



A short history of the celebrated race-horse, Eclipse

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A SHORT HISTORY OF THE CELEBRATED RACE-HORSE, ECLIPSE.

NEITHER the ancient Hippodrome nor modern race-course can furnish perhaps so splendid an example of superior powers, as do the annals of the famous race-horse *Eclipse*, whose performances were of a description that rendered competition useless with the horses of his day; and such was his pre-eminence, that he at last was suffered quietly to receive his laurels by walking over the ground, where no rival appeared to dispute his matchless claim. The bones of this famous horse would form a valuable acquisition to any public school, or to the hall or hunting stables of any nobleman or gentleman desirous of making so curious an appendage to his establishment, as they must ever obtain from the celebrity of the animal a share of interest and curiosity. They may be securely referred to as an unexceptionable model on which to calculate speed in horses; and from them may also be seen, at any period, if there be an increase or falling off hereafter of bone in length or size, in our breeds of race-horses, which may be readily ascertained, and in what degree, by his remains. The peculiar make and exact *tournaire* of his bones may also be known, which no pencil, however skilfully handled, could convey so accurate a knowledge of.

The following is a brief record of the interesting circumstances which attended his life, and of the chief of his exploits on the turf.

He was foaled in Sussex, in the stud of the Duke of Cumberland, our late revered king's uncle, and the hero of Culloden; his sire was *Marisk*, his grandsire *Squirt*; his great grandsire *Bartlett's Childers*, which was full brother* to *Flying Childers* of Devonshire, supposed to have been the fleetest horse, for a moderate weight and distance, that ever took the field. These Childers breed can be readily traced in

their descent from the *Darley Arabian*, imported into this country from Aleppo by this spirited merchant, early in the reign of Queen Anne, and which came over to England certificated with all the ceremony due to the very best blood of the Desert.

On the side of his dam he was descended of *Spilletta*, got by *Regulus*, the son of the *Godolphin Arabian*, whose pedigree is very well understood.

On the death of the Duke of Cumberland, his stud in Sussex was sold off; and the *Eclipse* colt, then a yearling, was purchased by a sporting Smithfield salesman, for the sum of seventy-five guineas.* An incident attended his sale, which is worth relating, as his life might have been in other hands of perhaps quite another description, and with none of that splendour which followed him, so much depends upon the characters of men and opportunities, as well as of the things themselves. Mr. Wildman, (for that was the name of this Smithfield amateur), having the young colt in view, arrived at the place of sale some minutes after the auction had commenced, and the *Eclipse* colt, being placed among the early lots, had been actually knocked down for seventy guineas, and sold. This spirited lover of the sport was not however to be daunted by this untoward circumstance from an attempt to gain him; and, referring immediately to his stop-watch, of trusty workmanship, he declared in the face of the company and of the auctioneer, that the time the bills had stated for the commencement of the sale had not then arrived, and insisted boldly that every lot should be put up again. The auctioneer, well knowing the stiffness of his man, and, unable to disprove the allegation, thought proper to comply; and to save the

* By full brother is understood by the same mare and horse.

* From this probably originated the vulgar notion that *Eclipse* was once sold in Smithfield at the open market.

trouble and time of the company it was finally agreed that such lots as he required should be put up again; and Eclipse was once more put up, and a second time knocked down, at the sum of seventy-five guineas, being an advance of five on his former sale.

This remarkable horse was also not without portentous events on the day of his birth, for he was foaled on the very day of the great eclipse of the sun, on the 1st of April, 1764, and hence he very naturally acquired his name, which from this accidental circumstance is now become in our language almost synonymous to swiftness and speed; as coaches, ships, steamboats, and all other sorts of vehicles having any distinguishing pretensions to velocity, are all now called *Eclipses*, arising out of this casual circumstance.

After the period of his sale, he was kept chiefly in the neighbourhood of Epsom; and, from some cause or other not now exactly known, was not brought into public notice till he had attained his fifth year, which, no question, was attended with many advantages to his general strength and the state of his feet; and, for the first time, he was started on the sweet scented turf of Epsom Downs, on May 3, 1769: he was matched against some reputed clever horses; Gower, Chance, Trial, and Plume, were his opponents; and he distanced them every one, winning for his owner a considerable sum of money. John Oakley, they say, had the honor of riding him on this occasion, and in general or perhaps always afterwards,* and to whom it is said this generous animal was much attached; but, although this jockey was deemed a skilful and powerful man, yet this brave animal did not require, they tell us, much of the aids of jockeyship, or would permit in any way the use of the whip or spur,

* It is stated that he was broken in by a daring character of the name of George Elton or Ellers, who was afterwards transported for poaching, and that he often rode him into the thickest of the forest, to overcome his intractable impetuosity, having previously defended his thighs and legs with stout leathers.

or much directing; the sole business of the rider was to keep his seat, and pull in, the rest was done by the horse. In a race that was expected to be sharply contested at York, O'Kelly placed several persons across the line of the course, beyond the coming-in post, in order that, if he broke away after winning, he might be stopt; but it was a needless precaution, for, after the race was won, he seemed to understand it, and readily obeyed the rein.

On this occasion at Epsom, they say, "*he was pulled*" the whole of the last mile with all the might of his rider, yet he distanced the whole, notwithstanding; since, for certain obvious political reasons, it was not desirable to his owner his prodigious powers should be at once disclosed.

It was after this race that Capt. O'Kelly purchased the half of him of Wildman for the sum of 450 guineas; and after a subsequent race at Winchester, he purchased the remaining half for 1100 guineas; yet, for all this, was he the cheapest horse ever sold in England, having by his valuable properties of one kind or other netted for his master the prodigious sum, it is said, of £30,000.

Among other bets on this race, one was made which was rather singular, by Dennis O'Kelly himself, "that he would undertake to place the horses:" after the bet was made, he was called upon to declare, and he said, "Eclipse first, the rest no where;" which was true, in a sporting sense, for a horse distanced might be said to be no where, or in no place.*

* His being backed four to one at starting in this race, for his superiority, though endeavored to be concealed, had got abroad among the turf people, and the manner this happened has been related as follows. Some persons engaged in the fancy were dispatched from London for the purpose of taking a sly peep at a private trial that was to be made between Eclipse and some other horses before his starting for the race; but they arrived too late, for it was just over; but an old woman, as it happened, was found near the spot toddling along, and of her they enquired if she had seen any thing of the trial: she told them, she did not much understand what they meant; but, if it was the two horses they were talking about that were running, she could tell them that white legs was a long way first, and that t'other, she was sure, run as fast as he could, would never overtake him. This was sufficient; they returned to town, and the

His next race was on Ascot Heath, on May the 29th, of the same year, 1769, where he beat Fettyplace's *Crème de Barbade*. The betting here was eight to one on Eclipse, and, though only five, he carried away the king's plate for the six years old horses.

At Guildford, June 5th, of this or the next year, he walked over for the king's plate.

His next contest was at Winchester, on June 13th following, of the particulars of which nothing more is known than his beating Turner's *Slouch*, who had won the king's plate at Guildford just before: ten to one was betted on Eclipse after the first heat. He carried away also the £50. purse, beating the Duke of Grafton's *Chigger*, Gott's *Julia*, O'Kelly's *Calliban*, and Bailey's *Clanville*. On the 15th he walked over the course at the same place, for £50. weight for age.

At Salisbury, June, 28th, no horse meeting him, he walked over the course for the king's plate for six years old, carrying twelve stone; and the next day he won the city silver bowl, with thirty guineas added, for any horse carrying ten stone, beating Fettyplace's *Sulphur*, and Taylor's *Forrester*, distancing the first.

At Nottingham, July 3, he walked over for the king's plate.

At Canterbury, July 25, he walked over for the king's plate for six years old, twelve stone.

At Lewes, July 27th, he won the king's plate for six years old, beating Strode's *Kingston*: ten to one on Eclipse.*

At Litchfield, September 19, he won the king's plate for five years old, beating Freeth's *Tardy* by Matchless: twenty to one on Eclipse.

At Newmarket first Spring meeting, (Tuesday, April 17th, 1770,) Eclipse beat Bucepha-

lus, got by Regulus, of his own lineage on the dam side; this was run for on the Beacon Course. Wildman staked 600 to 400 guineas on this race, six to four on Eclipse.

On Thursday, April 19th, he won the king's plate for twelve stone, beating Strode's Pensioner, Fenwick's Diana, and the Duke of Grafton's *Chigger*, Pensioner being distanced at starting: ten to one on Eclipse.

At the close of this year no horse would start against him, and he received the forfeit of 600 guineas at Newmarket, the king's 100 guineas at Guildford; the king's 100 guineas at Nottingham, and £317. 10s. beside.

At York races in this year, 1770, August 20, two horses were brought against him, Wentworth's *Tortoise* and *Bellario*, bred by the noted Sir Charles Bunbury. Eclipse was more than a distance at the end of two miles, and won the race with the utmost ease, twenty to one on Eclipse.

At Lincoln, Sept. 3, he carried away 150 guineas, and again at Newmarket, Oct. 3, 150 guineas, beating Sir C. Bunbury's *Corsican*; and the next day he walked over the round course for the king's plate. *Turf Reg. p. 15.*

He was then put out of training, and covered mares at Clay Hill, near Epsom, at 50 guineas each, afterwards at 25, till near his death.

They relate also an anecdote of this jockey, John Oakley, and of his horse, which we ought not to omit. It was several years afterwards, and that he had done racing, being very decrepid and foundered in his feet, from the joint effects of shoeing and of racing. It being required that he should be conveyed from Epsom to Canons, in Hertfordshire, the seat of his master O'Kelly, a four-wheeled car was made on purpose for him. In this car rode John also, and baited with him at the stopping places on the road; so that, in the words of the poet, he had almost become "*demi-natured with the brave beast.*"

owner was surprised, on his arrival, to find the betting so high in his favor; he however took the odds, and won much money.

* The writer of this is however credibly informed by some old people, who were eye-witnesses of this race, that he was on this occasion certainly ridden by one John Whiting; that Oakley appears to have been his constant groom, but whether he generally rode him, as Lawrence asserts, is not certain.

Eleven king's plates, in all, were won by Eclipse; and the weight he carried was twelve stone, except for one, which was ten stone.

His color was a light chesnut, or sorrel-chesnut, the off hind leg white from near the top of the shank to the foot, a white blaze also from his forehead to his nose. His exact height has no where been stated that I have seen; but, those who have seen him living, guessed his height to have been fifteen hands and a half. The best portrait of him is done by the masterly hand of Stubbs, to whose extraordinary merits and undeserved neglect we have to bear a sad testimony.

This famous horse was not only the best that ever this country saw as a racer, but he was no less so as a stallion, for his progeny, by their feats upon the course, in 23 years won 344 races, producing to their owners the extraordinary sum of one hundred and fifty-eight thousand pounds, various smaller sums and forfeits not included.

His exact speed was never known, as no horse could be found to call forth his extreme pace. His collateral ancestor, Flying Childers, was supposed to have done a mile in a minute; if this be admitted, and it were possible he could continue such a pace without intermission, he would in seventeen days and nights and a few hours, measure the belt and circumference of the whole earth, and arrive at his stable again, if no obstacle opposed him, before the eighteenth night. The circumference of the globe, from the most correct computation, being stated at 24,855 miles.

If we examine his make in the portrait, as well as in the skeleton, the most marked difference is in his croup, which stands particularly high, owing to the length of his hind limbs; and his thigh bones are, for a blood-horse, of an enormous size, which, if provided

with proportionate muscle and energy, must give him great superiority. It was also remarked in his gallop, that his hind legs were very wide and separated; the width of the haunch bones and pelvis, which also partook of this increased volume, would account sufficiently for this appearance, the hind legs being parallel columns from the haunch, and not approaching upwards, as do the fore limbs.

His fore legs are also remarkable for good symmetry, and their exact perpendicularity of direction.

His fore feet were dropped in the hoofs and foundered, and his coffin bones were very much rounded and diminished by absorption from undue pressure upon the sole. He was thick winded, probably from some error or exposure in his bringing up. He died at Canons on the 28th of February, 1789, of the gripes, at the age of twenty-five years; and cakes and ale were given at the funeral of his flesh, after the manner of the Godolphin Arabian; for his skin was preserved, and his bones were nicely cleared of every covering but the ligaments that held them together, by the masterly hand of Sainbel, the first professor of the Veterinary College, and an excellent anatomist, in which, more than in any thing else, he excelled. Sainbel has stated, in his work on Eclipse, that his heart weighed fourteen pounds,—a remarkable size for a blood horse.

Sixty guineas were offered by the College of Surgeons for this remarkable skeleton, it being intended to be placed in their museum; but the sum was refused. A hundred being the price fixed for this king among horses.