



Heading for home in the second of three 10-horse eliminations, Nick's Fantasy, an altered son of Tyler's Mark from the Trenton mare Saraton, sails down the Delaware stretch for John Campbell. (Ed Keys photo)

## Second To None: *The 50th Anniversary Little Brown Jug*

By Ardith Carlton

**I**t's the sport's most electrifying thrill-ride, swooping and skyrocketing 50,000 people through county-fair fun, gigantic gatherings of the harness faithful, and unforgettable battles among the breed's best. Of course, it's the Little Brown Jug—and never has this emotional roller-coaster been more super-charged than this year's gala Golden Anniversary.

Somebody has to bear the brunt of the force in the coaster's front seat, and this year trainer Caroline Lyon found herself in the spot. When a record 31 horses were entered in the epic 50th Little Brown Jug, the rule limiting the race to the 30 richest entrants was invoked; Lyon's charge St. Outrageous was low horse on the money-earnings meter, and all his Jug payments were refunded to owner/breeder Markenjay Stud.

That left only Nick's Fantasy, trained as well as groomed by

Lyon, to represent Markenjay Stud in the \$543,670 pacing classic. Days before the race, Perfect World Enterprises (David and Terry Brooks of New York) and Kenneth Kooch had purchased 50 percent of the highly-regarded gelding from Kenneth Carver of Markenjay—with the stipulation that John Campbell replace regular driver Bob Ritchie in the bike.

With David's Pass off-form and sitting out the Jug, Campbell was available. As for Lyon's longtime partner Ritchie, was it difficult to do? "Financially, no," he quipped. "I'm willing to step aside because I get 10 percent and no pressure!"

But with St. Outrageous, another Ritchie-piloted, Jug-entered pacer, denied a starting spot, the Pennsylvania-based veteran found himself on the sidelines for the big event. That was disappointing—he and St. Outrageous could certainly race on Jug day,



Starring in the bustling, boisterous winner's circle were John Campbell, owner and breeder Kenneth Carver, Nick's Fantasy, trainer and caretaker Caroline Lyon, Campbell's wife Paula, and co-trainer Bob Ritchie. (Mark Hall photo)

but just in a \$3,375 overnight. "How often does a guy 57 years old get a chance to race a horse in the Jug?" Ritchie mused.

"There are some horses that don't fit in the race that get in because they've got more money," observed Lyon. "A lot of horses get put in stake races that don't belong, and they end up getting in everybody else's way."

"But they have their rules," said Ritchie, "and those are the rules we went by."

The rules also directed the capacity crowd of Jug pacers to be divided into three 10-horse eliminations. An arrangement to telecast the Jug on ESPN also resulted in a distinct difference from past years, with the three eliminations raced in early afternoon.

The first elim went to 20-1 shot Powerful Structure, the first Jug starter for trainer Jimmy Cruise, Jr. since the hard-charging Dignatarian back in 1985. Before the race, Cruise said of his underrated colt, "When he's good, I think he's as good as anything in the race—and he's acting *real* good. We'll see if he might open some eyes." And indeed, he did. Saddled with post nine, Powerful Structure swooped the field late, pacing past favorite Viking Commander in 1:54.1 to bring driver David Miller his greatest win yet, and also bring tears of pride and joy to the eyes of Miller's mother Loretta, who drove one of Delaware's infield golf-cart ferries.

Miller had acquainted himself with the Dragon's Lair colt the week before. "I trained him by himself a mile in 1:55 flat, and I was really impressed with him then—and he went a hell of a trip today!" he enthused.

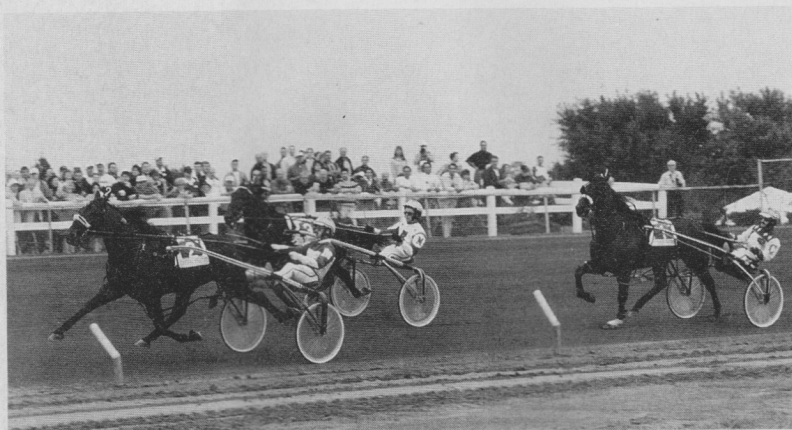
Fun Time Go Getter and Viking Commander also advanced to the final.

The second elimination featured all four divisional winners of the Jug Preview, including Nick's Fantasy. Sent away at 2-5, the Tyler's Mark gelding flew to the front for John Campbell, with fellow Preview winner Midnight Island in pursuit. But approaching the quarter, Ray Fisher, Jr. attempted to fit longshot Lightning Lane Lo in between, and a sickening chain-reaction erupted.

Midnight Island caught his foreleg in Fisher's bike and veered into second choice Jody's Cam, toppling Mike Lachance to the ground, where he was struck by Mattgilla Gorilla. Lachance was hospitalized, but miraculously, apart from being beaten up and



Despite losing driver Mike Lachance and his bridle, Jody's Cam did his darndest to keep going. After a tricky chase, outrider Pat Coffey collared the colt at last. (Ed Keys photo)



Elimination winners Powerful Structure (2), Village Connection (3), and Nick's Fantasy (1) barrel into the final heat's first turn. Nick's Fantasy dazzled the crowd and his rivals with a breathtaking blitz of speed in the final quarter. (Dean Hoffman photo)

pretty sore through the ribs, he needed only three stitches.

(Fisher, a top driver at Northfield Park, was mortified about his mistake. Northfield hosted two Cadillac Breeders Crowns the following night; Lachance stayed home, but Fisher found Lachance's son Patrick and offered his most heartfelt apologies for the accident.)

The driverless Jody's Cam careened another circuit of the track before the outriders could stop him. "If there's anything bad that can happen in harness racing," said his anguished owner/breeder Leo Thibodeau, "it's happened to me." But fortunately, like Lachance, the colt escaped serious injury.

Nick's Fantasy, the only horse unaffected by the incident, continued on cruise control, besting Hensell Hanover by six lengths in 1:54.3. Longshot Wild Dancer was third.

Bill Wellwood, trainer of the third elim's odds-on standout Village Connection, was looking forward to the end of the day. "If you can come in here and free-wheel it, just do your thing with a 20-1 shot, everybody loosey-goosey and bouncing along, that's easy—that's what I did twice before. But not this year," he explained. "Now the pressure is much bigger."

Among Village Connection's foes was a horse just plain lucky to be alive, Eicarl's Ruman Coke. Four nights earlier, the colt had escaped from a barn at The Meadows and found his way onto the highway. "He fell on top of a small car," explained trainer Steve LeBlanc. "It must have scooped him up, because there's not a scratch on his legs. The guy must have had the car almost stopped, because there's no way any horse would live!"

The adventurous colt jogged out of his stiffness and was pronounced fit to contest the Jug. But sixth was the best he could do, as Village Connection soared wire-to-wire for Paul MacDonell in 1:54. Pan It's Cold and Lisryan were the final two to advance.

Before the Jug's second heat, Nick's Fantasy and Village Connection went toe-to-toe on the toteboard. The improvers of the breed eventually gave the Lyon-trained gelding the edge.

Powerful Structure swept to the front, with Village Connection nabbing the pocket trip and Nick's Fantasy away third. MacDonell elected to sit with his Cam Fella colt as Nick's Fantasy ranged up first-over.

Past the three-quarters, Powerful Structure wilted, and Campbell motored the Maryland-bred on to the front. Out popped Village Connection in pursuit, but Nick's Fantasy was overwhelming in overdrive, wowing the crowd with a monster surge to stop the

clock in an eye-popping 1:51.2! Caroline Lyon became the first winning female trainer in Jug history, and her pupil paced the fastest Little Brown Jug heat ever, also a new world record for sophomore pacing geldings on a half-mile track. Village Connection paced home four lengths in his wake, second, and Lisryan closed for third, followed by Hensell Hanover, Powerful Structure, Pan It's Cold, Fun Time Go Getter, Viking Commander, and Wild Dancer.

"He was just totally awesome today," Campbell said of his third Little Brown Jug winner. "I was fortunate to get the drive."

(As detailed in our story on page 48, Campbell had travelled to nearby Mount Gilead, Ohio to drive a horse as a surprise for ailing owner/trainer Don Sipe, who was battling leukemia. Now, three weeks later, Campbell had won the Jug. In Mount Gilead, Sipe's nurse heard it on the radio; Sipe's wife relayed

the happy news to her husband...and that evening, Don Sipe passed away.)

Kenneth Carver greeted his first-ever Jug horse in the winner's circle, then stressed, "Calling this a 'wide-open field' was a lot of B.S. Until today, we've been the Rodney Dangerfield of harness racing—no respect!

"My only regret is, my Dad's not here to enjoy it," he said—then called skyward, "Hope you're looking down!"

Markenjay Stud was named for brother Mark, himself, and his late father Jay—"all three of us thought we were studs," Carver laughed.

"You guys are probably wondering 'why Tyler's Mark'? It's because I happen to think I'm pretty good in genetics," the winning breeder smiled. "Tyler's Mark is the right cross for that mare, and for others in the family."

Some of those other family members strutted their stuff for the Jug-day crowd of 53,709, too. Stout, a two-year-old Precious Bunny half-brother to the dam of Nick's Fantasy, finished a steely second in a \$33,701 division of the Standardbred despite a rival having shattered his wheel.

And better yet, Stout's 3/4-brother St. Outrageous, unfortunate number 31, took center stage in that overnight race, playing it to the hilt with a gate-to-wire 1:55.3 trouncing of his foes as race-caller Roger Huston roared. "It's *his* Jug!"

Both horses bore Bob Ritchie in the bike, and both were trained by Caroline Lyon.

"It's not right for people to think this is just a man's sport; that's like people thinking that cooking is just a woman's kind of thing. It doesn't matter if you're a female or a male," said Lyon.

"I used to play sports when I was growing up, and I used to love to beat the boys. It was a thrill—they always thought that girls aren't supposed to be able to do things!

"But with Bob and me, it's a team effort; I took my trainer's license in 1985, and Bob has had his stable for 18 years," she explained. "I'm down as trainer, but we're both trainers, and he's the driver. And the horse raced super; it's really a team effort."

"She's the brains; I'm the brawn," beamed Ritchie. "She deserves to be the first lady to win the Jug; she *worked* for it. Over 12 years, she's gone through a lot of hell in this business, and several times thought about giving it up. And this is the result."

Three horses, three wins and a second in four races, on one day...all part of the Golden Anniversary Little Brown Jug thrills that folks won't soon forget. ■