

*“A breeder always has in mind what they’re looking for and Salmo was it.”*

Sara Collette

**W**hen Sara Collette moved to Pageland Farm in Casanova, Virginia, about 30 years ago,

she hunted with the local pack aboard Midas, Penny and Bronceia. She attended social and sporting functions with her ichthyologist husband, Bruce, and looked after the farm when he was studying fish in exotic natural habitats or at the Smithsonian.

Collette started breeding Thoroughbreds at Pageland because she wanted to breed show horses, but she got

speed merchants with jumping talent. In 1984 she foaled Melantha (Vast Empire-Flower Bow, Zabeg), who raced on the flat and over fences.

Melantha, Collette’s favorite broodmare, produced 10 foals, including Salmo. This late-blooming gelding by Northern Baby was 13 when he scored his second Virginia Gold Cup last May. In 2007 Salmo became the latest Virginia-bred winner of

# SALMO

Virginia-bred Winner of Two Gold Cups

Story and Photos  
by  
Lauren R. Giannini



Salmo winning first Virginia Gold Cup by a head.  
Chip Miller up

the classic timber contest since Saluter's reign of glory (1994-1999) and Sugar Bee's 1986 win for Great Meadow founder Arthur W. Arundel.

Salmo's rise to glory was riddled with bumps and bruises. A trail of fallen, sometimes seriously injured, jockeys made him an undesirable ride. Only one person remained unwavering in her staunch belief: the gangly chestnut colt's breeder. "I thought Salmo was special from the moment he hit the ground," said Collette. "He was accident-prone as a foal and yearling. He didn't have the muscle to keep his legs in line, and it took him a long time to develop, but he's a very sound horse and a world-class healer."

His huge stride matches his height – nearly 18 hands, almost six feet tall at the base of his neck. This powerful ship needs time to get motoring and plenty of room to turn: the difference between big racing yachts and smaller, nippy vessels. Salmo can jump the moon, but he doesn't want his rider to make any big moves when he's about to lift off.

"He's very sensitive for a big horse and can be a difficult horse to ride even though he's as sweet as he can be," explained Collette. "Salmo was born knowing how to jump, and he gets irritated being told how to do it. He doesn't like riders fooling with him in front of a fence or at any other time. The rider is very important to Salmo, and I believe that there was a lot of miscommunication early in his career."

Salmo made his racing debut on the flat in September 2000 at Glenwood Park, finishing 11th out of as many starters. He never broke his maiden status on the flat, but in April 2001 Salmo won for the first time over hurdles at the Potomac Hunt Races.

Hurdles have artificial brush at the top, making them more forgiving than the solid timber fences. These contests run at a very fast pace over a distance of two to two and a half miles. Salmo won once more over hurdles at the Glenwood Fall Races in

2001, with a few seconds and thirds at point-to-points and National Steeplechase Association meets.

In October 2003 at the Virginia Fall Races in Middleburg, Salmo ran fourth in his timber debut. Three weeks later, with Woods Winants in the irons, Salmo broke his maiden over hurdles in sanctioned company at Great Meadow on International Gold Cup day. Seven started, two pulled up, and Salmo won by a neck after a stretch duel with Zignal, Danielle Hodsdon doing the honors for Kinross Farm.

Salmo's driving finish attracted the attention of former champion jump jockey Arch Kingsley, who trained for Irvin S. Naylor. He put in a word about the horse. Naylor bought Salmo from Collette and the rest, as they say, is now racing history. But it wasn't a pretty or smooth rise to fame.

In his first spring start of 2004, the rangy gelding, piloted by Brooks Durkee, pulled off a 12-length runaway romp in the



Chip Miller and Salmo, 2007 Gold Cup winner

En route to his second Gold Cup victory, Salmo and Darren Nagle fly over a timber fence in front of the crowd.



maiden timber at Howard County–Iron Bridge, Maryland. Sometime thereafter, Naylor put Salmo into training with Jack Fisher, Saluter’s trainer and jockey for six consecutive Virginia Gold Cups. That autumn Salmo ran second at Foxfield to Naylor’s Allimac, also trained by Fisher. With Durkee still in the irons, Salmo debuted in the featured International Gold Cup at Great Meadow, finishing third behind Chinese Whisper and runner-up Joe At Six. At the Pennsylvania Hunt Cup, Salmo and Durkee were disqualified for going off course.

Salmo was still learning how to handle solid timber fences. Horses might rattle the sticks but soon learn to tuck landing gear tightly while airborne. Jockeys often check their horses to help them find the right take-off spot, but Salmo interpreted assistance as interference.

An also-ran on the flat in the fall at Shawan Downs in Maryland, Salmo with Paddy Young in the plate garnered a 20-length, three-mile timber win at Genesee Valley Hunt in New York. At the International Gold Cup, nine started: three finished, one pulled up and five horses fell, including Salmo with Young. In November’s season finale, the Pennsylvania Hunt Cup, Salmo crashed over a fence and sent Young flying.

The following April, Roger Horgan and Salmo recorded an eight-length timber win at the Green Spring Valley point-to-point in Maryland, featuring a stellar field, including Rosbrian, Askim and Bug River. Weeks later, in the Maryland Grand National, Salmo hit a solid timber fence, launching Horgan out of the saddle and into surgery.

Salmo earned the unfortunate nickname “Slamo.” Chip Miller and the quirky chestnut won driving at Winterthur, Delaware; Robbie Walsh rode him to a stakes win at Radnor, Pennsylvania. Matt McCarron agreed to ride the season finale at Shawan Downs: Salmo fell, sending the two-time champion jockey to the hospital.



Salmo and Darren Nagle drive for the wire, prevailing over last year’s winner Bubble Economy, owned by Arcadia Stables, trained by Jack Fisher, and Mrs. Magalen O. Bryant’s Erin Go Bragh, trained by Doug Fout, ridden by Paddy Young.

(L to R) Mrs John Warner, Sen. John Warner, Irvin Naylor, breeder Sara Collette, Robert Duvall, Chip Miller and trainer Jack Fisher after Salmo’s Gold Cup win in 2007



Salmo finished last on the flat in his first start of 2007. Fisher had four entries for the \$100,000 Gold Cup, but nearly scratched Salmo for want of a jockey. Miller’s first choice, Whitewood Farm’s Straight Gin, trained by Richard Valentine, would not run. Faced with watching from the sidelines or racing, Miller accepted the

last-minute, risk-filled ride, thereby harvesting his first Gold Cup win as Salmo set the pace until challenged at the next-to-last fence.

“We were going at a pretty steady gallop and had a clean lead – I was surprised we were left alone,” recalled Miller. “That day he was all about jumping. He had a

couple of untidy fences, but he didn't make any mistakes. He was flying to the last, digging in. He was so genuine – I was happy to be out there.”

Injuries afterward (sore shins and a bowed tendon) sent Salmo to his owner's facility in Maryland for R&R. Hired as Naylor's farm trainer in 2006, the Irish-born Desmond Fogarty really gets Salmo. "Salmo's a fine old gentleman," said Fogarty. "Since I've known him, he's been great. He's very easy to train. You can do anything with him. He's a big old galloping type, and he loves it. I think some of the reason why he's going so good now is that he has experience. I can imagine him when he was even five or six, and I obviously didn't know him then, but I'm sure he was a big backward type and that type often needs a bit of time. He's a very honest, genuine horse, and he'll absolutely run his eyeballs out for you.”

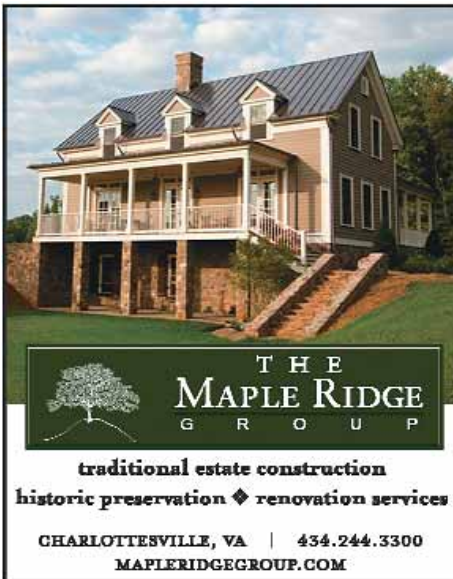
Which Salmo did last May: After a 17-month holiday and one flat start, he won his second Virginia Gold Cup with Irishman Darren Nagle in the irons. Fogarty's favored conditioning method – swimming combined with long, easy gallops – suits Salmo to a T. His future includes a possible return to the Great Meadow course, perhaps the half-mile shorter International Gold Cup in mid-October or the four-mile Virginia Gold Cup on the first Saturday in May.

Fogarty called Salmo a Gold Cup horse, adding, "If he can run the big races a couple of times a year, that's all he needs to do. We'll keep him going as long as he wants and let him tell us how he's doing and what he wants." Naylor, one of the leading NSA owners, agreed. "We'll retire Salmo as soon as he indicates that he doesn't want to run anymore, when he loses his enjoyment. He'll retire right at the farm. He's absolutely been worth the investment of effort, time and energy.”

As for Salmo's breeder, she's thrilled. "I always knew he could do it," said Collette. "I'm not sorry I sold Salmo, but I

want to pay tribute to Irvin Naylor. He has been very kind about keeping me informed about Salmo, and he has taken excellent care of him. That means a lot to me. It goes hand-in-hand with Salmo's successes. I think that Naylor's had a lot to do with letting Salmo come into his own.”

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Lauren R. Giannini is an award-winning writer specializing in stories and photos about the equestrian world. Her stories and photos appear in equine-friendly publications, including *Sidelines*, *Virginia Horse Journal*, *Middleburg Life*, and *The Virginia Sportsman*. A card-carrying member of the International Alliance of Equestrian Journalists, she will be covering the 2010 World Equestrian Games at the Kentucky Horse Park.

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