

Alpha's heart played huge role in capturing Horse-of-the-Year honors

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At first glance you might not be impressed with Godolphin Racing LLC's Alpha. The bay colt's diminutive stature seemed to always make him the underdog, said Tim Jones, Darley's trainer in Aiken. However, there are certain intangibles that can't be measured as easily. Alpha was selected as the 2012 Aiken Trained Horse-of-the-Year, and will be honored at a ceremony on March 17, 2013 at 12:30 p.m. at the Aiken Thoroughbred Racing Hall of Fame and Museum. Memorabilia from his 2012 racing season will be on display at the Hall of Fame, and the public is invited to attend.

A four-time stakes winner during his sophomore campaign, Alpha would go onto earn \$1,180,000 of his \$1,270,000 lifetime bankroll as a 3-year-old.

"He had a tremendous heart," said Jones. "Someone always seemed to be against him, knocking him, doubting his abilities. He was a small, refined colt, and looked very much like a filly."

It was that intrepid spirit that saw him turn in courageous efforts during the winter at Aqueduct in winning the 1-mile and 70 yards Count Fleet Stakes and the 1 1/16-mile Grade 3 Withers Stakes. The colt would later go onto win the 1 1/8-mile Grade 2 Jim Dandy Stakes over an off track at Saratoga, and he would dead heat with Golden Ticket for a share of first in the 1 1/4-mile Grade 1 Travers Stakes also at Saratoga. Alpha is conditioned at the racetrack by Kiaran McLaughlin.

The Darley homebred is by Classic and Eclipse Award winner Bernardini, and is out of the Nijinsky II mare Munnaya. Alpha is a half-brother to group winner Mystic Melody, multiple graded stakes placed Lavender Sky and group placed Numaany.

The Darley staff in Aiken played a role in the colt's development, and it's very much a team effort, said Jones, acknowledging the commitment the personnel has to the horses coming through the program in Aiken.

"It's a privilege to be around horses of this quality," said Jones. "We're kind of behind the scenes with what we do."

Alpha joins It's Tricky, Emcee, Dance Card and Better Lucky as horses that went onto score Grade 1 wins after passing through the Darley training program in Aiken.

The adage one should never look at looks resounded loudly, based on the colt's diminutive frame, and it almost appeared as if the colt enjoyed proving his loudest critics wrong.

"We thought he was good, but we didn't have any idea of what to expect," said Jones, who trained the the Aiken Trained Horse-of-the-Year in 2002, Congaree; 2006, Bob and John; 2007, Country Star; 2008, Midshipman and 2011, It's Tricky.

There is no yardstick, barometer, gauge, level measurement or tape measure when it comes to determining the size of an athlete's heart. Alpha's 2012 exceeded all expectations.