

LA PETITE COCO DENIES CHAMPION LOVE IN LAST STRIDE AT THE CURRAGH RAPIDLY RISING STAR IS NOW SECOND CHOICE FOR G1 BRITISH CHAMPIONS



The ominous presence of the looming challenger La Petite Coco causes Love consternation in the shadow of the wire.

La Petite Coco, a daughter of Ruler of the World, took one of the biggest scalps available among fillies and mares in the world of turf racing Sunday at The Curragh, when she dug in very late to pass Coolmore's vaunted filly **Love** in the last stride or two to claim victory on Irish Champions Weekend in the Group 2 Blandford Stakes. The margin was a nose.

Victory seemed improbable a sixteenth of a mile from the wire at the County Kildare oval that serves as headquarters of the Irish Turf, as Ryan Moore had quickly opened up a 2-length advantage over the Team Valor color-bearer. Love had been given a lead for most of the 10-furlong race by a Ballydoyle inmate, as is the style of trainer Aidan O'Brien.

La Petite Coco, with jockey Billy Lee masterfully yanking off the filly's blindfold just as the gates popped open, was able to position herself well from the inside draw. Soon, however, she was boxed in, with Ballydoyle's designated pacesetter clear on a rocking horse lead while on the rail and Love second. Rounding the stretch curve, the pacesetter was still on front on the rail, with Love positioned right on her hip, ostensibly creating a blockade against any rider trying to get by Love.

Once Love cut for home in the stretch, room suddenly opened up big enough to drive a Mack Truck through and Billy Lee took advantage of the opportunity as the complexion of the race suddenly changed. Moore must have felt bullish to be cruising in front on a daylight lead as he got closer to the finishing post.

Billy Lee rode energetically and began to close the gap. However, with a furlong to go Love had spurted clear and seemed a certain winner. With a sixteenth left in the race, "Coco" simultaneously found another gear and Love began to jink ever so slight as her year-younger challenger had reached her hindquarters.

Over the next 100 meters La Petite Coco steadily closed the gap. Two strides from home they were dead even, trading head bobs. "Coco" dove for the line and prevailed by the slimmest of margins. [VIDEO](#)

The Group 1 Quipco British Champions Filly and Mare Stakes is set to be renewed October 16 over a mile and a half for about \$690,000, and is likely to be “Coco’s” next outing.

Twomey reports the filly has come back in excellent condition from her hard-fought victory, licked her feed tub clean and seems as bright as ever. “We will back off of her until Thursday, when we will put the tack back on her and start to prepare her for the race.”

