

In a breathtaking career finale, Flightline glided to an 8¼-length victory in the 2022 Breeders' Cup Classic at Keeneland to remain undefeated in six starts

# A True 'Once-in-a-Lifetime' Superstar

FLIGHTLINE'S BRILLIANCE ON THE RACETRACK CAUSED QUITE THE STIR

By JENNIFER KELLY / Photos by ANNE M. EBERHARDT

**BREEDER JANE LYON'S** Summer Wind Farm boasts two high-powered producers, mares whose progeny have left their mark on the sport's history in their own ways. Littleprincessemma, purchased by Lyon when her Pioneerof the Nile colt was 2, is part of an elite sorority that currently has only two members: that Pioneerof the Nile colt, named American Pharoah, won the 2015 Triple Crown. Another superstar mare Feathered, a graded stakes winner, produced a Summer Wind-bred superstar in Flightline, who blew his competition away to put an exclamation point on an undefeated career in the 2022 Breeders' Cup Classic (G1).

## BREEDING A SUPERSTAR

On the racetrack, Feathered was a graded stakes winner, taking the Edge-wood Stakes (G3T) at Churchill Downs, and grade 1 stakes-placed, finishing second in the Starlet Stakes at Los Alamitos and the American Oaks at Santa Anita Park. Her racing career done, Lyon purchased the filly in foal to War Front for \$2.35 million at the 2016 Keeneland November Breeding Stock Sale. For the next breeding season, Lyon sent Feathered to one of the all-time great sires, Tapit.

Among Tapit's progeny are Belmont Stakes (G1) winners Tonalist (2014), Creator (2016), Tapwrit (2017), and Essential Quality (2021). His legacy of stamina has made him one of the sport's leading sires and a nice fit for Feathered, their pairing producing a bay colt with a smidge of white on his forehead.

Foaled March 14, 2018, Lyon named the colt Flightline.

Entered in the 2019 Fasig-Tipton Saratoga Select Yearling Sale, Flightline impressed in the sales ring, hammering down at \$1 million to bloodstock agent David Ingordo buying on behalf of Terry Finley of West Point Thoroughbreds and partners. Lyon bought a share of Flightline, racing him in partnership with Hronis Racing, Siena Farm, West Point Thoroughbreds, and Woodford Racing. To start Flightline's education as a racehorse, he went to Mayberry Farm in Ocala, Fla., where April Mayberry prepared the colt for California trainer John Sadler.

Much like his sire, Flightline has a high-energy personality, which tended to make him accident-prone as a young racehorse in training. He was getting tacked up ahead of a scheduled breeze one morning at Mayberry when he spooked and backed into a stall door latch. That opened up a deep gash on the colt's hip, a significant injury that took 90 days to heal and delayed Flightline's debut until his 3-year-old season.

Additional injuries—a hoof issue and then a hock strain—would interrupt Flightline's career once he began racing, but he was brilliant whenever he entered the starting gate.

### FINDING HIS FEET

Sent west to Sadler's barn at Santa Anita Park, Flightline recorded his first official workout in January 2021, with his debut to come in April 2021. With Flavien Prat in the saddle, the colt faced six others in a six-furlong maiden special weight race. He won by 13¼ lengths with Prat sitting still in the saddle.

The colt's second start came in September in a six-furlong allowance optional claiming race at Del Mar. He



Jane Lyon of Summer Wind Farm bred and co-owned Flightline

raced in second early, seized a clear lead with a quarter of a mile to go, and surged away from the field with ease, again winning by double-digit lengths. That second start made it clear that Flightline had the potential to be a star and his performance in the seven-furlong Malibu Stakes (G1) at Santa Anita announced that to the world.

In traffic early, Prat sent the colt to the lead. With multiple graded stakes winners chasing, Flightline poured it on and crossed the finish line 11½ lengths in front.

He closed his 3-year-old season with three wins in three starts,

with his combined winning margin 37½ lengths. Already a sensation in his short first season, Flightline's 4-year-old campaign would take this blossoming star to a new level.

### CROWNING A CHAMPION

Sadler initially pointed Flightline to the San Carlos Stakes (G2) in early March at Santa Anita, but a hock issue pushed his first start of 2022 back to Belmont Stakes day in the Metropolitan Handicap (G1). Informally known as the Met Mile, this was his longest race to that point, against a field that included 2021 Breeders' Cup Sprint (G1) winner Aloha West; grade 1 winners Speaker's Corner and Happy Saver; and Informative, who took the 2021 Salvator Mile (G3).

The Met Mile would prove to be his toughest test yet.

"He didn't break well but soon after that he was traveling well—just an incredible horse," Prat told the media.

Around the sweeping Belmont Park turn, Flightline darted away from Speaker's Corner to win by six lengths. Another captivating performance and another step closer to the goal of the Breeders' Cup World Championships at Keeneland.

Back in California, Sadler prepared Flightline for his target, the Classic, with a try in the 1¼-mile Pacific Classic Stakes (G1) at Del Mar. The race attracted its share of stakes-winning competition, including Country Grammer, winner of the 2022 Dubai World Cup (G1); and Express Train, winner of the Santa Anita Handicap (G1). Flightline made his longest test yet look like no more than a morning



Flightline at Lane's End Farm, 11 days after winning the Classic

workout. Prat wrestled with the colt to keep him settled, and then at the five-eighths pole, the horse put himself on the lead and put on a show.

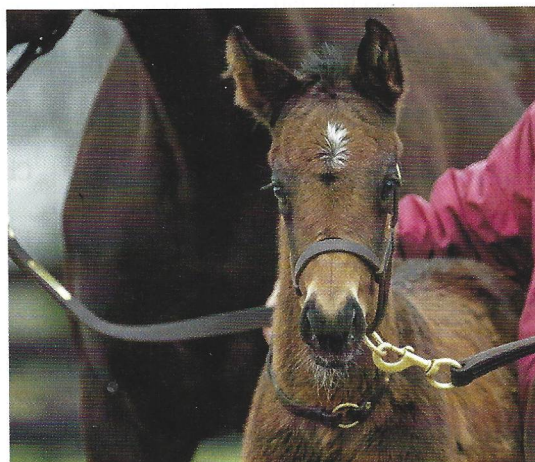
He was 10 lengths ahead after a mile and 13 clear in early stretch. At the finish line, Flightline was 19¼ lengths ahead of the closest rival, Country Grammer.

"When we went into the final turn, he was traveling so well I asked him to pick it up a little bit," Prat said after the race. "As soon as I looked back and saw how far in front he was, I wrapped up on him."

The stunning victory made Flightline the horse to beat in the 1¼-mile Breeders' Cup Classic. In his final start, Flightline had stiff competition.

Life Is Good had taken the Breeders' Cup Dirt Mile (G1) at Del Mar in 2021 and the Whitney and Woodward stakes, both grade 1s, before his trip to the Classic. Taiba had won

both the Santa Anita Derby (G1) and Pennsylvania Derby (G1) and was just narrowly beaten by Cyberknife in the Haskell Stakes (G1). Hot Rod Charlie had finished second in both the 2021 Kentucky Derby and Belmont Stakes before returning at 4 to win the Lukas Classic Stakes (G2). Epicenter was second to Rich Strike, also a Classic contender, in the 2022



Bearing a striking resemblance to his sire, this colt became Flightline's first foal when born Jan. 12 of this year at Taylor Made Farm

Kentucky Derby and went on to win the Travers Stakes (G1) before trying older horses at Keeneland.

Leaving the gate, it was all Life Is Good and Flightline. Irad Ortiz Jr. put Life Is Good on the lead within strides of the break and Prat followed on Flightline, shadowing his moves around the first turn and down the backstretch. Life Is Good was 2½ lengths in front at the six-furlong mark, but Flightline was not about to let Life Is Good get away from him. Around the far turn, Flightline pulled even with his rival, the two head-to-head as they entered the stretch.

If anyone on hand at Keeneland for the Classic expected a duel, they got one for a handful of strides before Flightline unleashed a record-breaking show. Suddenly, he was three lengths ahead and then five. At the finish line, he was the winner by 8¼ lengths, a Breeders' Cup Classic record.

"Brilliant is his normal. He didn't disappoint. He never has. He's a remarkable, remarkable horse," Sadler said after the race. "In the words of (the late trainer) Bud Delp, he's one of the best horses to ever look through a bridle. He's just that good."

A few days after his Breeders' Cup victory at Keeneland, Flightline boarded the van for one more ride, this time to the next phase of his life, becoming a stallion at Lane's End—his first foals hit the ground in 2024.

At the Eclipse Awards, Flightline was named 2022 Horse of the Year and champion older dirt male.

As one of the sport's most dominant racehorses in recent history, Flightline's speed, strength, and versatility have earned him comparisons to all-time greats such as Secretariat. Beyond the statistics and accolades, this champion captivated fans and professionals alike, a once-in-a-lifetime phenomenon whose brief career left behind mesmerizing performances that won't soon be forgotten. **BH**