

SPECIAL
REPORT



SECRETARIAT:
LIKE NO OTHER HORSE



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SECRETARIAT

Combining astonishing talent with good looks and charisma, Secretariat captivated the nation in 1973. Forty years later, his star still shines bright.

The other icons of 1973—the Partridge Family, Bobby Riggs and Billie Jean King, eight-track tapes, bell-bottom pants—seem as distant and hoary as 40-cent-a-gallon gas. But Secretariat thunders on, timeless, as vibrant and relevant in death as he was in life.

Earlier this year, 1,200 people turned out for a party in Virginia celebrating the anniversary of his birth. Millions of admirers have watched grainy YouTube videos of Secretariat's thrilling stretch runs. He has been immortalized in bronze, books, film, song, even on a postage stamp. A Secretariat bobblehead commands \$200 on eBay; a Belmont Stakes ticket, purchased for \$2 in 1973, goes for \$1,000; a nail from one of his horseshoes fetches more than \$6,000. In Paris, Kentucky, red roses still arrive every month for him at Claiborne Farm; thousands

By Jennifer Graham



STILL MATTERS

JIM MCCUE

KIT HOUGHTON/CORBIS



still visit his grave there every year.

Forty years after he ran his last race, Secretariat still matters, and it doesn't take too much effort to figure out why.

His Triple Crown records still stand.

His feats can be endlessly relived by anyone with an Internet connection through sites that showcase videos of his racing career.

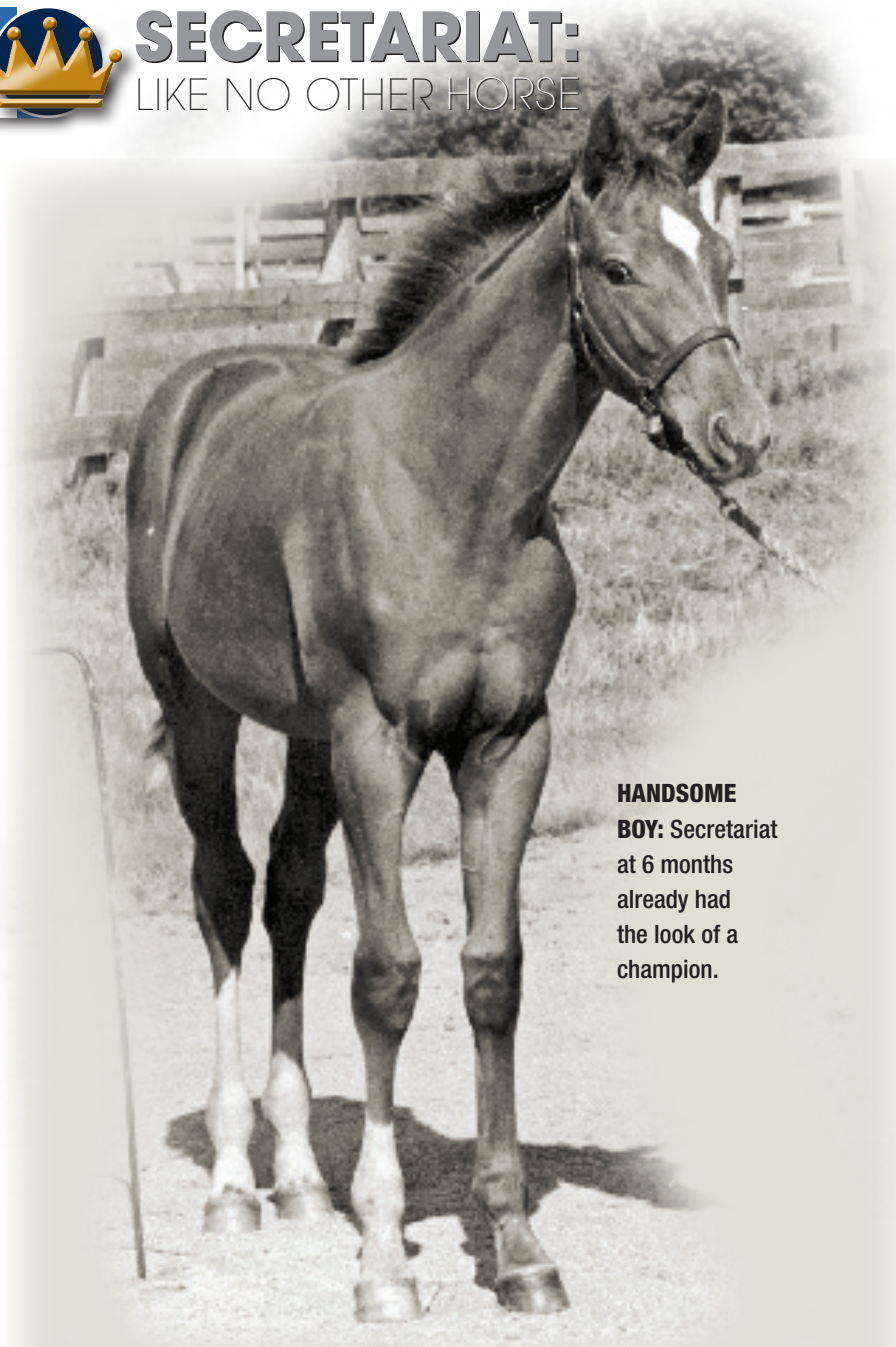
And, perhaps most important, Secretariat's legacy has been managed by a smart, dynamic and telegenic businesswoman, Helen "Penny" Chenery, who understood, as no one else did, what he meant to the public then—and what he still represents today.

A NEW GENERATION OF FANS

Secretariat was born on March 30, 1970, at The Meadow in Doswell, Virginia, about a half-hour from Richmond. The property is now owned by the Virginia Farm Bureau Federation and is home to the Virginia State Fair.

Christopher Chenery, Penny's father, bred Secretariat as well as 1972 Kentucky Derby winner Riva Ridge and many other racing champions. The Chenery family sold The Meadow in 1978, and the house was torn down in the 1980s, but the foaling shed and other barns remain, testaments to the beginnings of a mighty champion. (The story is detailed in *Secretariat's Meadow*, by Kate Chenery Tweedy and Leanne Meadows Ladin, published in 2010.)

Earlier this year, Penny Chenery and her daughter traveled back to The Meadow for a birthday celebration for Big Red. Also on hand was Ron Turcotte, the jockey who guided Secretariat through his Triple Crown victories and most of his other races.



HANDSOME BOY: Secretariat at 6 months already had the look of a champion.



YouTube



BOB HART

Among the 1,200 people who turned out were children whose own parents were children in 1973. “It’s been 40 years, but it might as well have been yesterday,” wrote Holly Prestidge in *The Richmond Times-Dispatch*. Among the fans were a family of six who’d made a seven-hour drive so their 12-year-old daughter could meet Chenery, the woman behind the horse.

Now 91 and living in a retirement home in Colorado, Chenery has become almost as famous as her beloved horse. She admits that, while much of his popularity was organic, part of it was the fruit of her labor.

“We’ve worked hard to keep him in the public eye, because he fulfills a need,” Chenery says. “All those horse-crazy teenaged girls.... We could not have kept his memory alive if there was not a need for him,” she says.

To help meet that need, a decade after Secretariat’s death, Chenery partnered with Leonard Lusky, a publisher in Kentucky, to produce a website dedicated to the horse. “Almost every famous horse now has an Internet presence,” Lusky says. But Secretariat, true to form, was a stand-out from the beginning.

One of the first products that Lusky produced was a bobblehead in Secretariat’s image. Lusky laughs when remembering Chenery’s response when he first proposed it in 2001: “She gave me that look, and said, ‘Don’t you think that might be a little undignified for Secretariat?’”

But he convinced her that he could produce “the Rolls Royce of bobbleheads” that fans would love, in a design she approved, and that the effort would be in keeping with Chenery’s camaraderie with and accessibility

SECRETARIAT’S VITAL STATISTICS

Height: 16.2 hands

Weight: 1,200 Pounds

Owner: Meadow Stable,
Penny Tweedy (Chenery)

Trainer: Lucien Laurin

Jockey: Ron Turcotte

Groom: Eddie Sweat

Exercise riders: Jim Gaffney
and Charlie Davis

Lifetime race record (1972-1973):

21-16-3-1; \$1,316,808

Progeny: 653, including
57 stakes winners

Recent popular descendants:

A.P. Indy, Gone West, Storm Cat, Elusive
Quality, Smarty Jones

Source: Secretariat.com



Secretariat
and his groom
Eddie Sweat

to Secretariat’s fans. (Chenery is widely known to possess superpowers in her ability to sign books and photographs for hours.)

It turned out to be a brilliant decision. Today, Lusky has seen the original bobblehead sell for \$800. And a Beanie Baby issued in 2007, likewise, swiftly sold out and remains a collector’s item.

BURNISHING THE RECORD

A Kentucky native, Lusky was 12 when Secretariat was racing and vividly remembers watching the Belmont on a television at a RadioShack at a mall. Later, after Secretariat retired, he went to Claiborne Farm to see him.

“I was a gawker, like everyone else,” he says. “I’d brought my camera, and the groom brought him out. He was big, he was burly, and his head was down. I wasn’t sensing the greatness. But then I took out my camera to take a picture, and he perked up, got that faraway look, and posed, and I said, ‘Now I get it.’

“He was a ham,” Lusky laughs.

What started as a part-time venture to help fund the life-size bronze statue of the horse at the Kentucky Horse Park in Lexington turned into a “dream job” for Lusky as Secretariat’s reach has continued to expand and the



website grew. For a while, Chenery answered questions from fans on the site, but that task soon became overwhelming, so new questions are no longer taken. An archive of previous questions and answers is available, however.

It was Lusky who, in 2012, argued on behalf of Secretariat before the Maryland Racing Commission and had his Preakness time adjusted. Lusky's presentation lasted more than three and a half hours, but it took commission members just five minutes to decide that a timer had malfunctioned at the start of the race, and Secretariat's time had, in fact, broken the record. Not that the big horse's reputation needed further burnishing, but, as Lusky puts it, "It was fantastic, after 40 years, having those asterisks taken away."

Now, it's official: In winning the 1973 Triple Crown, Secretariat broke records in all three races, finishing the Derby in 1:59 2/5, the Preakness in 1:53, and the Belmont in 2:24.

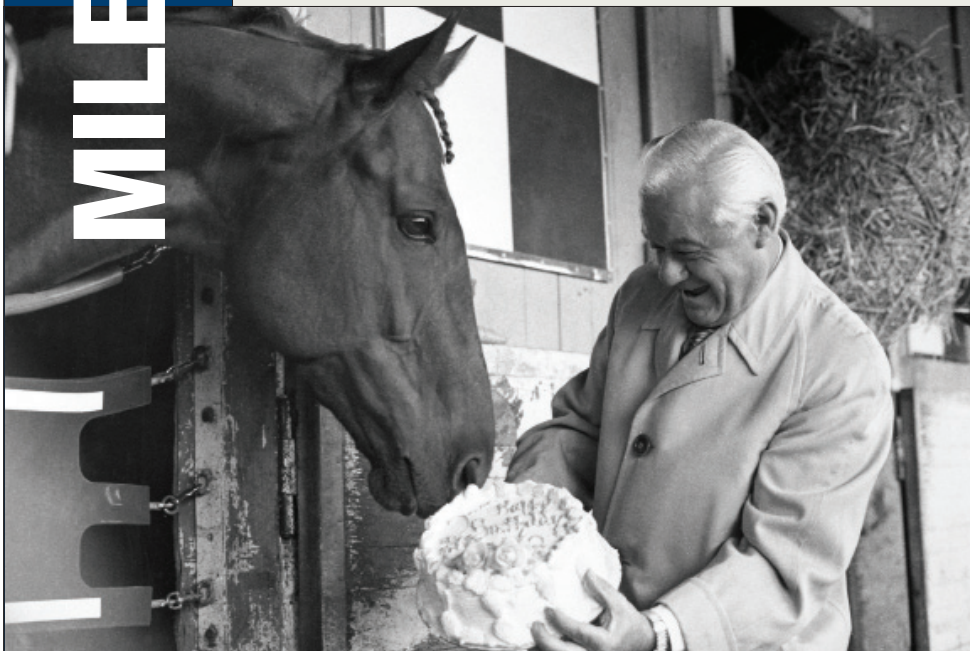
The footage of the Belmont win is one of the most inspirational video clips on YouTube, with Secretariat blowing past Sham in front of a billowing American flag as renowned broadcaster Chic Anderson breathlessly calls the race, describing Secretariat as "a tremendous machine."

"Secretariat," Lusky says, "was this rare confluence of time and accomplishment. It was the perfect storm of what he did, the way he did it, how he looked and his team. I'm not sure that will ever happen again."

"WHAT A MIRACLE"

An orthopedic surgeon in Austin, Texas, Barbara Bergin, MD, didn't even get interested in horses until she was in her 40s, when she first learned to ride. But early on she discovered the wonders of Secretariat.

MILESTONES



BEST IS YET TO COME: Secretariat's trainer Lucien Laurin presents the colt with a birthday cake in March 1973.

• **March 30, 1970:** foaled at The Meadow, Doswell, Virginia

• **July 4, 1972:** In his first race, Secretariat had a poor start and rough trip, but he rallied to finish the five-and-a-half furlong race in fourth place, at Aqueduct Race Course in New York.

• **July 15, 1972:** Secretariat earns his first win, taking a six-furlong maiden race

then-record \$6.08 million. *Sports Illustrated* noted that "he was syndicated for something like \$345 an ounce," much higher than the price of gold, which was \$86 an ounce. Penny Chenery kept four of the \$190,000 shares, while 28 others went to buyers from all over the world. The syndication contract stipulated that the colt would retire from

BETTMAN/CORBIS

at Aqueduct Race Course in New York by four lengths.

• **December 1972:** After finishing the season with six additional wins, including five stakes races, Secretariat was named the champion 2-year-old colt of 1972 and voted as Horse of the Year, topping his stablemate 1972 Kentucky Derby winner Riva Ridge and the unbeaten filly La Prevoyante.

• **February 1973:** Secretariat is syndicated for a

racings after the end of the 1973 season.

• **May 5, 1973:** Secretariat wins The Kentucky Derby in a record-breaking 1:59 2/5 minutes, gaining speed with each successive quarter mile. The crowd of 134,476 was the largest to ever gather for a horse race by that date.

• **May 19, 1973:** Secretariat wins The Preakness Stakes, the second



KENTUCKY DERBY 1973

JERRY COOKE/CORBIS

JIM MCCUE

leg of the Triple Crown, by 2 ½ lengths over Sham.

• **June 9, 1973:** By an extraordinary 31 lengths, Secretariat wins the Belmont Stakes to become the first Triple Crown winner since Citation in 1948.

• **October 28, 1973:** Secretariat wins his last race, the Canadian International at Woodbine Racetrack in Toronto, Ontario, by 6 ½ lengths. His final record: 16 wins; three second-place finishes; one

third place finish in 21 starts, with total winnings of \$1,316,808. Secretariat is retired to stud at Claiborne Farm in Paris, Kentucky.

• **October 1977:** Dactylographer wins the William Hill Futurity in England, becoming Secretariat's first stakes winner. In the years that followed, his notable offspring included 1979 Travers Stakes winner General Assembly, 1986

Horse of the Year Lady's Secret, 1988 Preakness and Belmont Stakes winner Risen Star, and 1990 Melbourne Cup winner Kingston Rule. Secretariat also became known as a broodmare sire. His daughters produced many successful racehorses including Storm Cat, Gone West and A.P. Indy.

• **October 4, 1989:** Secretariat is put down due to severe laminitis.

BLACK-EYED SUSANS:

Secretariat and Ron Turcotte with Penny Tweedy and Lucien Laurin in the winner's circle at Pimlico Race Course.



Bergin, who is also a competitive reiner, was studying the differences between racehorses and reining horses when she became intrigued by Secretariat. She was soon hooked. "From my standpoint as a physician and as a person who takes care of athletes, it's rare to come across an athlete who's super-special like this," Bergin says. "There are a lot of good athletes out there, but every once in a while, there's somebody who's special above and beyond what's explainable by good training and good opportunity. I don't know that there will ever be another one like him. He was kind of a freak of nature."

Like many Secretariat fans, Bergin was thrilled when Disney, in 2010, released a movie about the horse. The film, starring Diane Lane and John Malkovich, no doubt contributed to a resurgence in the Thoroughbred's popularity. It brought the story to a new generation and rekindled interest in those who grew up as fans.

"Within two weeks, I saw the movie seven, eight, nine times, and I'm not exaggerating. To this day, I've seen it 20 to 25 times," says Neysa Osborne of Dallas. "Every woman should watch this movie at least once."

Osborne, who saw Secretariat while

he was alive and has met Chenery, named her business Triple Crown Publishing in Big Red's honor. Sitting in her office, surrounded by Secretariat pictures and memorabilia, Osborne quotes the film



WALT DISNEY STUDIOS MOTION PICTURES



from memory: "This is about life being ahead of you. You run at it, because you never know how far you can go unless you run."

"There's no better example of that than Secretariat," she says. "Thirty-one lengths. What a miracle. I personally hope that is never broken."

Lusky says that while the website Secretariat.com saw an uptick of traffic after the movie was released, the tens of thousands of visitors each year aren't all the result of the film.

Many Secretariat fans are like Lynn Jawitz, a wedding planner from New York City, whose love for the horse was seeded in events she witnessed in real life, not a film merely "based on a true story."

Jawitz, in fact, refused to see the film because she didn't want a fictionalized version to interfere with the very real memories she has of the horse.

"When I was a teenager, I saw Secretariat numerous times. In the backstretch at Belmont, I watched him graze in his little grassy area by the stable. My mom had a photo of me standing on the split-rail fence with Secretariat in the background," Jawitz says.

"When I was in college I dressed as Secretariat for Halloween, with brown pants, a brown shirt, and my red hair in a pony tail," she adds. "I am such a fan of his that I would neither see the movie nor read the books. I saw the real story unfold live and didn't want to get annoyed watching it get made for TV."

"He was, and still is, a role model for excellence, he was so far superior to anybody else. It's unbelievable that a horse from 1973 can inspire someone in 2013, but he still does. I just want to be half as good at anything as he was in the Belmont. He's what excellence is all about," Jawitz says.

While Chenery and her family were actively involved in the making of the movie (Chenery was on the set for much of the filming, and Disney hired Lusky as a consultant), she is quick to distinguish its fictions from its facts. One celebrated scene, for example, in which groom Eddie Sweat bathes Secretariat while Chenery and others dance around the horse to the tune of the gospel spiritual "O Happy Day," didn't happen; in fact, it couldn't have happened: "The horse wouldn't have stood still," she says with a laugh.

"A KIND OF PERFECTION"

The biggest reason Secretariat endures in our hearts may also be the simplest: because he was a horse, not a person. We anthropomorphized him, of course; wanted him to be one of us, because so much about him was admirable.

In *The Horse God Built*, author Lawrence Scanlan quotes Ted McClain, once the barn foreman for Lucien Laurin, Secretariat's trainer. "He was the biggest, strongest, most attractive and powerful animal you could ever lay your eyes on. He was a heartthrob...."



DID YOU KNOW?

- Secretariat's favorite treat was carrots, but he also liked Certs breath mints.

- Secretariat's groom Eddie Sweat greeted the colt by touching his tongue in the morning. Over time, Secretariat began to stick out his tongue each morning as his beloved groom approached.

- The talent agency William Morris represented Secretariat while he was racing.

- "Secretariat" was not the first choice of names for the chestnut colt. Penny Chenery preferred Scepter, but that name was rejected by the Jockey Club registry, along with Royal Line, Something Special, Game of Chance and Deo Volente. The name Secretariat was suggested by Chenery's father's secretary, Elizabeth Ham, who previously had worked as a secretary to a United Nations diplomat.

- Before his 3-year-old season, Secretariat was syndicated for \$6.08 million, a record at the

\$6.08
MILLION

time. Each of the 32 shares cost \$190,000. Penny Chenery was the major stockholder,

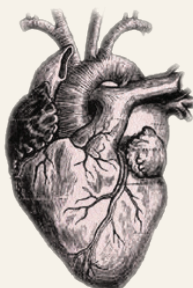


CROWD PLEASER:

Secretariat won the 1973 Arlington Invitational handily—by nine lengths—but still managed to finish within a fifth of a second of the track record.

holding four shares. Under the syndication agreement, the colt had to be retired from racing when he finished the 1973 season.

• When Secretariat was necropsied, his heart was estimated to weigh about 22 pounds—more than double the size of an average Thoroughbred's heart, nine pounds.



22 pounds

But the organ was never actually weighed. As Penny Chenery wrote on Secretariat.com, "It did not seem right to separate Secretariat from his heart."



• The market for Secretariat memorabilia continues to be strong. In 2006, a nail from a horseshoe he wore during the Belmont Stakes sold for \$6,100. In 2004 a horseshoe he wore during his maiden race sold for \$10,721, and in 2003 the blanket he wore after his final victory sold for \$21,600. All were sold through the official website Secretariat.com.

• Secretariat's jockey Ron Turcotte never used his whip in The Preakness or Belmont Stakes.



PENNY CHENERY AND SECRETARIAT

A WOMAN AND HER HORSE

Secretariat fans can celebrate the 40th anniversary of his greatest season with a new documentary that debuted in September: “Penny and Red: The Life of Secretariat’s Owner.”

Produced and directed by Penny Chenery’s youngest son, John Tweedy, Jr., “Penny and Red” tells the story of the 1973 Triple Crown winner from behind the scenes. “She has, for a long time, been interested in telling the story from the inside,” says Tweedy of his mother. “This was a wonderful opportunity for us to get her recollections, not just of her time with Secretariat, but looking back over her whole life.”

The film also highlights Chenery’s

unique contribution to Secretariat’s legend. “Just like Secretariat was the perfect hero for his era, in many ways, Mom was, too. She is an enduring source of inspiration, mirroring a positive story for women, and that’s part of the relevance of Secretariat today,” Tweedy says.

At 91, Chenery recently announced her retirement, and her last public event was to be in September. “The travel is getting harder and harder, and less exciting for me,” she says. “It’s time.”

She says she is “proud and grateful” to have been part of Secretariat’s story, and that she shared a quality with her most famous horse, who loved to pose for the camera. “I’m a ham, too,” she says with a laugh. “I love the attention.”

Chenery is famous for her willingness to connect with Secretariat’s fans, and at public events over the past four decades,

she would sign autographs for hours.

“It’s part of her appeal; she has a wonderful way of connecting with fans. She’s never lost the touch,” says Tweedy, an attorney and filmmaker, who runs Landlocked Films with his wife, Beret Strong, in Boulder.

Though Chenery is stepping back from the spotlight, her own legacy is already assured. As one person who passed her recently in a hallway reverently whispered, “That’s the horse lady.”

And “the horse lady” she will continue to be. Though she doubts there will ever be another Secretariat, Chenery still owns a half-share of one horse, a 2-year-old Thoroughbred called Annie Get Your Run.

“It appears she might have some talent,” Chenery says. “I’m just sorry I didn’t give her a more dignified name.”

SECRETARIAT: LIKE NO OTHER HORSE

He was a man. He was John Wayne and all the movie stars rolled into one, the toughest athlete around.”

But, of course, he wasn’t a man, and as such, he was incapable of man’s bad behavior. He kicked occasionally, and attracted (or annoyed) by a shiny earring, he once nipped a visitor’s ear. This was all, of course, trifling, forgivable stuff when you looked—and ran—like Big Red. “Humans are essentially fallen creatures. Sports heroes are complex and full of flaws and back stories,” says John Tweedy, Jr., the youngest son of Penny Chenery. “Horses are mute, noble, beautiful.”

“And they don’t have agents,” his mother inserts. Both laugh, then Tweedy turns serious again.

“Secretariat represented a kind of perfection, and he came along at a certain moment in which our culture was in need of a hero. That need persists. That’s why he remains a source of inspiration, a source of admiration, and that will continue as long as people look to heroes in sports,” Tweedy says.

In 1973, Ilie Nastase was the top ranked tennis player in the world and Kareem Abdul-Jabbar was heading toward the third of his six National Basketball Association Most Valuable Player awards. Meanwhile, Jack Nicklaus won his 14th major golf championship, besting a longstanding record of Bobby Jones.

However, in retrospect, it’s clear that the greatest performer of 1973 was Secretariat. And 40 years later, his star shines as brightly as ever. 🐾

Jennifer Graham, a lifelong Secretariat fan, is the author of Honey, Do You Need a Ride? Confessions of a Fat Runner. She’s at work on a new memoir, How Secretariat Taught Me to Run.