

VALID MESSAGE



Coady Photography

BY LISA GROOTHEDDE

2008 RACE RECORD:
7-3-1-1, \$134,968

Pop quiz: Which one of these is not like the other? Leaving On My Mind, There Goes Rocket, Valid Lilly, Valid Message, Bridesmaid. If you guessed that these horses are all Texas juvenile champions sired by the region's most dominant stallion of the past decade, Valid Expectations, give yourself partial credit. If you determined the odd man out to be Valid Message, you are right on the money.

Like his counterparts, the 2008 Texas Champion 2-Year-Old Colt/Gelding got off to a fast start in his racing career by capturing at least one stakes event during his juvenile year. But Valid Message is unique to his peers in that he has exhibited an affinity for turf—the only one of Valid Expectations' five state champions to do so at a young age.

Bred by Texas Thoroughbred Association Board of Directors member Ed Few and produced by the Wolf Power (SAf) mare Templemartin, Valid Message has won three of four starts on the grass, including two in open

stakes company. But where did his impressive penchant for turf come from? His sire, a seven-time stakes winner on dirt, ran only twice on the turf during his 27-start career, with a single allowance race on the surface as a 2-year-old. His dam, a four-time winner from 20 starts, ran once on the grass and failed to hit the board.

Perhaps the answer can be found a little farther back in his family tree.

Known to his many fans as “The Big Gray Wolf,” the late stallion

that he would get better as the races got longer,” said longtime horsewoman Ellen Williams, who took over Valid Message’s training duties on behalf of the Hanaks. “He did not seem to like being rushed in the early part of the race, but he did have a good closing effort, and we thought that would do well going a route of ground.”

Switched to the turf and asked to run 7 1/2 furlongs for his new barn on July 4, Valid Message relished the conditions and broke his maiden against

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Wolf Power was a multiple champion and Horse of the Year in South Africa who rose to dominance during the early 1980s through a string of victories on that country’s sole racing surface: turf. From his 31 lifetime starts, Wolf Power won 18 times, including 16 at the stakes level. A Group 1 winner and champion at 2, the gray son of Round Table’s English champion Flirting Around raced for four seasons in his native country and was imported to the United States in 1984 to commence his breeding career as South Africa’s all-time leading money winner.

At stud, Wolf Power is emerging as a useful broodmare sire, with 34 stakes winners already produced by his daughters. Chief among them is the two-time Santa Anita Handicap (G1) winner and \$2.8 million-

earner Milwaukee Brew, Florida’s leading second-crop sire of 2008.

In Texas, his maternal grandson Valid Message was originally tried twice on the main track last May, nine months after he was purchased for \$20,000 by Wayne Sanders and Larry Hirsch at the 2007 Fasig-Tipton Texas Summer Yearling Sale. He made a late move in his 4 1/2-furlong debut at Lone Star Park on May 9 and got up for second after traveling five-wide.

It was enough to capture the attention of Carolyn and Guido Hanak of H & H Ranch. The Horseshoe Bay, Texas, couple slipped in a claim for the colt when he made his next start in \$25,000 maiden claiming company at the Grand Prairie track 20 days later. Although he only mustered fourth in that five-furlong race, his new connections were pleased with their purchase.

“We all liked his breeding, Valid Expectations and Wolf Power, and felt

nine rival 2-year-olds at Lone Star. His 2 1/2-length runner-up that day was his fellow Texas-bred Poltergeist, a Tapit colt who is being mentioned among early Kentucky Derby (G1) hopefuls after he won a mile allowance at Oaklawn Park by six lengths in his first start of 2009.

Buoyed by their acquisition’s newfound prowess, the Hanaks and Williams entered him in the \$75,000 Sunny’s Halo Stakes at a mile on the turf at Louisiana Downs in August. Valid Message again reached the wire first, this time powering from 11th with a late move on the outside.

He encountered some trouble in the track’s grassy \$150,000 Sunday Silence Stakes on September 20, but he was able to muster third in the 1 1/16-mile race, which was won by the subsequent

Grey Goose Breeders’ Cup Juvenile Turf fourth-place finisher, City Style.

Valid Message regrouped and came home to Texas, where he contested the \$100,000 Skyy El Joven Stakes at Retama Park on November 1. Back at a mile on the turf, the bay colt overcame his outside post and swept from last to first in the 11-horse field for a 1 1/2-length victory.

The \$750,000 purse of the Boyd Gaming’s Delta Jackpot (G3) on the Delta Downs dirt proved irresistible, but the Texas-bred finished eighth in that 1 1/16-mile test to close out his juvenile campaign with three wins and two placings from seven starts and \$134,968 in earnings.

The newly minted champion is currently enjoying a pre-planned break, but he is expected to return to competition later this year.

“Valid Message is such a special horse, and he has made horse racing so much fun,” said Carolyn Hanak, who added that the colt’s future plans include “using his Texas-bred restriction to further his career.” ★

Valid Appeal, 1972
Valid Expectations, 1993
Mepache, 1981
Wolf Power (SAF), 1978
Templemartin, 1997
Cresttothetrail, 1991

Valid Message
BAY COLT
FOALED MARCH 4, 2006