

**QUEEN AZTECA JOINS TEAM VALOR INTERNATIONAL'S DOMESTIC STRING
GRADE 1 ALABAMA AUGUST 16 AT SARATOGA SET FOR HER FIRST US START
GRADE 3 UAE OAKS HEROINE FINISHED SECOND JULY 13 IN SWEDISH DERBY**



Queen Azteca romping home on top by 8 lengths going a mile in the Cocoa Beach Stakes at Meydan in the UAE.

Queen Azteca is the latest out-of-the-box acquisition for Barry Irwin's Team Valor International. She will make her first North American start August 16 in the Grade 1 Alabama Stakes at Saratoga. The well-traveled 3-year-old filly will be ridden in the NYRA classic by John R. Velazquez.

Unlike other prospective members of the Alabama, Queen Azteca has already raced beyond the testing mile-and-a-quarter distance of the Grade 1. Each of the filly's 9 starts have come on dirt, the last three going 9½, 11 and 12 furlongs. In 9 outings, she boasts a career profile of 4-2-0 and earnings of more than \$302,000.

Irwin says "the mile and a quarter of the Alabama will be a test of stamina for the American fillies, but may in fact be too short for Queen Azteca. One thing is for sure—she figures to be running on in the end, which is something that usually is not the case for domestically trained and raced sophomore fillies on the dirt. So that's why we have targeted this prestigious race at Saratoga for her."

Bred by Three Chimneys in Kentucky, she was pinhooked for \$22,000 as a Keeneland yearling and resold the following May at Tattersalls for \$39,466. She has raced exclusively until her most recent start for Glaesner Racing. Trainer Niels Petersen brought the filly back to Norway after the Newmarket juvenile sale. Petersen developed the filly first in Scandinavia before bringing her to the United Arab Emirates for the Dubai Winter Carnival with the Grade 3 UAE Oaks as his goal.



Irwin says “I tried to buy her as a Kentucky Oaks prospect over the winter when she was racing in Dubai, but was unable to strike a deal. She had won the Cocoa Beach by 8 lengths over a mile and the Grade 3 UAE Oaks going 9½ furlongs. But the owner insisted on going in the UAE Derby and I was against it. She was fifth beaten 8 lengths in the Derby and I went cold on her.”

Queen Azteca getting up to win the G3 UAE Oaks.

When Queen Azteca resurfaced this summer to easily score in the 11-furlong prep for the 12-furlong Swedish Derby, the original agent that had contacted Irwin in the spring got in touch with him to see if a new deal could be rekindled.

Team Valor worked out a deal to buy 100 percent of the filly, race her in the colors of the seller and the names of both buyer and seller, with any of the \$235,000 prize money going to the seller. The Swedish Derby is the richest race run in Scandinavia.

When prohibitive odds-on 1 to 2 favorite Queen Azteca’s prospective pacesetting stablemate was scratched after being found to have a remnant of ringworm on his skin in the paddock, the entire complexion of the 12-furlong Swedish Derby changed, which resulted in a dawdling pace and the favorite being forced wide the entire way around the oval at Jagersro racetrack in Malmo, Sweden. She gamely rallied wide to finish second beaten 2 lengths in the field of 11 runners.

When Irwin shared the video of the Derby with Velazquez agent Kieran McLoughlin, the ex-trainer said “that race may have been 12, but your filly ran 13 furlongs.”

Irwin was disappointed in how the race was run, but was proud of the filly’s competitive desire and said “Well, one thing’s for sure, she will be plenty fit for the 10 furlongs of the Alabama.”

Plans call for Petersen to prepare Queen Azteca for the Alabama. The filly is due to arrive stateside on August 8. As she hails from a country without an export protocol with the United States, the filly will be isolated in quarantine at The Spa and train after the local horses have finished their morning racetrack routines. After the Alabama, the filly will be transported in a sealed van to Margaux Farm near Midway, Kentucky, where she will undergo tests for Contagious Equine Metritis (CEM).

Neils Petersen has never been to fabled Saratoga, let alone saddled a horse to race there, but he is very much looking forward to the experience. Petersen, a regular over the winter in Dubai, has fashioned a fine reputation as an international horseman. “She has plenty of stamina and will relish the trip in New York,” Petersen said.

When asked about a jockey, Petersen told Irwin that “she always breaks sharply, but then paces herself, gradually building up momentum. She needs a patient rider that will allow her to run her own race. When she has hit full steam she can pick up her rivals late in the game.” Irwin immediately thought of JRV and quickly contacted his agent. Velazquez famously was a last minute selection to ride Team Valor homebred Animal Kingdom to win the jockey’s first Kentucky Derby.

Team Valor has selected long-time former Bill Mott assistant Rodolphe (Rudy) Brisset to train the new filly. Irwin says “We consider Rudy to be a brilliant young horseman with a proven record of training top horses on dirt, as well as turf. We want to race this filly next winter and spring at Oaklawn Park, where there are excellent races for fillies and mares and the purse structure is amazing. I fully expect the filly to show more pace after Rudy has worked with her for a few months. While longer races will always suit her, an ability to be closer and in touch earlier will enhance the filly’s chances of being effective in North America.”

Queen Azteca is from the third foal crop sired by Sharp Azteca, an earner of \$2,406,740 that in 17 career outings had a record of 8-5-2. He was off the board only 2 times and finished one-two in 13 of 17 races. Among his victories were the Grade 1 Cigar Mile in New York, Grade 2 Gulfstream Park Handicap, Grade 2 Kelso in New York and the Grade 3 Pat Day Mile. He placed in the Grade 1 Breeders’ Cup Dirt Mile, Grade 1 Malibu Stakes at Santa Anita, Grade 1 Metropolitan at Belmont Park and the Grade 3 Godolphin Mile in the United Arab Emirates. He ran a brilliant 115 Beyer speed figure in taking the Cigar Mile at Aqueduct by 5 ¼ lengths. He also ran a 112 Beyer when winning the Grade 2 Kelso at Belmont Park going a mile on the main dirt track in New York. Sire Sharp Azteca now stands in Japan as the property of Three Chimneys and a Japanese stud farm.

Queen Azteca hails from one of the strongest families in the American Stud Book, a family that was prospected in South America and has borne riches in North America, providing the Phipps Family Dynasty with one Champion and Grade 1 winner after another.

Princesa Helena, dam of Queen Azteca, is an 8-year-old mare that has had 2 winners from 2 foals to race. Second dam With Flying Colors (a daughter of Leading Sire, Leading Broodmare Sire and Horse of the Year A.P. Indy), won the Heatterten at Belmont Park and produced \$389,820-earner Theresa Z, a double Grade 3 winner on dirt of the Turnback the Alarm in New York and the Monmouth Oaks, with a placing in the Grade 2 Delaware Handicap.

Third dam My Flag was an earner of \$1.5 million that accounted for a quartet of Grade 1 wins in the Breeders’ Cup Juvenile Fillies, Ashland Stakes at Keeneland, Gazelle Handicap in New York and the Coaching Club American Oaks over ground in New York. She placed in an additional 4 Grade 1 races including the Alabama Stakes.

As a producer My Flag foaled Storm Flag Flying, a \$1.95-million earner that was Champion Filly at 2, accounted for four Grade 1 races, these being the Breeders’ Cup Juvenile Fillies, Frizette Stakes, Matron Stakes and the Personal Ensign named in honor of her own second dam. Importantly, this Eclipse Award winner was sired by Storm Cat, which just so happens to be the same sire line as that of Queen Azteca. Storm Cat sired Freud, the sire of Sharp Azteca.

Fourth dam Personal Ensign is one of the most accomplished female racehorses and producers in the history of North American racing. Personal Ensign was unbeaten in her 13 lifetime starts, among them 8 Grade 1 races, including the Breeders’ Cup Distaff. This \$1.6-million earner was voted as the Horse of the Year after winning the Distaff, has been inducted into the Hall of Fame at Saratoga and was voted Broodmare of the Year. She was the first major American racehorse to be retired without losing a single race in more than 80 years and is regarded as perhaps the greatest female racehorse in North American history.