



Dubai Racing Club | Penelope Miller

THUNDER SNOW A COOL CUSTOMER IN CLASSIC PREPARATIONS

Louisville, Kentucky, USA (October 31, 2018) – Which Thunder Snow will the world see? The question beckons and global racing seeks an answer as the bay 4-year-old colt attempts history on Saturday at the Breeders' Cup. A Godolphin/Darley homebred, Thunder Snow has shown downright dominance and perplexing volatility in a career that has garnered him seven victories and 15 top-three finishes from 20 efforts. He now lines up as a serious contender in the prestigious US\$6 million Breeders' Cup Classic (G1), a race no Dubai World Cup sponsored by Emirates Airline winner has subsequently claimed within the same year.

The son of Helmet has been on the grounds at Churchill Downs since early October and quickly made himself comfortable in his new surroundings, impressing many in the process. This is the same locale at which he had his darkest moment, when he bucked wildly and was pulled up quickly by jockey Christophe Soumillon after the start of the 2017 Kentucky Derby (G1). The event, to this day, has been immersed in mystery for even those closest to him, but his subsequent brilliance has spoken for itself, including G1 wins on both dirt and turf.

“He looks like he’s in good shape,” said trainer Saeed bin Suroor. “I’m happy with him. He has been training well since he ran second in the Jockey Club (Gold Cup) at Belmont (on September 29th) and we have been preparing him at Churchill Downs since. He is strong, fresh and we are looking forward to Saturday.”

The barrier draw did not treat the charismatic charge well, as he was assigned post 1 of 14 entrants; closest to the inside rail. Still, his conditioner expresses confidence.

“The horse can take position and the jockey knows him really well,” bin Suroor continued. “I’m not worried about the draw, really. The Breeders’ Cup Classic is very hard, with horses coming from all across the country and from England, but our horse is good enough. He won the Dubai World Cup and won it easily. He looks to be in good form and hopefully we will see a good run from him Saturday.”

Thunder Snow, who has competed over Meydan's dirt track six times, including victories in the 2017 UAE Derby (G2) and UAE 2000 Guineas (G3), will reunite with Soumillon, who has been aboard for 14 of his 20 starts and six of his seven victories, including his 5³/₄-length tour de force in March's Dubai World Cup—his third top-level win from as many seasons. Since then, he was last of eight in York's Juddmonte International (G1) after losing two shoes on August 22nd before shipping from England to America to be beaten by a heartbreaking neck in Belmont Park's Jockey Club Gold Cup (G1) on September 29th.

“He will run on the dirt and the turf and is very versatile from 1400 to 2000m in the winter, summer time and spring. I don't see many horses able to do those kinds of things,” Soumillon said. “Since the Dubai World Cup, he has improved physically and a bit mentally, too. He's much more confident now. When I rode him in York, where he unfortunately lost two shoes, it was his first run on the turf in a year and we had to make the running, which doesn't suit him on the turf. Then his run in New York on the dirt was good for him.

“He improved a lot and he's trained now for more than a month on the U.S. soil, so it's probably a big change for him and the best way to bring him to 100% like in Dubai for the World Cup,” Soumillon continued. “I'm sure he will improve five or six lengths from his running in New York for the Breeders' Cup.”

While Thunder Snow is not known as the most enthusiastic workout horse in the mornings, one cannot doubt that the earner of \$8,531,476 is a brutal competitor in the afternoon. He will need that fighting spirit when he takes on a stellar line-up in Kentucky, including his conqueror from York, England's Roaring Lion, American divisional leaders Accelerate and Catholic Boy, as well as a trio left in his wake in the Dubai World Cup: West Coast, Pavel and Gunnevera.

“He’s a very tough horse and that’s what I like about him,” bin Suroor concluded. “He’s sound and always happy and healthy. He’s good in the morning when he works and always gives everything in the race. He has a big heart. I hope to keep him sound and healthy heading to Saturday and I think we have a big chance.”

Thunder Snow is likely to head back to Dubai the week following the Breeders’ Cup. He is currently tentatively aiming toward a defence of the Dubai World Cup, but such plans will not be solidified until after he competes on Saturday in the iconic 2000m affair.

IMPERIAL HINT MAY RETURN TO DUBAI

Many forget that the world’s top-rated dirt sprinter, Luis Carvajal Jr.-trained Imperial Hint, was once in Dubai preparing for the Dubai Golden Shaheen sponsored by Gulf News (Group 1) in 2017 before illness prevented him from competing in a race eventually won impressively by Mind Your Biscuits. Since then, he has been nothing short of brilliant, winning 6-of-8 races, finishing second in the 2017 Breeders’ Cup Sprint (G1) and returning in 2018 to dominate the American dirt sprint division.

Still, the question remains what might have been that night, had Raymond Mamone’s compact son of Imperialism clashed with Mind Your Biscuits. They did subsequently meet once: in the aforementioned Breeders’ Cup Sprint, with Imperial Hint finishing two lengths ahead of Mind Your Biscuits in third. Subsequent 2018 Dubai Golden Shaheen third-place finisher Roy H won by one length that day. Both Roy H and Imperial Hint are currently preparing for a highly anticipated rematch in the Breeders’ Cup Sprint on Saturday at Churchill Downs.

“I would love to go back to Dubai,” said Carvajal. “This year we wanted to, but we lost some time with him and would have had to run him in a race at Tampa in February and he wasn’t ready. If everything goes well this year (between now and March 2019), we would like to go back.

There is much on the line in the Sprint. Pride aside, a year-end championship will likely be determined with none other than Imperial Hint and Roy H being the leading candidates.

“This is a championship here and not an easy race. There are some really nice horses,” Carvajal continued. “After this, though, he’ll get a little break again and go down to Florida. Most likely he’ll come back and run one time there and then try to go to Dubai.

“We’ll look at Tampa for a prep race because he loves that track, broke his maiden there and won his first stakes there. The good thing this year, compared to before when we went to Dubai, is that we would be training in warm weather in Florida. Before, we were stabled at Parx (in greater Philadelphia, Pennsylvania) in the winter and it was about zero degrees. We had to ship up to New York for two days and they had to cancel the flight and then went from zero degrees to very hot. I think that’s why he got sick (with a fever and fluid in his right lung).”

QUICK HITS: Meydan form is strong at Churchill Downs this week, with multiple runners on the grounds. Two-time Dubai Golden Shaheen runner-up X Y Jet was withdrawn earlier this week from the Grade 1 \$2 million Breeders' Cup Sprint, leaving 12 possible horses with Meydan form to compete. Godolphin's Andre Fabre-trained Talismanic, unplaced in this year's Dubai World Cup, has made solid impressions as he prepares to defend his title in the Grade 1 \$4 million Breeders' Cup Turf. Toast of New York, winner of the 2014 UAE Derby, has been training exceedingly well, but is an 'also eligible' on the entry list, requiring a pair of defections to make the 14-horse field in the Grade 1 \$6 million Breeders' Cup Classic. A pair of alumni from Thunder Snow's Dubai World Cup, Reddam Racing's Doug O'Neill-trained Pavel (fourth in the Dubai World Cup) has especially given off good impressions, while Margoth's Antonio Sano-trained Gunnevera (eighth) has galloped well. Gary and Mary West's champion West Coast, the beaten Dubai World Cup favourite, will likely train on the track on Wednesday morning for three-time Dubai World Cup winner Bob Baffert. In UAE news, reigning champion trainer Doug Watson has confirmed that Burj Nahaar (G3) winner Kimbear and Godolphin Mile (G2) runner-up Muntazah are nearing returns. Kimbear is pointing to the Listed Garhoud Sprint on December 6th and Muntazah is eyeing Abu Dhabi's National Day Cup three days later.

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Photo: Dubai World Cup and multiple #DWCCarnival winner THUNDER SNOW preparing for the Breeders' Cup Classic (DRC/Penelope Miller)