

Assault

by Kathleen Jones

Assault's first act of note was to spear his right front foot on a surveyor's stake, inflicting an injury which never gave him trouble at full flight, but resulted in an odd limp when he walked. This earned him several nicknames, including "cripple" and "club foot". But when he ran, he was magnificent, and the new nickname became "the club-footed comet".



At 2, trainer Max Hirsch didn't think the colt would even train, let alone race, let alone be a stakes winner. But he did surprise many by winning the Flash Stakes in a four-way photo with Mist o'Gold, Mush Mush and Degage. At three he easily won the 6 furlong Experimental, but no one really noticed him because he still commanded 9-to-1 odds for the Wood Memorial, which he won.

Given quite a bit more notice now, he started at much lower odds for the Derby trial, but Hirsch made the colt wear Oregon boots (to keep him from hitting himself) but on the muddy track, the boots picked up pounds of mud and the combination slowed him to fourth.

For the Derby, he was liked moderately at 8-to-1 odds, while the Maine Chance Farm entry of Lord Boswell, Knockdown and Perfect Bahram was favored. The track was rated "slow" but Assault loved it. Smothering the field in the stretch, he won by eight lengths. The best of the favored entry was Lord Boswell finishing in fourth place.

For the Preakness, he lost ground at the start and was rushed up earlier than normal. The tactic very nearly cost him the race as he began to fade on the lead and could only just barely hold off the fast-closing Lord Boswell. This resulted in many dumping him in the Belmont in favor of Boswell. Assault had a way of failing to keep his backers convinced. But the loyal were rewarded since Assault won the Belmont by three lengths from Natchez and Cable, with Lord Boswell again in fourth.

Two weeks later he won the Dwyer, and finally it was conceded that he was the best three year old in training, but that it was also a poor crop to choose from. His next start was an embarrassing last place finish in the Arlington Classic, and suddenly the opinion swung back to him being just an average horse.

As he walked back to the stable, the trainer noticed he was favoring his right hind leg, and feared the worst. Fears were allayed when the vet diagnosed nothing more serious than a kidney infection.

He returned to the track, and his efforts were good, but not victorious. A string of placings brought up many questions. Regular rider Warren Merhtens felt the horse had lost confidence in himself. Hirsch felt Merhtens had lost confidence in the horse. So Merhtens was out and Arcaro was in for the Pimlico Special. Both Assault and Arcaro waited patiently until Stymie had extended his drive, then swept by him easily. Then they smashed the field in the Westchester Handicap and the horse was immediately titled "Horse of the Year".

Over the winter he developed into a very handsome 4-yr-old, and his personality grew also. Hirsch claimed that the colt was perpetually hungry and unless given a handful of feed from the bucket, he would charge the groom. He continued to exhibit the limpy walk to befuddle onlookers who often asked why a poor crippled horse was being ridden. On his hikes back to the barn from training, Assault soon figured out that when the exercise lad



was unattentive (and Assault could tell when), if he made a sudden jump to the side, he could leave the rider in mid-air. Assault must have thought this was great fun because he employed the trick often. Max Hirsch meanwhile could have developed an ulcer for the number of times he watched his superstar go careening through the backstretch stables.

By the middle of his four year old season, Assault had won many of the greatest handicap events while giving weight and a beating all around. His impost had increased to a staggering 135 lbs., but the owners didn't cry too much about it. "Assault has earned 135 pounds," they said, "so there's little to do but let him carry it." He has swapped the all-time Leading Money Earner title with Stymie several times throughout the season.

Although he was a superb runner, Assault proved to be sterile at stud. He returned to the track in 1948, raced, then retired again. Returned again in 1949 to race with some success, then was retired for good in 1950. He was allowed to pasture breed with quarter horse mares and it is reported that a few of these did produce foals by Assault.

Born: March 26, 1943, King Ranch, Kingsville, Texas

Died: September 1, 1971, (age 28) at King Ranch, Kingsville, Texas

Pedigree:

| | | | |
|------------------------------|--------------------|--------------------|------------|
| Assault, b.c. foaled 1943 | Bold Venture, 1933 | *St Germans, 1921 | Swynford |
| | | | Hamoaze |
| | | Possible, 1920 | Ultimus |
| | | | Lida Flush |
| | Iguai, 1937 | Equipoise, 1928 | Pennant |
| | | | Swinging |
| | | Incandescent, 1931 | *Chicle |
| | | | Masda |

(female family # 4)

Racing Record:

| Year | Age | Starts | 1st | 2nd | 3rd | unp. | earnings |
|-------|-----|--------|-----|-----|-----|------|-----------|
| 1945 | 2 | 9 | 2 | 2 | 1 | 4 | \$ 17,250 |
| 1946 | 3 | 15 | 8 | 2 | 3 | 2 | 424,195 |
| 1947 | 4 | 7 | 5 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 181,925 |
| 1948 | 5 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 3,250 |
| 1949 | 6 | 6 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 3 | 45,900 |
| 1950 | 7 | 3 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 2,950 |
| total | | 42 | 18 | 6 | 7 | 11 | \$675,470 |

Stakes Record:

at 2:

- won - Flash Stakes
- 3rd - Babylon Handicap

at 3:

- won - Kentucky Derby
- won - Preakness Stakes
- won - Belmont Stakes
- won - Dwyer Stakes
- won - Westchester Handicap
- won - Pimlico Special
- won - Wood Memorial
- won - Experimental Free Handicap No. 1
- 2nd - Jersey Handicap
- 2nd - Roamer Handicap
- 3rd - Gallant Fox Handicap
- 3rd - Manhattan Handicap
- 3rd - Discovery Handicap
- **Horse of the Year**
- Champion 3yo Colt

at 4:

- won - Brooklyn Handicap
- won - Butler Handicap
- won - Suburban Handicap
- won - Grey Lag Handicap
- won - Dixie Handicap
- 3rd - Gold Cup

at 6:

- won - Brooklyn Handicap
- 3rd - Edgemere Handicap