

King of the Turf

US : 1939 : dir. George Bruce : United Artists : 88 min
 prod: Edward Small : scr: George Bruce : dir.ph.:
Roger Daniel; "Snowflake"
 Adolphe Menjou; Dolores Costello; Walter Abel; Alan Dinehart; William Demarest;
 Harold Huber; George McKay; Lee M Moore

Ref:	Pages	Sources	Stills	Words	Ω	8	€	M	⚡	Copy on VHS	Last Viewed
5804	2.5	3	2	686	3	-	-	3	-	No	<i>unseen</i>



Kissy kissy !

Source: The Moving Picture Boy

Halliwell's Film Guide review:

"A gambler out of luck befriends a small boy who turns out to be his own son. Hard to take even at the time, this sentimental tarididdle does not bear later scrutiny."

"Dandy racetrack yarn... it has a refreshing appeal and the dialogue is excellent."

– **Variety**

The United Artists Story review:

"Producer Edward Small put his money on **"KING OF THE TURF"** and lost. This racetrack melodrama was a non-starter, despite a fine dramatic performance from Adolphe Menjou as a once famous stable owner who has degenerated into a drunken bum. He is persuaded to make a comeback by an honest jockey (Roger Daniel), and they buy a colt, train him, and start to win races. But Menjou finds out that the jockey is his son, and deliberately breaks the boy's attachment to

him by turning crooked so that he will return

to his mother (Dolores Costello) and stepfather



It's just another sentimental big buddy-little buddy horseracing remix of "THE CHAMP" – with Oedipal subtexts !

Source: The United Artists Story

(Walter Abel). George Bruce's screenplay was similar to **"THE CHAMP"** (MGM, 1931), but the direction of Alfred E Green made this a long stretch. Also rans were Alan Dinehart, William Demarest, Harold Huber, George McKay, Lee M Moore and, as the little black stableboy, Snowflake."

The Moving Picture Boy entry on Roger Daniel:

"Roger, the son of Irish-American parents, was an orphan at six. He played the piano and guitar, but his chief asset was an open, sensitive face. He was in fact a strikingly handsome fellow, with flashing eyes and romantic hair – a sort of brunet version of Wally Albright. Typical leads came in **"BOY SLAVES"**, as the most soulful of the juvenile workers exploited by a turpentine factory, and in **"KING OF THE TURF"** as a racehorse-crazy kid who becomes a groom and then a winning jockey for Adolphe Menjou.

In his later teens Daniel was in **"HER FIRST ROMANCE"** (41), **"LIFE BEGINS FOR ANDY HARDY"** (41), **"WE'VE NEVER**

BEEN LICKED" (43). And in 1946 featured in two **Joe Palooka** films. This was paltry reward for one who should have become a Burbank Byron. In due course he left acting and became a sound recordist."

[no listing in "Leonard Maltin's Movie and Video Guide 2001", "Speelfilm Encyclopedie", "The Critics' Film Guide", "The Good Film and Video Guide", "Movies on TV and Videocassette 1988-89", "Rating the Movies (1990)", "The Sunday Times Guide to Movies on Television", "The Time Out Film Guide", "TV Times Film & Video Guide 1995", "Variety Movie Guide 1993", "Video Movie Guide 1993" or "The Virgin Film Guide"]

No further information currently available. [Roger Daniel](#) was 15, and whatever his “chief asset” may have been, it wasn’t visible on screen – at least to judge from his central performance in “**BOY SLAVES**” the same year, the kind of low-key *sensitive kid from the wrong side of the tracks* role Billy Halop would have played a few years earlier. What sets this maudlin racetrack melodrama slightly apart is the element of man and boy becoming bosom buddies before discovering they’re father and son (in effect a homoerotic variant on the Oedipus story). Hollywood always loved a comeback yarn, but Wallace Beery himself had milked the “**CHAMP**” story so often (with Jackie Cooper, Mickey Rooney, Dean Stockwell) that it was already old hat. A more interesting twist would have been to let the reforming deadbeat dad watch his erstwhile straight-arrow son get progressively corrupted by racetrack life so that they pass each other travelling in opposite directions.

See subject index under [HORSES & PONIES](#) for many a similar tale, and under **SPECIAL FRIENDSHIPS**.