

HOW TO SELL A HORSE (Originally published September 1965)

Late in July we attended the summer yearling sale of Thoroughbred race horses at Keenland in Lexington, Kentucky. Two hundred and eighty-odd one-year-old colts and fillies went under the auctioneer's hammer and \$5,068,300 changed hands. This averaged \$17,973 per yearling—a lot of cash to pay for an untried horse which has been broken only to a halter lead. The top individual, a royally and fashionably bred filly, sold for \$140,000; a colt for \$125,000. Both, incidentally, were bought by the same man.

Our own colt, that we had bred and raised in partnership on a West Virginia farm, was one of those that helped to keep the sales average “down.” He brought a measly \$6,000 in what was a comedy of errors.

On the first afternoon, with the sales ring jammed and the tempo of the auction reaching a high pitch in noise and excitement, just before our colt was led into the ring, the main fuse blew. The lights went out, the air-conditioning quit, and the public address system pooped. The bidding on our colt was conducted in confusion and in a contrasting atmosphere of tomb-like silence. After the bidding stopped, a friend confided that he had “bought the colt in” for us, as he considered the price too low. He would take it to his farm, fatten it up, then put it in the September sales for us where he knew it would bring a couple of thousand more. Another buyer came by and said he had meant to bid but thought the price would be too high, and would we consider reselling privately? Later when the friend who thought he had bought the colt went to sign the sales slip at the business office, he found that in the darkness and confusion the bid had been given to someone else, who was then back in Chicago.

So now, Sunny (that was the colt's farm name), is on his way to Ocala, Florida, to be broken, trained and started on the schooling that will teach him to become a racehorse. One year from now, if any one of a thousand things doesn't happen to him (and those same thousand things may just as easily happen to the \$149,000 filly), he may run his first race.

The yearling colt last year, which sold for an all-time record price of \$176,000, recently had to be operated upon for bone chips in his knee and very probably will never get to run a race. But people who breed and race Thoroughbreds are uniformly and incurably optimistic. In 1967, after Sunny wins the Derby and Preakness, we can always say we knew him when.