

The Pauper And The Princes

by Lissa Oliver

On the first Sunday of October 1965, the world's equine elite lined up at Longchamp racecourse, in the heart of Paris, for the 2400m Prix de l'Arc de Triomphe. Though it was, and remains, Europe's premiere horse race, no one then or since could recall such a high-class line-up. The field included Derby winners from five countries - Meadow Court (owned by Bing Crosby), Ireland; Reliance, France; Tom Rolfe, America; and the mighty Sea Bird II, the French-trained winner of the English Derby. And the fifth? For the first time in the history of the race a horse from Russia lined up - Anilin, winner of the Soviet Derby.

Anilin, a son of Element out of Analogichnaya, by Agregat, was foaled in 1961. Agregat was lost without trace during World War II; Analogichnaya's dam survived through those years on a diet of straw. That Anilin could take his place in the Paris showcase was a small enough miracle, but he only managed to do so by dint of the Soviet trotters Apex Hanover & Granit, whose wins in France earlier that year funded his travel expenses.

While the champions of the racing world flew in to compete, Anilin, sharing a float with his trainer, Schimschirt, and jockey, Nikolai Nasibov, travelled by road - from Moscow to Paris, via Smolensk and Strasbourg. He was stabled at Saint-Cloud and every day émigré Russians poured through the gates to visit him.

Nasibov travelled everywhere with Anilin, whether by train throughout the USSR or float across Europe, and



Anilin and the trophies he won, 1967

he recalled the affect the horse had on those who met him, as they disembarked for rest stops.

"After the initial bewilderment of seeing a top-class racehorse for the first time, people displayed a remarkable familiarity with the subject which they never even suspected they possessed," Nikolai remembered. "It turned out that everyone was somehow connected with the horse - used to ride, went to war on horseback, heard about them from a parent or grandparent. Everyone told us about the horse in their life; it appeared alive to them." Anilin was truly the People's Champion. State-owned, he belonged to the entire Soviet population.

Nasibov was probably grateful to have Anilin deflect any attention. He

once modestly recalled "I am affected by the spectators' eyes on me. As I ride past the stands, the cheek nearest the crowd starts to burn." Yet he was able to travel throughout Europe and America and overcome any barriers of language and prejudice, thanks to the natural accord of the horseman. His recollection of morning work in Moscow transcends era or place:

"The horses come out of the stable as though they are on springs. They squint at familiar objects as though seeing them for the first time, and every day they are afraid of the same old gates. Really, they're just taking the chance to be naughty. A sparrow flies by, the nostrils flare, and the horse gives a jump to the side that could throw you out of the saddle.

What's the matter! Haven't you seen a sparrow before, then? Just you wait!' And she answers you with a twitch of her ears, as if to say 'OK, don't get mad!'"

When Anilin and Nasibov arrived in Paris they may have been the poor relations, but they brought with them a formidable reputation. At two, the horse nicknamed at home 'The Breadwinner' won three of his five starts, including the Soviet equivalent of the Grand Criterium. At three, he won all his four starts in Moscow, from 1600m to 2400m, as well as two wins in East Berlin and success in the prestigious Steinradler Rennen, 1800m, in Cologne. His final start in 1964 had been the 2400m Washington International at Laurel Park. Lopping four seconds off the fastest time of the era, the great Kelso won by 4 1/2 lengths, from Gun Bow, who had Anilin nine lengths further back in third. But behind the Russian were Classic winners from France, Italy and Ireland.

Coming into the 'Arc', Anilin was unbeaten that season in three Moscow races at 2000m, 2400m, and 3200m. Nasibov usually allowed him to bowl along in front in his races and the pair had soon taken the lead. "I was halfway round when I



Nasibov leading Anilin from his float in Paris, 1965

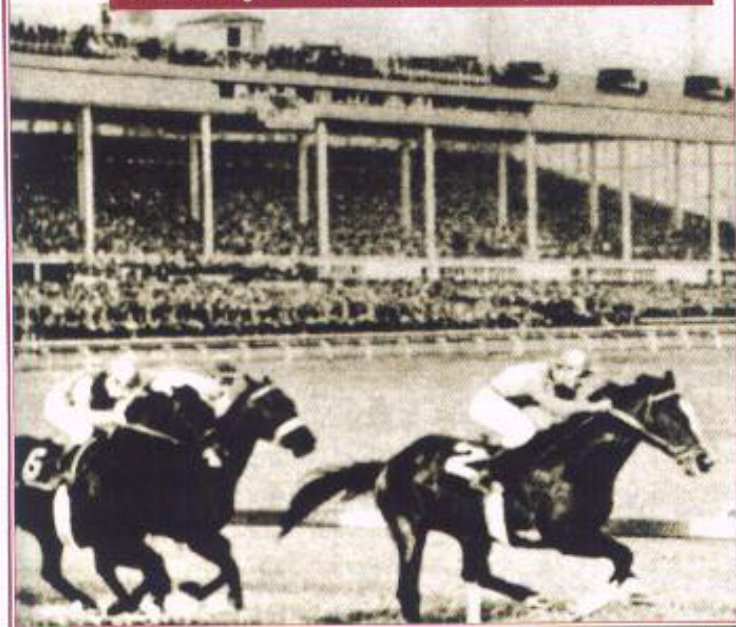
heard someone coming up behind me," Nikolai says of the race, "There he is! We were being caught by Sea Bird II, the Horse Of The Century!" Anilin finished fifth, far from disgraced, beaten less than twelve lengths behind Sea Bird II, Reliance, Diatome and Free Ride. Five lengths behind him in sixth was American Champion Tom Rolfe, with

Meadow Court among those well beaten behind. "They offered half a million for Anilin," Nasibov revealed later, "so you can see what it means to 'only come fifth' in such a race."

While this might have been his greatest moment on the international stage, Anilin's travels were not over yet for the season. Back in his humble float, the horse belonging to the Soviet nation arrived in Cologne two weeks later and landed the first of his three successive Grosser Preis Von Europa successes.

Nasibov had wanted to run Anilin in the Washington International once more following their Cologne win, but Schimschirt felt 'The Breadwinner' had done enough for

Anilin leading the field in the 1964 Washington International.

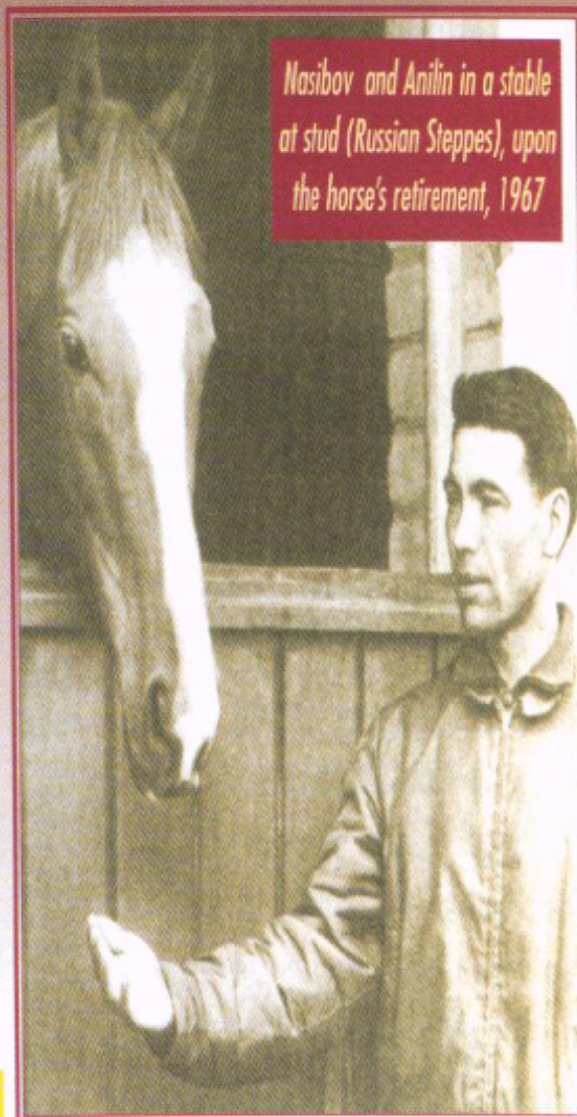


the season. Nasibov always maintained that Anilin would have won at Laurel Park that year and produced his best form on the back of hard races. As it was, they returned to America in 1966 and ran second in the Washington International to Behistoun. That proved to be Anilin's only defeat since the 'Arc', in seven starts that year.

Anilin's final season was 1967. He had only two starts in his build up to a second attempt at the 'Arc', winning both the Budapest Prize in East Berlin and the Steinradler Rennen, Cologne. But in Paris he had a rare off day, finishing a mere eleventh to Topyo, though beaten less than ten

lengths. Two weeks later he bowed out with his third Preis Von Europa victory, a record which still stands today.

Despite all of this Anilin has passed out of history, forgotten in an era when we like to think that new barriers are being broken by truly international competition and in a season when much has been made of the English Derby winner's 250 owners. Yet few know of the horse owned by millions, a colt who took on the aristocracy of Western racing to defy his humble origins. Anilin - horse of the people. **R**



Nasibov and Anilin in a stable at stud (Russian Steppes), upon the horse's retirement, 1967