

ROYAL PLEASURE WINS GRADE 3 STRELITZIA, STAYS UNBEATEN IN 3 OUTS HOMEBRED FILLY IS VISIONAIRE'S FIRST SOUTH AFRICAN STAKES WINNER TVI'S THIRD STRELITZIA WINNER EYES GRADE 1 ALLEN ROBERTSON STAKES

Royal Pleasure, bred by a Team Valor partnership that sold her for peanuts and bought back after she won her racing debut impressively by 6 $\frac{3}{4}$ lengths, scored a well-earned victory Sunday when she took the Grade 3 Strelitzia Stakes by three-quarters of a length at Scottsville in South Africa.

["Reunited"](#) and it feels so good," as both Peaches and Herb so aptly put it, said Barry Irwin. "It is good to have this fleet filly back in the fold and performing at such a high level this early in her career."



For the record, the victory was the third in the 5 $\frac{1}{2}$ -furlong Strelitzia Stakes for Team Valor, which had won it with Sally Bowles and Stately in earlier editions. Royal Pleasure also became the first major winner from the first crop of South African foals sired by Visionaire, winner for Team Valor of the Grade 1 King's Bishop Stakes at Saratoga and the Grade 3 Gotham Stakes at Aqueduct.

"It is good to see Visionaire having an impact," Irwin said. "He provided us with two of the most memorable racing experiences in the stable's history, when he emerged from the fog to win the Gotham in amazing fashion and when Alan Garcia brought him from last to first with a flurry to take the King's Bishop in breathtaking style at The Spa. He gave us some great moments on the track."

When the odds were first released for fixed betting, Royal Pleasure was not favored, and she would only reach a par an hour before post time when the late money came in for her. Stablemate Princess Royal had been the choice, based partially on a stakes win in 2 wins from 3 outings, but mostly on her selection as a mount over Royal Pleasure by jockey Greg Cheyne.

Irwin said "I was kind of hoping Glen Kotzen (r) would not run both fillies. I thought he might reserve the stablemate for the Grade 2 Debutante. Glen told me not to read too much into Cheyne's decision, as the rider told him Princess Royal was quirky, he held her in high regard, he figured she has the better long range prospects and he wanted to be on her back to make sure she did not pick up any bad habits in the Strelitzia. He was sticking with Princess Royal to insure his future with her. I told our racing partner Anant Singh that I didn't know if the story was true, but it was at the very least quite a clever comment because it had the ring of plausibility about it."



Once Princess Royal came onto the racecourse, it was obvious Cheyne was telling the truth, as the filly gave him and assistant trainer Frikkie Greyling fits going down to post. She repeatedly dumped the rider, who at one point did something unprecedented, when he personally ran alongside the filly for more than a quarter of a mile in an effort to settle her.

Once bettors caught Princess Royal's act, her odds eased and money rolled in for Royal Pleasure, who went to even money after the start was held up for 5 minutes. Princess Royal raced with cover, had her chance to make an impact, but failed to do so and wound up third. She may have been a bit unlucky in that her challenge may have been slightly delayed, but she did not have to speed to deal with Royal Pleasure.



Anant and Vanashree Singh and 3A syndicate (pictured) are TVI's partners in racing Royal Pleasure.

Anton Marcus substituted for stable jockey Cheyne. Marcus had breezed the filly before her first and second races, so although he did not ride her in a race, he may have known her better than Cheyne. The plan going into the race was to rate the filly somewhat off the pace because she has shown a marked tendency to pull herself up once in front.

Irwin said "This may not have been the best afternoon to experiment, even though it all worked out fine in the end, because Scottsville's track superintendent had dressed the course with a layer of moisture intended to keep the grass from being negatively impacted by morning front prevalent in the area at this time of year."

Kotzen said that the kickback was somewhat inconvenient, but that Royal Pleasure handled it most admirably. The filly traded bumps at the break, then was settled a couple of lengths off the pace in third. Marcus did a fine job in keeping the filly under light restraint while avoiding a pace battle and any kickback from the topical dressing.

When Marcus signaled to the filly it was time to move, she cut with him, not so much lengthening her stride as much as quickening it.

"She is a pure sprinter with rapid turnover," Irwin noted. "That's what makes her so effective."

Royal Pleasure opened up between a 3 and 2 ½-length advantage in the final furlong. With the race wrapped up, Marcus eased the filly before the line, giving the deception that the longshot runner-up was a danger. Post race, Marcus admitted his filly may have been on empty, but was in no danger of losing the race. He pointed out that his filly carried a 2-kilogram (8.8 pounds) penalty for her second win and that most people are unaware of how much of a burden that is for a young horse. Marcus said the filly would have no difficulty traveling another half-furlong.

Next on the agenda likely is the Grade 1 Allen Robertson Fillies Championship, an event run down hill on the Scottsville toboggan slide that Team Valor won with On Her Toes and lost in a photo with Sally Bowles. It is entirely possible that the filly will be put away until her 3-year-old season following the Grade 1 race, as the rest of the races are over 7 and 8 furlongs at the top level and Royal Pleasure's future is as a sprinter.