

## Secretariat with Wool

Llama racing has its own Triple Crown winner, a fleet fur ball named Clancy • by Franz Lidz

CLANCY THE llama is the most difficult of creatures. As he rambles around the Rockies, he radiates a serene even-temperedness. But should you offend his dignity, he'll flatten his banana-shaped ears and raise his nose haughtily. Goad him beyond his patience, and he'll spit half-chewed cud, hurled with pitiless accuracy.

Clancy is the Dalai Llama of racing, the only *Lama glama* ever to win llamadom's Triple Crown. In May he and his handler, Mark Pommier, won the California Llamathon, a seven-mile trudge across gravel roads and rolling cow pastures near Santa Cruz. Two months later they braved thorny scrub, raging waters and steep inclines to defend their title successfully in the Fairplay (Colo.) Pack Llama Race, a 3½-mile dash over the rocky escarpments of the Front Range. But Clancy's real fancy is Colorado's Llamathon—16 miles of trekking up and down jagged peaks, some as high as 12,500 feet. Since winning the inaugural Colorado Llamathon in 1989, Clancy has lost just once: Heatstroke in the '91 contest caused him to place a lamentable second.

On this autumn morning at the Redwood Llamas ranch, the temperature hangs at freezing, and the paddock is wet and muddy. Snow fell last night in southwest Colorado, and frost feathers the aspens. Ruminating on a mouthful of meadow grass, Clancy fixes a visitor with a disapproving stare. His rippling dark bay coat is fringed with gray—understandable considering that he is 11, middle-aged for a llama. Clancy grazes and gambols on this 90-acre spread with 46 other llamas. Many are his offspring. Clancy himself is thought to be a descendant of a herd taken to live on William Randolph Hearst's mountaintop estate in San Simeon, Calif., in 1931.

Clancy's owner, Bill Redwood, greets you with a handshake strong enough to pull down a barn. "I started breeding llamas in 1982," says Redwood, a dentist who bears an eerie resemblance to the actor Dabney Coleman. "I liked to go backpacking and wanted something that could

carry my gear and Steven, my infant son." Steven was born with spina bifida.

The first Colorado Llamathon was a sort of Clancy Challenge. Confident of Clancy's abilities at long distances, Redwood and two buddies put up \$5,000 for a winner-take-all race. Clancy defeated a

field of 16 challengers, and Redwood kept his money. Pommier urges Clancy onward with low murmurings. Clancy obeys diligently. "He responds to my commands," says Pommier. "Not like a dog, but he does respond." And Pommier responds to Clancy. The llama pulls back slightly when he wants to slow down. "Just a little tug,"



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About the only thing that stands between Clancy and most finish lines is his pal, Pommier. A 32-year-old schoolteacher from Bayfield, Colo., Pommier bounds up craggy mountain slopes with Clancy's lead rope clipped to his fanny pack. Hefting a saddle pack stuffed with 50 pounds of hay and wood, Clancy glides behind, surefooted and graceful.

Many Llamathon llamas get tired after a few miles and sink into a furry heap, folding their front legs under them like bridge tables. "Clancy only seems to get faster," Pommier says. "He's so well-conditioned that there's almost always lag in the lead rope." They train once a month on five-day, 40-mile pack trips. Clattering over boulders and sliding on scree, Pom-

**A llama panorama: Our hero hits the trail in Colorado behind his racing partner, Pommier.**

ier says Pommier. "It's almost apologetic."

Pommier trusts Clancy so implicitly that he'll sometimes jump off short cliffs to gain ground on an opponent. Clancy is, after all, a serious athlete. He never pauses during a race to nibble on underbrush. He never takes unscheduled dung stops. And he never, ever spits. Even on Redwood's ranch, Clancy confines his spitting to interllama spats over food or territory.

If Clancy has a pet peeve, it's sandstone. "Sandstone makes him skid," says Pommier. "He doesn't understand that sandstone is good for him."

It keeps his toenails trimmed. ■