

Saratoga Passage February 6, 1985 – July 5, 2008

Washington racing legend Saratoga Passage died as of the result of colic on Saturday, July 5, at the Oak Harbor farm of his breeders, Mel and Helen Beck. The two-time Washington horse of the year was the state's all-time leading money earner (\$800,212) and the only Washington-foaled horse in state history to win two Grade 1 events.

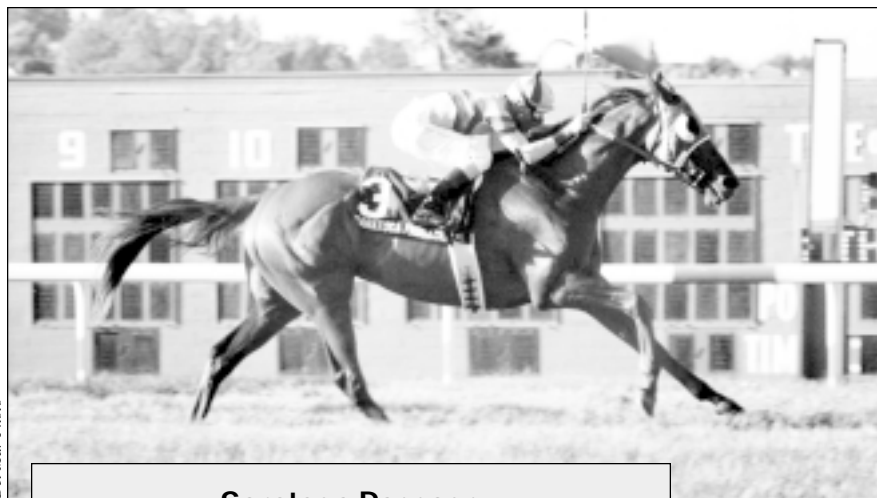
Named after the scenic waterway off Whidbey Island, the Becks formed a partnership with nine other island friends to race the runner, affectionately known as Sam, under the Saratoga I Stable banner.

He was turned over to airline pilot and part-time trainer Robert Leonard for his two-year-old campaign, which saw him break his maiden in the mile Tukwila Stakes at Longacres. After being second in the Longacres Lads Stakes, he went on to take the Gottstein Futurity by five lengths. Before his Gottstein triumph, plans were already in the works to send the talented runner to Santa Anita for the Grade 1 Norfolk Stakes, and on a gray and rainy Halloween Eve, the talented gelding drew out for a 2 1/2 length victory in the slop. His win in the Norfolk guaranteed the chestnut gelding not only championship juvenile honors, but his first Washington horse of the year title.

At three, hopes for a Triple Crown campaign were derailed, first by a respiratory infection and then later by a stress fracture.

At four, Saratoga Passage was turned over to the care of Hall of Fame trainer Robert Frankel, who led the runner through his second exciting championship campaign with a victory in the Eddie Read Handicap (G1), over Del Mar's turf course, and placements in the Grade 1 Oak Tree Invitational and Grade 2 Del Mar Invitational and San Bernardino Handicap. With his victory in the Eddie Read, Saratoga Passage became one of a handful of top runners who would prove successful in Grade 1 events on both dirt and turf and earned his second well-deserved title as Washington horse of the year.

After being injured in the Oak Tree stakes, Sam was given six months off and didn't return to the races until June of his five-year-old season. His final race was to be the 1990 edition of the Oak Tree Invitational, and after closing gamely to finish third, he



Del Mar Photo

Saratoga Passage

(1985, ch. g., Pirateer—Loridown, by Barrydown)

Washington's leader money winner of all time \$800,212
1987 Washington horse of the year
1987 Washington champion two-year-old colt or gelding
1989 Washington horse of the year
1989 Washington champion handicap horse

Won: Norfolk S.-G1 (SA), Eddie Read H.-G1 (Dmr), Gottstein Futurity (Lga), Tukwila S. (Lga); 2nd Del Mar Invitational H.-G2 (Dmr), Longacres Lads S. (Lga); 3rd Oak Tree Invitational H.-G1-twice (SA), San Bernardino H.-G2 (SA), Viking Spirit S. (R) (SA).

Saratoga Passage skims to a 2 1/4 length victory over Del Mar's turf course to win the 1989 Eddie Read Handicap (G1) en route to his second horse of the year title.

was pulled up in distress after the finish line with a bowed tendon.

"I made it to all of his races," remembered Mel Beck. "There was never a dull moment with him and he never missed anything,"

"He was a big horse with a big heart," Helen Beck said.

After convalescing, Sam found a new career as dressage mount for Jane Hiner and earned many ribbons before his second retirement at age 20. He returned to the Becks in 2005.

To this day, Saratoga Passage is one of only seven Washington-bred runners to earn a Grade 1 victory, and even with the larger purses in the last 20 years, his \$800,212 is still \$114,084 the better of the second ranked individual.

The grand chestnut gelding was buried at the Becks' Crescent Harbor Farm, the site of his birth some 23 years ago.

Sam and the Eagle

A few days before his death, an eagle visited Sam. This is what his longtime friend and dressage partner Jane Hiner wrote about the significance of that event in her eyes and heart.

I feel that having the eagle come to dwell with Sam a few days before he passed was very significant. First and foremost, it was two great species co-existing, but for me it was a sign of what was to come.

Eagles are messengers from heaven, along with many other birds, and in the past I have seen them come around before and after the passing of both people and animals.

The Becks had e-mailed me the picture Sam and the eagle on July 2. I had opened it right before I was leaving town on a vacation to the San Juan Islands. When I saw it, I didn't fear anything, but thought to myself how beautiful the photo was, with the purple-

leafed trees, green grass (where he now lays to rest), his barns, and of course, Sam, with the eagle in the distance. With so much going on to get ready to leave town for that weekend in our boat, I didn't give it another thought, as I just knew I would be up to visit Sam at the Becks on my birthday, July 9.

In addition to visiting Sam and the Becks on the 9th, we also had plans to have dinner in La Connor with Bill and Barbara Black (Wildwood Farms' previous owners), who were visiting from Montana.

We were vacationing in San Juan Islands on July 5, and had no clue what was happening to Sam that morning. (Sam seemed to time his departure for my benefit, so that I would have time to grieve.) I was taking a long hike early that afternoon and found a gray feather on the path in front of me; I picked it up. From my past experience with this happening, I knew it was the arbiter of news, a message, and one usually of a passing. When I got home Monday morning I read the e-mail from the Becks of his death. I was, of course, devastated. I now knew why the feather had been delivered to me in my path. And then I remembered the eagle and knew it was also a sign.

So, many tears . . . I so wished I could have been with him. That Monday turned into a very hard day and night. He was the one horse in my life to which I was deeply attached. (When I retired him to the Becks' farm, it was so hard to begin with, not to see him every day, but I was going through a difficult time with injuries that took me from riding and caring for horses, plus having to sell our farm. It was so very, very hard to let him go.)

During that fateful Monday, I got out many of my pictures of him. I set them all out around on my bedroom dresser with the one I printed of him with the eagle from the Becks.

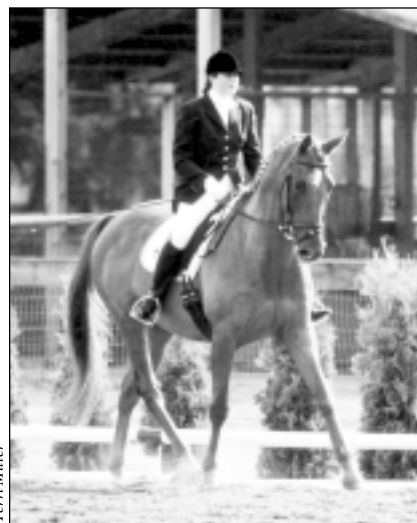
That night I had a dream about being in a very, very large stall with Sam, all bedded in deep straw. I knew he was there, but I couldn't see him too clearly. I knew in my rational mind that this was a dream, just as I knew he was dead, but I was still there with him in the stall. But also clearly there with him was my old horse Bleu, a half-Thoroughbred that I had for many years and that had passed away in 1998 at age 35, and a pinto mare named Eddie, who had died last year.

My old horse looked directly at me and was showing me all the feathers lying around everywhere; some were gray, some black and



In the days before his death, Saratoga Passage was graced by the presence of an eagle (circled) in his tranquil and beautiful paddocks at the Becks' Whidbey Island farm.

others white. Old Bleu and Eddie went down and colicked very similar to Sam. In my dream they were also showing me pieces of small plastic in the side of the stall, more towards Eddie. We had always wondered what caused Eddie to colic, as she was very young. At the end of the dream, I picked up a bunch of the feathers like a bouquet, with a taller one sticking up – it was of all three colors, mostly black on top and gray, but this feather really stood out clearly in the dream. I then I carried them out to show Mel what the horses had given me and I heard his voice, but couldn't understand what he was saying.



Terri Miller

Jane Hiner puts "Sam" through his paces in his successful second career as a dressage horse.

When I woke up on Tuesday morning, I was in awe, wishing I could have touched them and seen Sam more vividly – but I

know he is with me now more than ever. Later that morning my husband Eric and I took a walk on the trail near our Lacey home and I told him about my dream. While on our walk I found a black and gray feather, like the ones in the dream.

The next day, as we had already made plans to see the Becks and the Blacks, we drove up to visit them, and now Sam's grave. I told the Becks that Eric and I would like to spend some time alone at his grave before we come to the house. It was very hard on this beautiful, sunny day. Eric and I, with tearful eyes, placed rocks in a circle on his grave. Then we laid a red rose, my three

feathers of white, gray and black and also four sugar cubes – which he so loved – inside the circle. We stood there a few minutes talking about our many great Sam memories, when an eagle flew straight towards us overhead, and then circled above us for a few minutes. We acknowledged him as he looked down right at us, hung there and then flew out towards the Saratoga Passage waterway.

Afterwards, we went to the house and gave Helen and Mel a bouquet of red roses. We had a wonderful visit and then went to La Connor to meet the Blacks for dinner. They had just heard the sad news, but it was good to be with them that night, for Sam spent a lot of time at Wildwood Farm and that is where he and I found each other.

Later that night Eric and I walked back to the La Connor Marina where our boat is moored. It was quiet there, a good place to be as we were so emotionally drained.

On Thursday morning Eric went up to our truck in the parking lot to take our bags. He soon came back and told me I must come up to see the gift that was left for me. I ran up, and there on the bed of his truck, lay a black and gray feather, like the one that stood out so vividly in my dream.

This was an incredible experience for me. As my heart overflowed with my deep love for Sam and all the horses that I have opened my heart to over this lifetime, I know they will always be with me. Someday I believe we will be together again.

We were all blessed to have such a champion come into our lives, whose spirit and legacy will never leave. – Jane Hiner