



Special Effort smokes the 1981 Rainbow Futurity field.

RUIDOSO DOWNS

The End of EFFORT

Special Effort had a great run.

By Richard Chamberlain

WORLD CHAMPION AND ALL AMERICAN FUTURITY WINNER Special Effort, the only horse to sweep the triple crown at Ruidoso Downs, was euthanized March 11. The 27-year-old stallion was buried on the Burnett Ranches' Four Sixes Ranch at Guthrie, Texas, where he had stood at stud since 1993.

"I feel very fortunate to have handled such a great horse, and we were very proud to have him here," said Four Sixes horse manager Glenn Blodgett, D.V.M., a member and former chairman of the AQHA Stud Book & Registration Committee. "Special Effort was just a really special horse. I'm very humbled, but also proud, to have had the opportunity to handle horses like Special Effort – and Dash For Cash and Streakin Six. Those three all came here to the ranch at about the same time, and he's the last one to pass along. It was quite an honor to work with horses like those three."

Bred by Allen Moehrig and foaled on Moehrig's ranch at Seguin, Texas, the sorrel colt by Raise Your Glass (TB) was one of six winners out of the stakes-placed Double Devil mare Go Effortlessly, who won eight of 51 races and in 1973

set a 400-yard track record at Columbus Downs. Special Effort broke his maiden on first asking at La Bahia Downs in Goliad, Texas, for owners Allen Taylor and L.E. Willis. Right after winning his second start, in the trials to the now-Grade 2 Kansas Futurity at Ruidoso Downs, Special Effort was purchased by Dan and Jolene Urschel, who ranched at Canadian, Texas, and for racing purposes leased him to their daughter and son-in-law, Dana and Tim Guidry. Taking a gamble, the Urschels paid \$1 million for the colt, reportedly the highest price ever for an American Quarter Horse in training.

"I guess you'd have to call it a gamble – I don't like to refer to it that way," Urschel said at the time. "But I don't think you ought to have a racehorse if you don't expect him to win."

Win, he did, again and again, in big-time manner. Special Effort was a special racehorse – even *Sports Illustrated* did a feature article on him after his fabulous freshman campaign. An undefeated world champion at 2 and champion sophomore colt at 3, the bright red colt dazzled horsemen and fans

alike for two seasons, trouncing all comers in all kinds of conditions, from fast tracks and bright sunshine to rainy slop and near darkness. Trained by Johnie Goodman and never beaten until his final race – indeed, scarcely headed for much longer than it took for jockey Billy Hunt to uncock his bat – the colt put together an unbroken string of 13 victories. His nine wins as a freshman included Ruidoso's *Tres Coronas*, comprising the now-Grade 1 All American and Rainbow futurities and the now-Grade 2 Kansas Futurity (which the track replaced in 1993 with the Grade 1 Ruidoso Futurity).

"He can run and he loves to," Hunt said after winning the Kansas. "He kind of thinks it's a game out there."

The flashy colt returned at 3 to win his trial and the final the now-Grade 3 Kansas Derby, and after winning his trial with the 11th-fastest time to the now-Grade 1 Rainbow Derby, was scratched from the consolation. So what goes up has to come down – Special Effort won his trial to the now-Grade 1 All American Derby by a length over major winner War Star Wrangler (who also qualified), but in the final failed to fire and finished third to Justanold Love and eventual world champion Dashing in what his connections previously had announced would be his final start before going to the breeding shed.

The winner of 13 of 14 races, Special Effort retired with earnings of \$1,219,949 – the second-richest Quarter Horse at the time and still the 21st-richest today. A win in the All American Derby would have returned him to the top spot then, a position he yielded only a week before when Hunt rode Special Effort's stablemate Higheasterjet to win the All American Gold Cup.

Syndicated just prior to the All American Futurity trials, with 150 shares at \$100,000 apiece – \$15 mil total – Special Effort entered stud in 1983 at the Urschels' 3 Bar D Ranch, stood at Ed Gaylord's Lazy E Ranch at Guthrie, Oklahoma, in 1988-92 and arrived at Four Sixes the following year. A top-tier sire his entire career, Special Effort got champion Bully Bullion and six-figure earner Make An Effort from his first crop of 94 foals, and All American Futurity (G1) winner Elans Special and champion Easygo Effort from his second.

The stallion today is the fourth-all-time leading sire of winners and the sixth-all-time by earners. With 1,373 starters in 20 crops raced at the time of his death, Special Effort has been represented by 877 winners, including 73 stakes winners that scored in 126 stakes, 91 stakes placers and the earners of \$18,162,615. Special Effort also sired 1991 world champion Special Leader and other champions Special Project, Sweet N Special and Special Phoebe.

"Special Effort was a true quarter-mile horse," Blodgett said. "He could run on down the track himself, and so can his offspring and his second-generation offspring, as well. They're true Quarter Horses."

Beyond racehorses, Special Effort also is a sire of sires and of broodmares. His deceased son Strawfly Special, who sired All American Futurity winners Streakin Flyer and Ausual Suspect, is fifth on the list of all-time leading sires of earners. Special Leader is the broodmare sire of 2005 All American winner and reigning

world champion DM Shicago, and sired current champion Leading Spirit – who is out of a mare by Special Effort's son Special Task. Among leading sires Proudest Effort is by Special Effort, Jess Special and First Down Laveaux are out of Special Effort mares, and Bono Jazz's dam is by a daughter of Special Effort.

As a broodmare sire whose daughters have produced the earners of more than \$25.7 million, Special Effort is third on the all-time list by earnings, behind only Dash For Cash and Easy Jet, and ninth by winners. Among many others, he is the sire of Genuine Knockout, dam of All American Futurity winner Falling In Loveagain; Such An Easy Effort, dam of champion Deelish and Grade 1 winner Fearless Freda, who produced champion Fredricksburg; Tinys Effort, dam of champion Tiny First Effort; A Special Episode, dam of champion Eye Opening Episode; and Miss O Toole, dam of champion and All American winner Eyesa Special, who was bred by Moehrig and Marvin Selig and at \$1,394,911 is the leading money earner out of his daughters.

Special Effort was bred to only one mare this season, which did not result in a pregnancy. The daddy of 1,786 foals, Special Effort has 42 2-year-olds from his 2004 crop, and at press time, 24 foals had been registered from 2005.

"As a broodmare sire, he is having a big, big impact, far more impact there than as a sire of studs," Blodgett said. "He's been tremendous. In fact, the last several years, a number of our clients weren't so worried about getting a runner as they were about getting a mare they could breed. We still had a lot of people wanting to breed to him this year, and most of them wanted a filly."

Special Effort was buried next to Streakin Six, the stallion who occupied the stall across the aisle from him in the Sixes' stud barn in 1993-2005.

"He was such a dominant racehorse, winning all those races by those huge margins," Blodgett said. "And as a stud, he was very easy to work with. He was a tremendous racehorse and a tremendous sire. He'll have a lot of influence for years to come – a very, very longstanding impact."

"Special Effort – it's a special name for a special horse who won a special prize," Jolene Urschel said after the colt's triumph in the triple crown.

Now he's gone. And his legions of admirers will have to make do with the lack of Effort. But we and the breed are better because he passed through our lives. ■



Billy Hunt rides Special Effort to post in the All American Derby, his final start before he began his career at stud.