9-1-0 (placed all)
Stakes Races - 8 Starts: 7 wins (88%) Major
Race Wins - VATC Futurity Stakes 64.5kg,
STC Golden Slipper Stks by 8 lengths, AJC
Champagne Stks (race record), VRC Lightning
Stks, AJC Juvenile Hcp (Australian record)

TODMAN is best remembered for winning the inaugural Golden Slipper by 8 lengths, a record margin that still stands today, however, he was beaten only once in a sprint race when finishing second to Tulloch in the AJC Sires' Produce Stakes. Following a two-year absence due to injury, Todman returned to win three more races, all sprints, including the Lightning Stakes and his farewell to racing with 64.5kg in the Futurity Stakes.

6. LUSKIN STAR

Chestnut Stallion, born 1974 (Kaoru Star/Promising)

Sprint Race Record - 11: 9-2-0 (placed
all) Stakes Races - 11 Starts: 9 wins (82%)
Major Race Wins - STC Golden Slipper
Stks by 8 lengths, AJC Sire's Produce Stks
(Australian record), AJC Champagne Stks
(race record), AJC The Galaxy (57kg), AJC
Breeders' Plate by 12 lengths

LUSKIN STAR's first start typified his whole career when he won the AJC Breeders' Plate by 12 lengths in race record time. He was the first to claim the two-year-old Triple Crown (in its current form) and did so by a cumulative margin of 16 lengths, including an Australian record in the AJC Sires' Produce Stakes. Lusk Star won three more sprint races at three, retiring to stud after winning the open age AJC The Galaxy.

7. BAGUETTE

Brown Stallion, born 1967 (Rego/Dark Jewel)

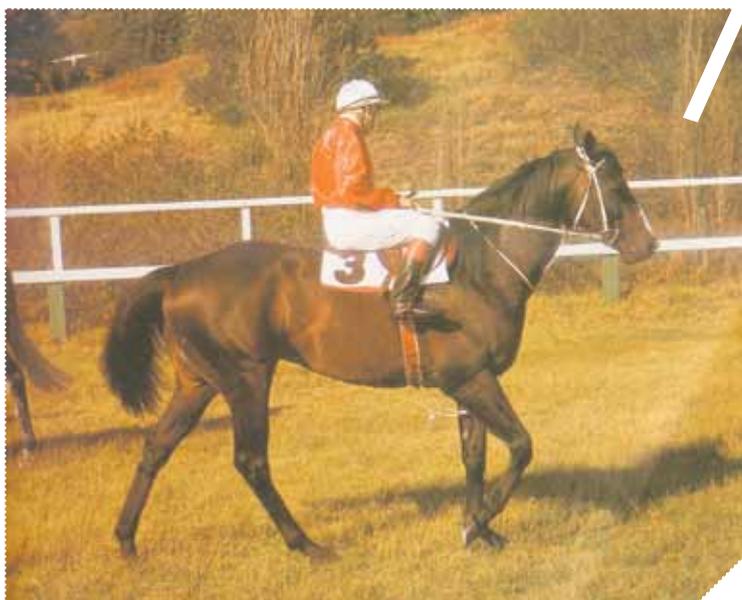
Sprint Race Record - 23: 13-5-2 (3
unplaced) Stakes Races - 20 Starts: 10 wins
(50%) Major Race Wins - VRC Newmarket
Handicap with 56.5kg as a 3yo, STC Golden
Slipper Stks, AJC Sires' Produce Stks by 4
lengths, AJC Champagne Stks by 4 lengths,
BATC Doomben 10,000 with 58kg as a 3yo



Todman is 'air bound' as he scores at Canterbury



Lusk Star and John Wade return after cruising away with the Golden Slipper



George Moore on Baguette pre-race at Randwick



Sky High was an extremely consistent galloper

BAGUETTE was never beaten as a two-year-old and accomplished what Todman and Vain failed to do in being the first horse to complete the two-year-old Triple Crown (when the Champagne Stakes was run over 1200m). His finest victory was at three in the Newmarket Handicap, defeating champion sprinters Dual Choice and Tauto with 2.5kg over Weight-for-Age. He completed that season with a win in the Doomben 10,000 carrying 58kg.

8. SKY HIGH

Bay Stallion, born 1957 (Star Kingdom/Flight's Daughter)

Sprint Race Record - 22: 15-2-3 (2 unplaced) Stakes Races - 19 Starts: 12 wins (63%) Major Race Wins - VATC Futurity Stakes with 60.5kg, STC Golden Slipper Stks, AJC Champagne Stks (60kg), VRC Lightning Stakes twice, AJC Daily Telegraph Stks (60.5kg)

SKY HIGH was another highly successful two-year-old, winning the Golden Slipper from the champion filly Wenona Girl, who inflicted his only defeat at two in their next meeting in the AJC Sires' Produce Stakes. At three, he defeated Lord when carrying 60.5kg to victory in the Futurity Stakes and at four he accounted for Aquanita in the Lightning Stakes. He was highly consistent with his only two unplaced runs in sprints; both in the last two years of his career.

9. ROYAL GEM

Brown Stallion, born 1942 (Dhoti/French Gem)

Sprint Race Record - 18: 14-1-0 (3 unplaced) Stakes Races - 11 Starts: 8 wins (73%) Major Race Wins - VRC Newmarket Handicap with 61.5kg, VATC Futurity Stks (64.5kg), SAJC Goodwood Hcp (58.5kg), VRC Ascot Vale Stks, ARC Victoria Park City Hcp (66kg)

ROYAL GEM was a first-rate galloper of the post-World War II era who won the highly regarded Adelaide Racing Club Victoria Park City Handicap with 61kg at three, and then again with an incredible 66kg at five. As an autumn four-year-old, Royal Gem won the Futurity Stakes carrying 64.5kg and the Newmarket Handicap at his next start with 61.5kg, conceding 14kg to the second placegetter.

10. GOTHIC

Black Stallion, born 1923 (Tracery/Sundrilla)

Sprint Race Record - 10: 6-1-1 (2 unplaced) Stakes Races - 7 Starts: 4 wins (71%) Major Race Wins - VRC Newmarket Handicap twice, VATC Futurity Stks with 63.5kg, MVRC William Reid Stks (61.5kg)

GOTHIC is the only horse in the 10 greatest not to race as a two-year-old, however, he did become a rare dual Newmarket Handicap winner. His second victory in 1928 was one of the greatest sprint performances ever seen, winning with 61.5kg from a seemingly hopeless position only two furlongs from the post. Jockey Jim Pike was said to have named Gothic, with the exception of Phar Lap, as the best horse he had ever ridden. **RNSW**