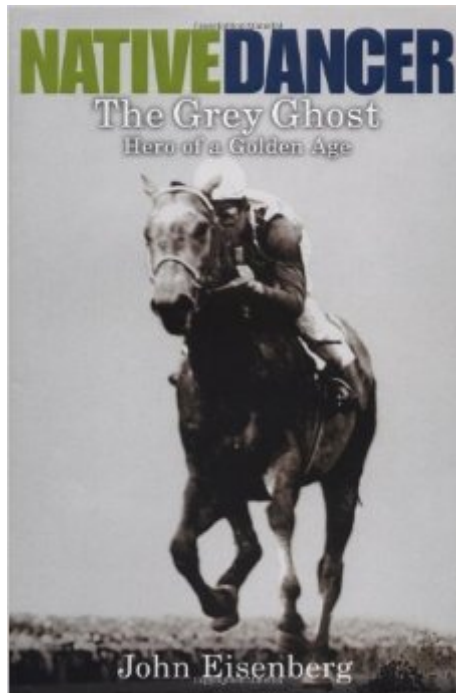


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Native Dancer: The Grey Ghost Hero Of A Golden Age



Synopsis

In the early 1950s, a rising star flickered across millions of black-and-white TV sets. Nick-named 'The Grey Ghost,' Native Dancer was a blue-blood thoroughbred with a taste for drama, courtesy of his come-from-behind running style, and impressive credits: He finished first in 21 of his 22 career starts, his only loss by a nose in the 1953 Kentucky Derby; was named Horse of the Year-twice; and was inducted into the National Museum of Racing's Hall of Fame. His popularity was so great, Time® magazine put him on its cover, and TV Guide named him one of America's top three TV stars, along with Ed Sullivan and Arthur Godfrey. Legend says his ghost haunts Churchill Downs. Set against the nostalgic events of an America long past, NATIVE DANCER is the definitive account of one of the greatest champions of horse racing's golden age.

Book Information

Hardcover: 304 pages

Publisher: Warner Books; First Edition edition (May 13, 2003)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0446530700

ISBN-13: 978-0446530705

Product Dimensions: 6.2 x 1 x 9.4 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.6 pounds

Average Customer Review: 4.4 out of 5 stars [See all reviews](#) (21 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #998,072 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #204 in [Books > Biographies & Memoirs > Arts & Literature > Dancers](#) #322 in [Books > Sports & Outdoors > Individual Sports > Horses > Racing](#) #362 in [Books > Science & Math > Biological Sciences > Animals > Horses](#)

Customer Reviews

With an introduction that compares 1950s racehorse Native Dancer with Elvis and Milton Berle, Eisenberg puts a great deal of pressure on his volume to convince readers these comparisons are viable. Thankfully, in most cases, the book and author live up to the challenge. Alternating between captivating retellings of Dancer's come-from-behind racing style (the account of Dancer's rally from 10 lengths down in 1954's Metropolitan is stunning) and a detailed account of how TV catapulted horse racing to the top of America's sports scene, Eisenberg's evenhanded writing style makes it easy to see how Dancer captivated Americans from coast-to-coast. Like the horse's popularity, Dancer's diverse race team-a Vanderbilt owner, a Cajun high school dropout rider, a folksy black groom-personified a cross-section of American society and helped make Dancer as American as

the glamorous Elvis or the comforting Berle. If there is a hitch in this book's giddap, it is its focus on the controversial 1953 Kentucky Derby, which, though covered engagingly, occurred in the middle of Dancer's career, forcing the book to a premature climax. But that fault belongs to real-life timing, not Eisenberg, whose thorough research, historical analysis and old-fashioned horse sense bring to life an American hero whose nickname, the "Grey Ghost," should be as remembered as those of the King and Uncle Miltie-if not Seabiscuit. Illus. not seen by PW. Copyright 2003 Reed Business Information, Inc.

A number of recent books have tried to follow in the remarkable hoofprints of Laura Hillenbrand's Seabiscuit, hoping to share a measure of that best-seller's phenomenal success. This one actually merits the comparison. Native Dancer's story lacks the drama of Seabiscuit's rags-to-riches tale. He was a regally bred colt owned by one of America's richest aristocrats, and he was never an underdog through his 22-race career from 1952 through 1954. Native Dancer was nevertheless a great horse, and he captured the country's imagination much as Seabiscuit had done in the late 1930s, employing an indomitable will and a devastating stretch kick to win 21 races, with his only loss coming by a heartbreaking nose in the 1953 Kentucky Derby. His fame was amplified by the popularization of television and his gray coat, which made him easy to find on the black and white screens, to the degree that TV Guide named Native Dancer, along with Ed Sullivan and Arthur Godfrey, as the nation's biggest television star of 1953. Eisenberg's research into the lives of Native Dancer, owner Alfred Vanderbilt, trainer Bill Winfrey, and jockey Eric Guerin is exhaustive, and he tells their stories with skill and understanding. If the stories aren't quite as compelling as those of Seabiscuit and his connections, they can still be read with a great deal of pleasure. Dennis Dodge Copyright © American Library Association. All rights reserved

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