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Secretariat

Lead: He was perhaps the greatest racehorse in history, and his extraordinary speed and strength may have been due to Secretariat's huge heart.

Intro.: *A Moment in Time* with Dan Roberts.

Content: They called him Big Red and in 1973 he won racing's Triple Crown decisively. The horse even seemed to have a celebrity's instinct for posing at the sound of cameras clicking. Secretariat was a publicist's dream. He was the culmination of a carefully planned and brilliantly

executed breeding program by his owner, Christopher Chenery of New York and the Meadow Stables in Doswell, Virginia. He used the fortune he made in the oil and gas business to pursue one of his great loves, the breeding of fine racehorses.

In the early 1970s Chenery was drawing close to his lifelong dream. In 1969 his mare Somethingroyal was bred to a powerful stallion, Bold Ruler, known for his stamina and lightening speed. In late March, 1970 she foaled a dazzlingly red colt with three white socks, a star and a narrow blaze that after five failed naming attempts at the Jockey Club was finally named Secretariat.

When he first began training he seemed a little lazy, reluctant to race, but he soon grew out of his lethargy, born his jockey said, out of the horse's innate congeniality. By his racing debut in summer 1972, he was so composed that he endured a collision that would have caused other horses to give up. He finished fourth. Soon the racing world began to wake up to the arrival of a very serious contender – the first two-year old to be voted “Horse of the Year.”

Then came the legendary season of 1973 and the Triple Crown where Big Red seemed to grow in strength and speed with each passing race. Derby, new track record, Preakness, new track record, and the stunning gallop

seemingly all alone at the finish of the mile and a half at Belmont, a new world record. For the rest of the season his performance suffered because he was sick, but he finished strong in Toronto with a new track record.

And then came the payoff. The ever-elfin Si Burick, columnist for the Dayton, Ohio Daily News put it well, “Secretariat is everything I am not. He is young and handsome, he has all his hair, and his entire sex life is ahead of him.” He was put out to stud in a \$6.8 million syndicate. At first his offspring were considered disappointing on the track, but by the third generation, his fillies were producing winners. This has led to

genetic speculation that speed and stamina are derived from having a large heart, but that such a phenomenon is passed to subsequent generations only by the fillies of great-heart horses and does not become evident until years later in the breeding cycle.

Subsequent to his death by euthanasia after a painful bout of laminitis in 1989, the doctor who performed Big Red's necropsy estimated that his heart weighed 22 pounds, twice the size of a normal horse's heart. According to the Australian researcher, Dr. James Steel's "heart score system" a small horse heart would rank at about 103, Secretariat's heart scored 180.

**At the University of Richmond's
School of Professional and
Continuing Studies, I'm Dan Roberts.**

Resources

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