

New Sires For 2017: VERDI - Long Acres Stud, Fee \$3,000

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- John Richardson



Verdi was untapped on the track but will get his chance in the breeding barn at Long Acres Stud.

In a year that has seen an influx of 13 high-quality new stallions going to stud, it is surprising that only two are set to make their siring debuts in the South Island, where VERDI is to stand at the Darfield, Canterbury-based stud of Myles Gordon and Deborah Clark.

And there can be little doubt that he possesses the credentials to become a major influence on staying races not only in the south.

Verdi was trained by the champion trainers Murray Baker and Andrew Forsman in Cambridge, who gave him a few trials before introducing him to raceday in the middle of March in his three-year-old season, where he scored at Wanganui over 1650 metres on debut.

He then finished second at Counties and third at Tauranga before being put aside until the following season. That spring he won again first up over 1400 metres at Ruakaka, taking the trail before barrelling to the lead 100 out to win well.

A fourth and a third over 1600 metres followed, and then another fourth over 2200 metres at Ellerslie. In more than one of these runs he beat himself by hanging, but just before Christmas he defeated the stakes

mare Endean Rose and a handy field over Te Rapa's 2100 metres to go out with a blaze of glory after racing in midfield and coming with a sustained run down the outer to take the spoils.

Sadly, an injury then saw the curtain drawn on a promising staying career that had seen three victories in eight starts in which he had never been out of the first four – something of a family tradition. His trainers made no secret of their disappointment, as they had the Auckland Cup clearly on their radar.

Verdi's sire is the mighty Zabeel, winner of the Gr. 1 Australian Guineas and winner of the Dewar Trophy for combined Australasian earnings no fewer than 15 times.

He has sired a total of 163 stakes winners including three Cox Plate winners and 10 various Derby winners, not to mention a swag of Cups. As a sire of sires he is supreme – just as his own sire Sir Tristram had been – and he is sire of our current champion Savabeel and the very successful Australian sires Reset and Octagonal.

Of more moment may be the success of his lightly-raced son Zed, who bangs out the winners on a regular basis and now has eight stakes winners to his credit. He too had been a highly regarded ex-Baker trained horse who went wrong.

Verdi's dam sire Paris Opera (Marscaj) was not one of Okawa's great successes but his eight stakes winners included the well-travelled toughie Interval (AJC St. Leger, Avondale Guineas.).

The next two sires along the bottom line are Sir Godfrey (Riverman) and Resurgent, followed by the Coronach son Ascot Lad, Fair's Fair and Inflation, a son of Paper Money, an English Derby placegetter from 1919 who features in so many top horses especially down south.

This is the No. 18 family from Manto via Flora McIvor that has been in Australia almost two centuries and in New Zealand three-quarters of that time. The dam of Verdi is the good racemare Miss Opera, whose six wins included the Listed Castletown Stakes and also placed in the Gr. 3 Lowland Stakes.

Her seven foals to race are all winners, most notably the Gr. 1 New Zealand Derby and Thorndon Mile winner Puccini (whose 14 wins included seven Group successes) and Sir Slick, champion New Zealand middle-distance horse, whose 22 wins included the Gr. 1 Zabeel Classic, New Zealand Stakes, Waikato International Stakes, Otaki-Maori WFA and two Thorndon Miles – truly a pair of iron horses.

Their full and half-brother Mr. Jinky was second in the Gr. 2 Avondale Guineas, and their stakes-placed half-sister Shortblackmini is dam of stakes winners Amarula (Gr. 2 Hawke's Bay Guineas) and Little Wonder (Gr. 3 Darley Plate and Cambridge Breeders' Stakes; 3rd Gr. 1 Railway Stakes).

This is a remarkable line, and the many stakes winners from sixth dam Victoire include Solvit (Cox Plate), Heat of the Moment (champion Australasian three-year-old filly), Vite Cheval (champion New Zealand two-year-old, champion Australasian older horse), Timon (Wellington Cup), Romantic Son, Lord Cheval, Congrats, Nat the Brat, Pump Up The Volume, Let Her Rip and French Gypsy.

Zabeel's sire Sir Tristram shows balanced inbreeding to Princequillo 4 x 3 and to the great mare Selene 5 x 4 (but not through Hyperion), while Zabeel is himself balanced to Mahmoud and Selene. He is a basic Sir Ivor/Northern Dancer nick. Verdi's dam Miss Opera is balanced to Gainsborough and Nasrullah.

Her sire, the sprinter Paris Opera, is balanced inbred 3 x 4 to Star Kingdom, and her dam Brierley (foaled 1984 – when else given she was named thus as she was out of Justaz Wealthy!) is balanced to Gainsborough.

Overall we see that Verdi boasts a real stayer's chart, being balanced to Princequillo (6/5 x 7), Nearco (9 lines), Nasrullah (6), Gainsborough (9) and Hyperion (5), plus more remotely to Selene (8), Teddy (9) and Blandford.

To add more balanced crosses, we might look for male Round Table, My Babu, Nureyev and Val De Loir, and female Sir Tristram, Sir Ivor, Northern Dancer, Vieux Manoir, Marscay, Biscay, Pakistan II, Never Bend and Riverman.

So what mares will suit the new sire? Mares with Volksraad, Vice Regal, Rip Van Winkle, Racing Is Fun, Istidaad and Centaine have already gelled with the family. Anything that carries the Northern Dancer nicks with Turn-to (Hail To Reason and Sir Ivor) or Star Kingdom, also lines of Mr. Prospector will add to the mix.

Lines of the great staying sire Le Filou always help with Zabeel and can be found in Vice Regal, while I particularly like sons of Montjeu. Connections may well be pleased that a good proportion of what I consider possible damsires are southern-based. I especially liked Coat's Choice, while D'Cash, Gallant Guru, Kingmaker, King of Roses, My Halo, Saperavi and Seasoned Star are all well worth examination.

Northerners I liked include Thorn Park (good if you can find one), Any Suggestion, Duelled, Elusive City, Fast 'n' Famous and Mettre en Jeu.

Verdi is an athletic horse of 16.1 hands high, fairly typical of his sire and at the same time showing that toughness that characterises his female line. He deserves a good show at stud.