

PATHWAY TO STARDOM
CHAPTER 15: Bump On the Road

If I thought that a crash course in thoroughbreds, racing and breeding was all I had to achieve – enough in itself, you might say – that was not the case. A business friend of mine, a Taiwanese lady, precious stone collector with an eccentric personality, wanted to take Paris by storm in the same fashion as Masahko Sawada.



The Delong Star Ruby weighs 100.32 carats - Natural History Museum of New York



The Chalk Emerald weighs 37 carats - Natural History Museum in New York



The Bismark Sapphire weighs 98.6 carats - Smithsonian Institution



The Star of Africa weighs 530.20 carats - Tower of London

She was insistent on becoming a partner in my new, exciting venture into the unknown.



Adventure into the unknown with flying Pegasus

Following a dinner date with a well known international jockey in Hong Kong, she would brook no argument. She must be allowed to take a stake in those 45 horses. Moreover, she had already signed up said jockey as her racing manager.



My friend's expensive hand shake

My intuitive caution led me to consent but on the condition that I remained the majority shareholder in this unlikely partnership.

The wisdom of her decision was borne out on the jockey's first inspection of her new venture. Urban Sea, he declared, was so unattractive and badly-bred that she must be banished to race in the French provinces. It would be madness to waste Chantilly training fees on such a creature.



French Province, Bordeaux where my friend's manager wanted to send Urban Sea



Paris, Capital of France, My choice

However, I had placed my total trust in M. Lesbordes' instincts. If M. Lesbordes had identified Urban Sea as the jewel in the crown, then so she was. Already the seeds of division had been sown.



Urban Sea, the jewel in the crown

For now it will be enough to say that while some of those horses paid their way, many did not. Nor did my friend pay her part. So the partnership was dissolved, the horses coming up for sale on the eve of the 1992 Prix de l'Arc de Triomphe. By then Urban Sea had already proven herself beyond all of M. Lesbordes' expectations. Second on her two-year-old debut, she had won next time out on her final juvenile start. M. Lesbordes was adamant that the best was yet to come, explaining that Urban Sea came from a family that – like good wine – improved with age. In China, vintage French wines are worth more than their weight in gold. Legendary British composer Lord Andrew Lloyd Webber's wine collection fetched £3.5m at auction in Hong Kong on 22 Jan 2011.



A magnum 1990 Domaine de la Romanée Conti sold for £17,460



A case of Chateau Petrus 1982 sold for £48,500



The Phantom of the Opera: Lord Lloyd Webber is the most prolific and best known composer of our day



Cats will start its National Tour in Mandarin all over China

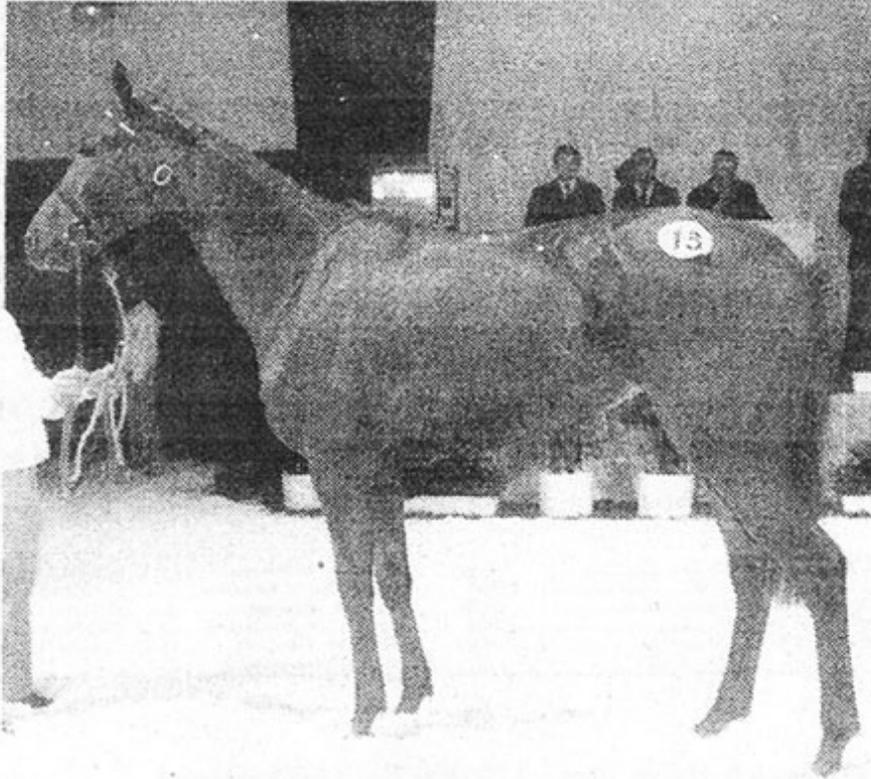
When Urban Sea entered the sale ring in October 1992, she did so as the winner of a Listed race at Longchamp in May and the valuable Piaget d'Or at Deauville at the glamorous August meeting. She had subsequently proved herself by running third in the Group 1 Prix Vermeille and second in the E.P. Taylor Stakes (Group 1) at Woodbine in Canada. She would cost a lot to buy in, everybody predicted. Of course she would. She was the star of this Goffs sale.



Star of the sale is also Star of the Sea

If I had misgivings, they vanished the moment Urban Sea walked into the sale ring. Our eyes met and the instant they did, Urban Sea was coming home. Yes, there were plenty to tell that I had paid far more than I should have when the hammer fell at 3,000,000 francs (EUR 457,347), a lot of money for that time. It mattered not. Urban Sea had already become a cherished member of my family.

3.000.000 F pour URBAN SEA



Urban Sea est devenue propriété exclusive de M. D. Tsui pour 3.000.000 F.

Newspaper on Urban Sea sold for FF3,000,000.00

Was my heir Christopher worried that I might part with Urban Sea? Not for a nano-second! Weekends in Chantilly with M. Lesbordes and Clement made my son feel accepted into their charmed little circle. Between them father and son, they taught him how to ride which was a miracle for Christopher.



Christopher riding on Boulou in Chantilly



M. Lesbordes taught Christopher how to ride

With time, my son turned into a winning race horse owner. He went to all the week-end meetings with Clement and M. Lesbordes. He was with them when Urban Sea won the Piaget d'or and they let him lead Urban Sea in. Christopher became part of a family winning team.



Christopher and Jean Lesbordes greet Urban Sea after her victory in Le prix the Piaget d'Or

Actually, those memorable winning days did not revolve exclusively around Urban Sea, although hers were the most special. Adieu au Roi also won his way into my affections.

* M. Lesbordes = Monsieur Lesbordes in French
Monsieur = Mister