

BREEDING

Pedigree Analysis



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FIRST SAMURAI

When Lea broke away from the field to win Gulfstream Park's Donn Handicap (gr. I) Feb. 9, he shifted a spotlight to his sire, First Samurai, a rising young power at Claiborne Farm. First Samurai is the most successful son of Giant's Causeway in Kentucky and adds another credit to the Storm Cat line.

Giant's Causeway entered stud at Coolmore Stud in Ireland in 2001, then went to its Kentucky division at Ashford Stud for 2002. His first U.S. crop included the precocious First Samurai, who broke his maiden at Churchill Downs in smashing style and picked up an allowance win at Saratoga before taking the seven-furlong Hopeful Stakes (gr. I) there. He won the mile Champagne Stakes (gr. I) at Belmont Park but shocked everyone by finishing third as the 6-5 favorite in the Bessemer Trust Breeders' Cup Juvenile (gr. I) at Belmont behind Stevie Wonderboy and Henny Hughes. The loss cost him the juvenile title, which went to Stevie Wonderboy.

At 3, First Samurai was second in the Hutcheson Stakes (gr. II) to Keyed Entry and won the Fountain of Youth Stakes (gr. II) on the disqualification of the erratic Corinthian. In the Toyota Blue Grass Stakes (gr. I) at Keeneland, the husky colt finished a disappointing fifth but was later discovered to have fractured a couple of ribs, possibly at the start of what was to be his final race. First Samurai was retired in July and went to Claiborne Farm for 2007, the first of two sons of Giant's Causeway, along with Aragon, to go to stud in Kentucky.

Despite being a top juvenile, First Samurai didn't light the world on fire with his debut crop. In 2010 there were only 10 juve-

nile winners and one stakes winner, the filly Le Mi Geaux (gr. III). The result translated into only 45 mares bred in 2011. First Samurai's runners picked up the pace a bit that year, with four new stakes winners including Woody Stephens Stakes (gr. II) winner Justin Phillip, Trubs, Swift Warrior, and the Canadian 2-year-old filly Northern Passion. It wasn't enough, and in 2012, First Samurai covered just 24 mares.

But a good horse has a way of turning things around, and First Samurai gained the reputation as a comeback kid. He had 10 stakes winners in 2012, led by Del Mar Debutante Stakes (gr. I) winner Executiveprivilege, and Commonwealth Turf Stakes (gr. IIIT) winner Lea. Last year the run continued, with nine stakes winners including A.G. Vanderbilt Handicap (gr. I) winner Justin Phillip. Breeders were paying attention to the rebound, sending 119 mares in 2013, and he's proving a popular boy again in 2014.

For one so precocious, First Samurai tends to have progeny that get better with age, and Lea is a perfect example. Unraced at 2, Lea won a grade III turf stakes at 3, and placed in two grade II turf stakes last year at 4. He opened his fifth year with wins in the Hal's Hope Stakes (gr. III) at a mile on dirt at Gulfstream, and his most recent victory in the Donn, setting a track record for nine furlongs (1:46.86).

First Samurai now has 17 stakes winners from his first four crops, and their pedigrees reflect the same sort of matings that have worked with Giant's Causeway. He naturally would have received a lot of mares from bloodlines already proven with his tremendous



COURTESY CLAIBORNE FARM

First Samurai

sire, but the point is—they're working.

Like Giant's Causeway, First Samurai is going gangbusters with Mr. Prospector-line mares, which have produced Justin Phillip (dam by Cryptoclearance), Swift Warrior (Afleet), Northern Passion (Golden Gear), Le Mi Geaux (another dam by Cryptoclearance), as well as Nakano, Get Happy Mister, and Trubs. Lea, whose dam is by Galileo, gets a cross of Mr. Prospector through Galileo's dam, by Miswaki.

The two Cryptoclearance mares bring in an element of inbreeding, since he was by Fappiano, also the sire of First Samurai's second dam, Frisson. This makes Justin Phillip and Le Mi Geaux both inbred 4x3 to Fappiano. Northern Passion's dam is by Golden Gear, a son of Gulch but from the same family as Fappiano, so she's linebred 5x5 to Fappiano's dam Killaloe.

First Samurai is already inbred 4x3 to Northern Dancer through Storm Bird (sire of Storm Cat) and Dixieland Band (sire of First Samurai's dam, Freddie Frisson). Since you can't seem to get enough Northern Dancer jammed into a pedigree, many of his best runners have additional returns to Northern Dancer. This includes Lea, with a cross of Galileo's sire, Sadler's Wells, and three crosses 5x4x4, to Northern Dancer.

The grade II winner Last Gunfighter, out of a mare by Sir Cat, is inbred 3x3 to Giant's Causeway's sire Storm Cat, which is a pattern we're probably going to see more of as Storm Cat gets further back in pedigrees.

The main lesson First Samurai offers is the virtue of having patience. For this, Claiborne has been duly rewarded. **BH**

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