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## Sheikh buys \$11.7M colt at Keeneland sale

By Glenye Cain  
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LEXINGTON, Ky. -- One day after spending nearly \$30 million on Thoroughbred yearlings at Keeneland's September sale opener, Sheikh Mohammed al-Maktoum showed no sign of stopping Tuesday, buying a sale-record \$11.7 million Kingmambo colt.

The price was the third-highest for a Thoroughbred at public auction, behind \$16 million for The Green Monkey at the 2006 Fasig-Tipton Calder juvenile sale and \$13.1 million for then-yearling Seattle Dancer in 1985 at Keeneland's July sale. Tuesday's price shattered the previous September sale record of \$9.7 million, which Maktoum paid last year for a Storm Cat-Tranquility Lake colt.

Over the first two, select sessions of this year's sale, Maktoum has spent a staggering total of \$56,885,000 for 25 yearlings, an average of \$2,275,400 per horse.

On Tuesday, the sale of Hip No. 425, a son of Kingmambo and the Seattle Slew stakes-winner Crown of Crimson, was the culmination of a series of long bidding duels between Maktoum and Coolmore Stud owner John Magnier. Their clashes have fueled an unprecedented rise in bloodstock auction prices in recent years. The Green Monkey's world-record bid was built on such a battle, with Coolmore the winner.

Earlier in the day, Maktoum outgunned Magnier on Monticule Farm's \$9.2 million Danzig colt out of Sharp Minister before Magnier came back to buy another Danzig colt, this one a \$5.2 million son of Al Theraab offered by the Indian Creek agency.

But it was Maktoum who prevailed more often than not, just as he had at Monday's opening session. At that session, he purchased 16 yearlings for \$29,660,000, including the \$8.2 million session-topper, a Storm Cat-Awesome Humor colt sold by Taylor Made, agent. His expenditures boosted the sale's first-day average to a record \$539,264.

On Tuesday, Maktoum also bought Hip No. 324, a Storm Cat-Snow Forest colt from Mt. Brilliant Farm's agency, and Hip No. 333, a Storm Cat-Strategic Maneuver colt offered by Eaton Sales, agent, both for \$1 million. And there were others that sold for less than \$1 million but still contributed to Maktoum's grand total for Tuesday: nine yearlings for \$27,225,000. His brother, Shadwell owner Sheikh Hamdan, also spent \$10,335,000 on Tuesday.

That kind of accelerant helped Keeneland's second session burn brightly. The session ended with 161 yearlings sold for \$94,960,000. That was down 3.6 percent from last year, when 184 lots brought \$98,502,000. But average rose 10.2 percent to a record \$589,814 from last year's \$535,337, and median also soared, climbing 10.1 percent from \$272,500 last season to \$300,000.

But the day's events were perhaps best described not by the numbers but by the expression on the face of consignor Lyn Burleson, who sold the \$11.7 million colt on behalf of clients Richard Santulli and George Prussin. Magnier and Maktoum stood just yards apart in the bidding area behind the auction ring, and as they went at it, Burleson stood nearby watching them, a smile gradually expanding under his large, cowboy-style mustache as the price ticked past \$9 million, past \$10 million, and past \$11 million. At \$11.5 million, a blonde woman in a bright pink shirt crept up beside him and squeezed his left arm, and her expression - eyes wide with amazement - said a lot, too. That was Burleson's mother, Jackie Hardin, a recent transplant from Texas who moved to Kentucky to be with her sons.

Burleson previously was a manager for Becky Thomas and Lewis Lakin's successful Lakland partnership, but he struck out on his own on Feb. 1, and this was his first solo consignment at the Keeneland September sale, numbering about 30 horses. The smile still beaming, he politely extricated himself from the forest of hands raised toward him in congratulatory handshakes and back-slaps, and said quietly, "I need to go thank Mr. Ferguson," referring to Maktoum's bidding agent and chief bloodstock advisor, John Ferguson.

No one would have predicted the price, but Burleson, an experienced seller, was well aware of what he had in the barn. Santulli and Prussin had sold Crown of Crimson's first foal, another Kingmambo colt now named Ashaawes, through Lakland's Keeneland September agency last year. The colt brought \$2.85 million from Sheikh Mohammed's brother, Sheikh Hamdan.

When the Lakland partnership ended this year and Burleson went out on his own, he got the break of a lifetime: the chance to consign Crown of Crimson's next Kingmambo colt. Representatives from both Coolmore and the Maktoums had looked at the colt in the spring, Santulli said. That both appeared to like him certainly tipped Burleson, Santulli, and Prussin off that a big sale was headed their way. But they had no idea how big.

"He was always a nice horse, and he vets well," said Burleson. "But you can't ever guess that kind of price."

Santulli pronounced himself "overwhelmed" and said the colt's reserve had been \$2 million, a sum that had looked entirely practical a few minutes before the auction and downright paltry immediately after it.

Between them, Maktoum and Magnier have created a Thoroughbred auction economy unto themselves that bears little relation to the mundane calculations other horsemen must make when they are breeding or buying horses, things such as stud fee, likely racetrack earnings, and possible return on investment. When Maktoum and Magnier hook up to compete for a horse, the issue is less about logic than desire.

Another consignor, Monticule Farm owner Gary Knapp, put it best. Maktoum outbid Magnier, paying \$9.2 million for Knapp's Danzig-Sharp Minister colt.

"Once you get to a certain price," Knapp observed, "what you're seeing is two people who really, really want that horse, and they're attempting to realize their hopes, dreams, and aspirations about the horse."

And in the process Maktoum and Magnier are making some dreams and aspirations come true for a few other people, too.

The September yearling sale continues with its open sessions through Sept. 25 at Keeneland. Sessions begin daily at 10 a.m., except on Friday, when there will be no selling.

*- additional reporting by Matt Hegarty*