



A Tale of Two Fillies

Remembering Silk Stockings and Tarport Hap

by Ardith Carlton

THEY MET AS RIVALS, in clash after clash of nimble grace versus

resolute power. Their 20 tussles saw one win 10 times, the other nine. Today, a quarter-century after their birth, one remains a living legend, while the other rests at The Meadowlands, the only horse ever buried there.

They are Silk Stockings and Tarport Hap, pacing fillies who battled the colts as well as each other, and continued the fray right into the free-for-all ranks.

Both were from the first crop of Most Happy Fella, and each bay filly was the third foal of a Tar Heel/Adios-cross mare. Each has proponents today who insist she was the greatest pacing mare ever. But despite the parallels in their blood and talent, Silk Stockings and Tarport Hap were distinctly different—as were their lives and fortunes.

'Two peas in different pods'

She would come to be known as one of the all-time great Standardbred broodmares, dam of 11 in 2:00. However, in May of 1972, Tarport Cheer was simply one of the younger members of oilman and investor Hugh A. Grant's broodmare band that dotted the fields of Delvin Miller's Meadow Lands Farm in western Pennsylvania.

A Tar Heel daughter of Grant's Adios mare Meadow Cheer, 6-year-old Tarport Cheer was carrying a foal by Most Happy Fella, one of 53 in his first crop. "It's always attractive to breed to the first son of a great horse," said Grant's son, Andy, today president of the Hambletonian Society. "My father felt that a Tar Heel mare to the Meadow Skipper line might work."

The result was a dark bay filly with a small star that would be named Tarport Hap.

Meanwhile, at Stoner Creek Stud in Kentucky, 9-year-old Maryellen Hanover was heavy with her own Most Happy Fella foal. A Tar Heel daughter of Meadow Maid—a mare bred by Delvin Miller from a pair of pacers he loved, Adios and the Chief Counsel matron Maggie Counsel—Maryellen Hanover was owned by Bert V. James.

On May 23, Maryellen Hanover delivered a bright bay lass with two hind stockings and a star and snip connected by a broad strip. The filly was dubbed Jambo Denise.

A year later, she had new owners and a new moniker.

"Armstrong Bros. and Lana Lobell Farms



bought all of Bert James' horse holdings, seven mares and two yearlings," explained Alan Leavitt, who owned Lana Lobell. "Glen Brown and I decided we weren't going to use any farm names, Armbro or Lobell, with either of the yearlings."

Leavitt had just finished reading a book about George S. Kaufman, who had co-written the stage play "Silk Stockings." The name seemed like a natural, and Jambo Denise became Silk Stockings.

Both Silk Stockings and Tarport Hap were pointed toward the yearling sales, and they promised to confound buyers eager to see how Most Happy Fella stamped his initial offspring.

"They were like two peas in different pods," noted longtime horseman Herman "Sonny" Graham. "Silk Stockings was slight and refined, and Hap was a big, masculine-looking filly."

At it turned out, though, only one of the pair made it into the sales ring.

"Tarport Hap was cataloged for the fall sale at Yonkers Raceway," said Andy Grant. "But a month or so before the sale, she ran through a fence at Meadow Lands Farm, and we got to keep her." After some "friendly negotiation," Grant and his father became partners to race the filly at 2 and 3, and entrusted her to Delvin Miller.

Silk Stockings, meanwhile, was part of Armstrong Bros.' consignment to that fall's Liberty Bell Sale, where she wore hip number 33.

That number wasn't specially selected for her;

Left: With Silk Stockings on the rail and Tarport Hap tipping out in close pursuit, the two rival Most Happy Fella fillies staged one of their many duels in the first heat of the '75 Jugette. Silk Stockings won by a head.

Right, top: A filly with a spicy desire to get her own way, Silk Stockings was trained and driven throughout her career by one man, Pres Burris.

Right, bottom: Delvin Miller, right, set a world record with Tarport Hap away from the racetrack, arranging the sale of the 3-year-old filly for \$325,000 to Alan Leavitt, left, and Bill Rosenberg.



as at any sale, that's simply the way the number assignment worked out. But for newcomer Claire Mazik, it shone from the catalog page like a beacon.

'That's what makes interesting things happen'

Mazik, a psychiatric nurse, and her then-husband, Ken, a clinical psychologist, operated the Au Clair School for autistic children in Bear, Del. "We were always looking for ways to find money to do more for the kids," said Mazik, and at the suggestion of her son from a previous marriage, the couple looked into the sport at nearby Brandywine Raceway.

They discovered what seemed to be an ideal solution: Not only could harness racehorses generate money, but they could also give the children something to focus on.

The Maziks selected Delaware horseman Preston Burris Jr. as their stable's trainer. Although he had gotten his trainer's license just three years earlier, his wealth of patience with his own four-legged pupils impressed them. He and the Maziks' claimers made the game plan a reality, finding success on the Liberty Bell-Brandywine circuit, and soon the Maziks were planning the next step: purchasing a top-bred yearling filly to become the school's foundation broodmare.

When their Liberty Bell Sale catalog arrived, the book opened right to hip number 33. For Claire, it was a clear omen.

"Number 33 stuck with me," she explained. "I'm a Catholic and a little overly religious at times, and the Lord died at 33 years of age, so I've always thought the number 33 was 'God's number.' It's a little strange, but that's what makes interesting things happen in life."

Once she saw the filly that went with the number, Mazik fell in love. "I'm a short person with short legs, and 'Silky' had very long, beautiful legs; she looked more Thoroughbred than Standardbred," she recalled. "Her legs fascinated me."

It didn't seem likely that the Maziks' \$20,000 maximum yearling stake—their

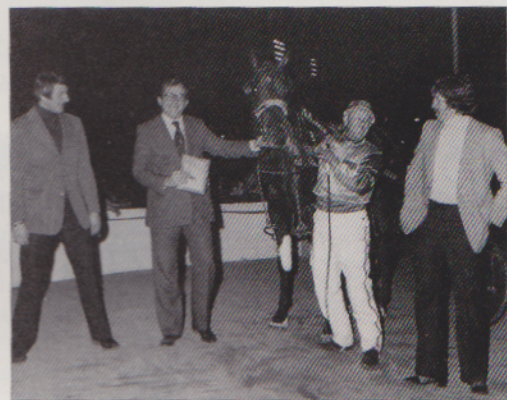
"Things just didn't bother [Tarport Hap]. You could run a jet airplane right beside her."

—HERMAN "SONNY" GRAHAM



Hoof Beats file photo

Above: Powering down the stretch, Tarport Hap won the second heat of the Geers Stake for Delvin Miller at Du Quoin. Among the fillies in their wake were Beckilyn Hanover (6, on rail), Rose Tattoo (between horses), and Steady Gay Girl (white shadow roll).



Hoof Beats file photo

Right: Tarport Hap closed her freshman season by becoming the richest 2-year-old pacer, regardless of gender, that the sport had ever seen. Co-owner Hugh "Andy" Grant Jr. presented a plaque to Hap's driver, Delvin Miller, as New York Rangers hockey players Pete Stenkowski, far left, and Steve Vickers, far right, checked out the champion.

combined annual salaries—could land the filly. Yet somehow, Silk Stockings was theirs for \$20,000.

"I think somebody got their wires crossed, was supposed to bid on her and missed it," mused Burris. "[The Maziks] were offered a lot more money for her before I started breaking her, but they wouldn't sell."

Winter training

Sonny Graham was Delvin Miller's second trainer when Tarport Hap reached the stable's Pompano winter base in late '73.

"We got her broke and started her, and

she trained perfectly all winter," recalled Graham. "She wore a big, long hobble, didn't hog the overcheck, was always sound—just perfect."

What impressed him most about the brawny filly was her professional attitude. "Things just didn't bother her," he said. "You could run a jet airplane right beside her."

Two caretakers didn't work out, but Tarport Hap took an immediate shine to the third, Duane "The Stick Man" Von Knoblauch. The young man's tall, thin frame earned him the nickname, and Hap adored every inch of him.

Far from Florida, Silk Stockings was receiving her early lessons from Burris in the Delaware Valley.

"I thought she'd already been broke, she broke that easy," the trainer recalled. A few physical ailments arose, though: "She popped a curb, and popped a splint on her left front at the same time, so I had those fired. Then, when we went in 2:15, she popped the curb on the other side. I



Dean A. Hoffman

Above: In the first heat of the 1975 Jugette, Silk Stockings steps out for Pres Burris as Delvin Miller, leaving from post 6 with Tarport Hap, plots a response.



Hoof Beats file photo

Left: One of Silk Stockings' most glorious triumphs came in the \$230,521 Monticello-New York City OTB Classic, at that time the sport's richest-ever race. Among those joining the filly in the winner's circle were Claire Mazik, husband Ken (rear), and a young Au Clair School student.

blistered that hock, and she never had any more problems."

Northern training had advantages that Burris believes paid dividends. "I never missed a training with her," he explained. "I don't care if it was snowing, blowing, or what, she went. So she was good in the mud, on a fast track, on any kind of track; she didn't have to take her track with her."

Silky was an independent filly. "She wasn't mean," stressed Mazik. "She just had her own ideas. If you wouldn't let her do what she wanted, she'd get away from you and do it. And if she didn't like you, no matter how nice you were to her, she'd twirl her foot around and kick you." High on the filly's hit list were Ken Mazik and Burris.

"She didn't like me because I'd make her race," said Burris. "It got to the point where I couldn't walk her; she'd fight me every step of the way, bite me, and pin her ears."

Silky's heart belonged to one man; groom Ira Bennett. Well into his 70s, the

conscientious Bennett lived with the filly, traveled every mile with her, and slept outside her stall through the end of her sophomore season, when illness forced his retirement. "Ira was 75 percent of why she was so good," stressed Burris. "I didn't have to worry about her; if something went wrong he'd call me, and he didn't have to call very often."

Mazik found herself thinking of Silky as a person, and staking her didn't seem much different than giving a human youngster plenty of opportunity. "We staked her to everything," she said. "Just like with a child, you want to give them every advantage to be great if they are."

"You just reach up and pull a couple hairs on [Silk Stockings'] tail, and she was gone, right now!"

—PRESTON BURRIS JR.

One of those advantages was nomination to the "Race for the Gold," the inaugural Monticello-New York City OTB Classic for New York-bred sophomore pacers, which promised the richest purse the sport had ever seen. "It cost \$5 to nominate her," recalled Mazik. "Everybody laughed at me—'How do you know she'll ever be able to race against colts?' I said, 'Well, it's just \$5,' and then I kept her eligible."

Tarport Hap's connections made the same gamble.

Fierce filly foes

Tarport Hap debuted at The Red Mile in late May, swept her first two purse starts, then headed to Hazel Park for Grand Circuit competition, where she roared back from a break to win the Geers Stake for Delvin Miller.

Silk Stockings wasn't far behind, racing in June baby events at Brandywine. She thrilled her entourage with two come-from-behind wins for Burris, speeding home in 28.4 in the latter. "I felt like a fool," admitted Burris, the only driver Silky ever had. "But she didn't feel like she was going that much."

With the Grand Circuit's next stop Brandywine, Silk Stockings was ready to join the fray. The same evening that the Maziks were honored by track officials for their work with the 23 Au Clair students, Silky won her division of the Pochontas Stake by 11 lengths in a stakes-record 2:01.2. Tarport Hap took the second-fastest division in 2:04 for Miller.

"Delvin had a lot of horses from Silky's family, and he stayed to watch Silky race," recalled Mazik. "'She's the one to beat,' he said."

The fillies' first encounter came five days later at Saratoga. Racing over a track rated slow, favorite Tarport Hap drew inside and splashed to the lead, with Silk Stockings on her back. Silky tipped out past the half and kept going, stunning Hap's backers to win by five lengths.

The fillies parted, Hap to start a new three-win streak and Silky to notch another victory. Their second meeting came in

a July NYSS at Roosevelt Raceway, with Silk Stockings favored from the rail. Yet from post 7, Tarport Hap gunned to the front for Miller, forcing Silky to battle overland. They dueled to the wire, with Hap prevailing by a head.

A week later, both drew into the same division of Yonkers' La Paloma. Again made the favorite, Silk Stockings skipped offstride at the start, then closed to finish third behind Hap.

Hap defeated Silk Stockings twice more, at The Meadows and Saratoga, and then it was on to Syracuse for a two-heat NYSS event.

Front-stepping Silky was collared at the wire in her first-heat elim by Spike Happy and Billy Haughton. They returned to face Tarport Hap, who had scored her ninth consecutive win in the other first-heat elim.

As Hap cut the mile, Silk Stockings was reserved in sixth, then cut loose in the stretch with Burris swatting her saddle pad: "If you made noise, she'd go a lot faster," he noted. It was Silk Stockings home first by a length, with Tarport Hap third.

The rivalry continued in a Yonkers NYSS, where Silky was sent off the favorite in the 13-filly field. Hap made her second break of the season and finished a distanced fifth as Silk Stockings romped wire-to-wire, eight lengths the best.

They hooked up again in The Red Mile's Almahurst Filly Pace. Each won their first-heat eliminations, but in the final heat, spoiler Armbr Penny and Joe O'Brien nailed Hap at the wire, with Silky a closing third.

Tarport Hap led the rivalry, four wins to three, as they entered their season-ending slugfest in a NYSS at Roosevelt. Silk Stockings took the field to the quarter, then Hap moved to the front. But Silky drew alongside in the final turn and out-sprinted her down the stretch to even the score. The win brought her earnings to \$144,110, a record for freshman pacers regardless of gender.

Silk Stockings called it a year, but Tarport Hap had the last laugh, winning

Silk Stockings and caretaker Ira Bennett were a team through the end of the filly's championship sophomore season, when illness forced the septuagenarian's retirement.

Fans turned out on a brutally frigid Chicago evening to see Tarport Hap, with Joe Marsh Jr. up, stave off Rambling Willie to win the second leg of the Suburban Downs Pacing Series, with Shadyside Trixie third. The next week, Hap captured the series final; two months later, she was gone.

Roosevelt's Belle Acton the following week to break the record with her \$150,051 bankroll.

"But I don't want to take anything away from Silk Stockings," Miller told *Harness Horse*. "Heck, she's a pretty good filly."

At season's end, Silk Stockings was the year's fastest freshman filly on all three sizes of track, while Tarport Hap's 26-20-3-2 record made her the winningest 2-year-old of 1974. Sporting an 18-12-4-2 record that voters found just as impressive, Silky was named champion by 25

votes over Hap.

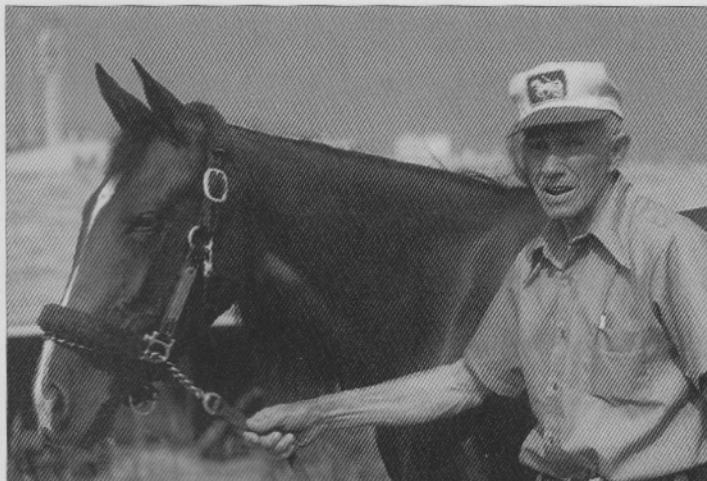
Step aside, boys

When they returned to the racing wars as sophomores, both Most Happy Fella fillies sported changes. Tarport Hap had graduated to a 60-inch hobble and traded in her blind bridle for an open one while retaining her brush shadow roll, knee boots, and scalpers.

Meanwhile, Silk Stockings had done some growing at last. "She was a little teeny thing as a 2-year-old, but as a 3-year-old she was a good-sized mare, almost 16 hands," observed Burris. "She was still short-coupled and wore a real short, 53-inch hobble. I'd give her a half-inch once in a while, but if you gave her too much, she'd put in steps."

Each camp intended to give their filly every chance for a championship season.

With Silk Stockings eligible to both NYSS and Grand Circuit events, "some-



Hoof Beats file photo



Hoof Beats file photo

"I believed Tarport Hap would become the first mare to pace in 1:52. We knew we had Silk Stockings' number."

—GEORGE "BUDDY" REGAN

Letter to a Friend

THE FOLLOWING letter was "sent" to Tarport Hap from her racing rival Silk Stockings, via the latter's owner, Claire Mazik, after Tarport Hap died in a race at The Meadowlands.

My Dearest Sister,

I've heard by the shedrow grapevine that you won't be able to race this season, and I'm saddened. You see, big sister, I've never raced a season without you, and I find it hard to imagine myself in a race without you by my side.

Remember as two-year-olds we wowed 'em from track to track...records flying as fast as our feet. What an exciting time! You'd beat me, then I'd beat you, and Del and Pres would fuss and fume while the Maziks and Grants would shout and cry. So I quit for the year after breaking sister Handle With Care's money-winning record, and you went out the next week and broke my record. You were something!

So we started our three-year-old season right where we left off. Except now the Rosenbergs and Leavitts joined your team. What a year we had—more records, and what competition! Who can forget us at the Jugette, when we went in world record time and it took forever to decide who won that photo finish. And remember when we went as fast as the colts in the Adioo Volo? We really had those studs worrying! I overheard more than one of those guys saying they were glad they didn't have to race us.

Well, last season we sure showed them what a couple of well-turned ankles and firm behinds could do! All us girls were so proud of you when you cut out that 1:57 at Roosevelt for a track and world record against all those colts. Right on, sister!

We didn't have many opportunities to race as mares against each other—I had my foot problems and you caught that throat infection. So as the new year came upon us I heard of your exploits, winning eight out of nine races against the best in the country, and I just knew we'd be at it again. But, if the railbirds are right, I guess we won't have the chance.

So, if the fates should have it that I should race this season, please know, big sister, that it won't be the same. Because who could hear the track announcer call Silk Stockings and not expect to hear 'it's Tarport Hap coming up on the outside...'

Love, Sister Silky

times she was eligible for two, three races in one week," said Burris. "Whichever one we thought we could win the most money at, that's where we went, and we went to every race with the intention of winning it."

"Delvin believed in racing horses—if you paid the stake payments, by golly, we'll race 'em!" chuckled Graham. That philosophy kept Tarport Hap's training between starts to a minimum, he added. "Once we got her tight in the spring, that was about it. As long as she was racing once a week or every 10 days, she'd just get jogged between races, never trained."

Silky, on the other hand, usually trained three trips between weekly starts. If her races were less than a full week apart, the filly would just be jogged and not train.

The rivalry resumed in a mid-June NYSS at Roosevelt, with both coming off winning efforts—Silky against fillies,

Hap against colts. Both dueled through the opening quarter, with Silky parked on top. Able to clear at last, she led the way to the stretch, but Hap kicked past to win by three lengths.

The next week, Silk Stockings squared off against the male stars of the crop in the Cane Prep. Heading the field was Nero, a colt being hailed as a superstar—and he won impressively, relegating Silky to third in both the elim and final.

Meanwhile, Tarport Hap was shaking up Yonkers' handicap ranks, notching two wins against older horses and turning

"[Silk Stockings] made us live great, like rich people, and I want to pay her back."

—CLAIRE MAZIK

back New Zealand star Young Quinn. The fact that she was eligible to the rich Monticello-New York City OTB Classic, and Nero wasn't, had horsemen talking and Alan Leavitt listening.

Leavitt called Miller and asked for a price on the rugged filly. Miller replied that her tag was a record \$325,000.

"Although Mr. Grant had plenty of money, Delvin never would give up a chance to make a man a lot of money; that's the way Delvin was," explained Graham. "Mr. Grant spent a lot of money and had a lot of horses over the years with Delvin, so [Delvin] probably thought he owed it to him to get him some of it back."

"I thought we could get half of it back in one afternoon at Monticello about a month later," admitted Leavitt, who quickly called his frequent partner, Dunkin Donuts founder Bill Rosenberg of Wilrose Farms.

Rosenberg was game and the deal was done, with Grant immediately selling his half of Hap, and son Andy to part with his half at the end of her 3-year-old season. As the younger Grant pointed out, "We've always been in the business of selling horses."

Tarport Hap's new owners came aboard just in time to see her take on Nero in the Cane Pace. "Everyone thought Nero was the Second Coming, but we had that much faith in her," said Graham. Hap and Miller shadowed the Meadow Skipper colt to finish second in their first-heat elimination, then had to settle for third, two lengths back of Nero, in the final.

After Silk Stockings set a new all-age track record at Goshen, gliding home in 1:58 for her sixth win in a row, she and Tarport Hap met for the second time that season, going postward in a Yonkers NYSS. Silky sailed to a four-length win in 1:58.2, erasing sire Most Happy Fella's track record for sophomore pacers.

Silky and Hap were among the 24 New York-bred pacers who came to Monticello in search of what was then the sport's richest-ever prize in the inaugural \$230,521 Monticello-New York City OTB Classic. Drawing into different eliminations, ►98

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From 65

each filly thumped the colts handily to advance to the final.

"So off we went to get back half our money," recounted Leavitt. "But then it didn't look as easy as it had. Silk Stockings had gotten a lot better."

In the Classic final's stampede into the first turn, Silk Stockings emerged in front—"she'd let you do the thinking, and she did the work," said Burris—while Tarport Hap erupted into a break.

"There must've been six or seven of them gunning for the front," said Graham. "She made a misstep, and Delvin took her back; he never hurt one."

Silk Stockings steadily opened daylight and stopped the clock in 1:57.3, the fastest mile ever paced by a female, regardless of age, on a half-mile track. Tarport Hap was seventh.

"After the race, Delvin was really down in the dumps," Rosenberg remembered. "He said, 'That wasn't that mare's fault; I cost her the race. How can I make it up to you, Bill?'"

"I said, 'Don't worry about it, Delvin. We'll just make the holes bigger in the doughnuts, and we'll get even!'"

The rematch in the Adioo Volo began in Hap's favor. She motored away from the rail as Silky, mired in post 11, slowly picked her way through traffic.

Leading the way down the backstretch, Tarport Hap suddenly had company, and suddenly was racing second as Silk Stockings skimmed by, pacing a 26.4 third quarter that had jaws dropping all over The Meadows. Hap hovered on her back but couldn't close a step, and Silk Stockings took her 10th win in a row.

The next time they met, Silky was returning from a rest after her grueling effort in the Prix d'Ete, in which she had closed to finish second to Albert's Star. Tarport Hap had a five-race winning streak in Grand Circuit filly stakes, and added a sixth at Silky's expense in a gate-to-wire stunner at Vernon Downs.

Five days later, when neither filly's connections opted to take on the boys in the Little Brown Jug, the two squared off in the Jugette.

"That was the best Silk Stockings ever was," asserted Burris. He captured both heats by having her on top by the quarter—"you just reach up and pull a couple hairs on her tail, and she was gone, right now!" he laughed—and daring Hap and Miller to catch them. They tried, but fell a head short to Silky in the world-record

1:57.2 first heat, and lost by two widening lengths in the next.

Right after Silk Stockings' crowd-pleasing win, Burris had an unforgettable encounter at Delaware's Log Cabin.

"Frank Ervin walked up to me and said, 'Preston, you have done a great job with that filly. That is the best filly I've ever seen in my life, and I've been in this business 60, 70 years,'" Burris recalled, with awe. "For somebody like that to go out of their way to shake your hand and tell you that, that was the best thing that ever happened to me in the horse business."

After a straight-heat win at Lexington, Tarport Hap headed to Roosevelt to try Silk Stockings again. This time Hap went right to the front and enjoyed sweet revenge, leading Silky home by seven lengths to equal the track record.

After Silky was a lackluster ninth in the Messenger, Tarport Hap was happy to tarnish her rival's star still further, blowing by late to win Liberty Bell's Hanover Filly Stake with Silk Stockings third. "At the end of the season, she'd had it," said Burris. "She'd been all over the East Coast."

Five days later, a Yonkers NYSS brought the pair together for the final time in 1975. They dueled around the final turn, but again Tarport Hap paced away.

The rivals had to once again call it a draw, with five wins apiece in their 10 encounters in 1975. Silk Stockings went home to the Au Clair School with a \$336,312 seasonal bankroll, making her the richest sophomore pacer ever. Again the year's fastest filly on all three track sizes in her 24-15-5-3 season, Silk Stockings was relaxing in her paddock and accepting treats from students and well-wishers as Tarport Hap completed her own 32-20-7-2 year at Hollywood Park.

In the balloting, it was no contest: Silk Stockings was the overwhelming choice for not only the divisional championship but also Pacer of the Year honors, the first female to ever receive that accolade.

Broadening their horizons

Harness racing already knew it had a wonderful thing in Silk Stockings, but her popularity was growing outside the sport, too. Silky's feel-good story was introducing harness racing to countless people who read about her in publications ranging from *The New York Times* to *Good Housekeeping*. Letters were arriving from

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children throughout North America. She had struck a sweet chord; everybody loved Silky.

Although she made a popular return to the races at 4, her season would be abbreviated by persistent quarter cracks that led to her racing with patched feet in bar shoes.

Tarport Hap, meanwhile, was as sound as ever. Now owned entirely by Leavitt and Rosenberg, the nearly 17-hand mare turned back Handle With Care and Young Quinn in the Blue Bonnets Challenge in a 1:56.3 world record, downed Rambling Willie and Nero in the Grand Prix Free-For-All at Sportsman's Park, and then went gate-to-wire in 1:57 at Roosevelt—the fastest mile that track had ever seen and a new all-age world distaff record on a twice-around—to defeat Keystone Accent and Rambling Willie in a leg of the U.S. Pacing Championship.

That same night, Silk Stockings went postward at Wolverine Raceway near Detroit in search of her third invitational win at as many tracks. At mile's end, she was history's fastest 4-year-old mare on a mile oval, defeating Peter Lobell in 1:55.4.

Northfield Park swiftly asked both Silky and Hap to its Betsy Ross Invitational, held the day before the nation's Bicentennial celebration.

"All the great fillies were in it; between them they had won over \$2 million," Mazik recalled of the all-star field. "Silky had special [bar] shoes on, and it started to rain. We thought that was the end."

But the sloppy track couldn't stop Silky. She quarter-moved to the front; behind her, Sonny Graham, Hap's race-pilot for only the third time in her career, maneuvered his mare from post seven into the chase. At the half, Tarport Hap was second, then tipped out to challenge—and stalled. She was swallowed by the field as Silk Stockings paced on, and at the wire it was Silky by a length, holding off Handle With Care and Missouri Time. Tarport Hap was sixth.

"That night at Roosevelt took a lot out of her," admitted Graham. "She didn't have that huge kick at the end of it like she usually did."

Tarport Hap rebounded to win the American-National Maturity Mare Pace for Graham, but the summer seemed to have sapped her, and a throat infection didn't help. As trainer Miller shared the seat with John Chapman, Peter Haughton,

Del Insko, Jim Dennis, and Greg Wright, she continued to compete with the boys but couldn't find the winner's circle, ending the season with a 26-7-4-3 record and \$169,833.

Silk Stockings kept on rolling, beating Jug winner Seatrain at Roosevelt and then breaking her own Monticello track record in a race dubbed the OTB Replay. But that 1:57.2 win carried a price: She was lame the next day with an infected crack in her left forefoot and filling in that leg. She was laid up for two months.

Silky returned to a sport being revolutionized by the grand opening of The Meadowlands, and equalled her 1:55.2 mark there in turning back Meadow Blue Chip, Young Quinn, and Handle With Care. Yet two weeks later, in a Meadowlands invitational against much the same field, she was a distanced sixth in an inexplicably abysmal performance that ended her season at 12-8-1-0 and \$89,552.

In the year-end balloting, Silk Stockings tallied 14 votes and Tarport Hap received two, but both were outdistanced by Meadow Blue Chip, who won the championship with 72 votes.

'She's a racemare'

The Meadowlands offered winter racing, and Leavitt and Rosenberg decided to sample it with Tarport Hap. "Alan wanted to race her another year; I wanted to breed her," said Rosenberg. "But Alan was more knowledgeable than I—I was the doughnut man, he was the horseman—so I listened to what he said."

And so, after a fruitless November at Hollywood Park, 4-year-old Hap was moved from Delvin Miller's barn to that of George "Buddy" Regan. "Delvin said, 'Look, there's no point to me taking her to Florida and laying her up for four, five months,'" recalled Leavitt. "Hap was the only horse I had any interest in that [Miller] trained, but Delvin was a wonderful horseman to deal with."

In the Regan barn, Tarport Hap was teamed with caretaker Linda Toscano, today a trainer whose stakes winners have included Jet Laag p,4,1:52f (\$524,236) and champion aged trotting mare Giant Mermaid 4,1:54.4 (\$365,039).

"She was tough, brutally hard to be around. She was a one-person horse," said Toscano, who as caretaker became Hap's one person. "She was so attentive to the person who rubbed her," Toscano added. "She would nicker to you when you came back with water for a bath."

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Regan enlisted Ben Webster to guide Tarport Hap at The Meadowlands, and the changes seemed to revitalize her. She won two December opens over horses like Whata Baron, showing her old grit when briefly collared in the stretch in the second: "She's a racemare," Webster told *Harness Horse*, "and I just hollered at her and tapped the saddle pad."

Racing on into 1977, she dead-heated Andy Lobell in a New Year's Day open, then traveled to Hawthorne with Toscano to contest the Suburban Downs Pacing Series.

"We missed the first leg, and I was hoping to miss the next two," recalled Regan. "They had a real bitter winter all around the country, even in New Jersey, but in Chicago that night they considered it to be 55 below with the wind chill."

Nonetheless, Tarport Hap and catch-driver Joe Marsh Jr. chugged wire-to-wire to defeat Rambling Willie by a neck.

"Willie sat on her back and couldn't get close," said Toscano. "[She was] beyond belief!"

The next week, Hap and Marsh again led every step to take the \$51,500 final by four lengths.

Returning to The Meadowlands, Hap reeled off four consecutive wins for Webster, leading at every call. Her victory in the opening leg of the Presidential made her the overwhelming choice in the second, but a fierce early speed duel took its toll and she folded late to finish fifth.

"She went what we considered a dull race," said Regan. "She didn't bleed from the nose, and they didn't have the machines we have today to scope them."

Hap bounced back to take the Presidential final by two lengths in a 1:57 season's record, and was rewarded with a week-long turnout. Regan tightened her with a 2:06 training mile at Roosevelt, then left her with Toscano at The Meadowlands for its March 12 feature, the open pace.

As he headed back to Roosevelt to tend four horses racing that night, Regan couldn't help looking forward to a rematch with Silk Stockings. "I believed Tarport Hap would become the first mare to pace in 1:52," said Regan. "We knew we had Silk Stockings' number, and we were looking forward to hooking her on a mile track. Unfortunately, it didn't happen."

Tarport Hap set sail for the lead, charging up first-over to put her head in front before the quarter. But then the great

mare went offstride, and took herself out of the race on a slowing, staggering course toward the outside fence. Webster leaped from the bike as she fell, and tried to revive her by heart massage as emergency workers and veterinarians ran to join him.

But Hap was gone.

An autopsy performed at the University of Pennsylvania's New Bolton Center revealed Tarport Hap had bled to death when nine jejunal arteries—near the middle portion of her small intestine—ruptured. Her stomach had been flowing with free blood.

"She was a dying horse, and yet she somehow made it to the front," said Leavitt, with emotion. "There was something, some spirit there, that carried her for a quarter of a mile."

"I asked Alan if they could bury her at The Meadowlands," recalled Rosenberg, who keeps a set of Hap's horseshoes with a photo of the great mare in his office. "I said we'd pay for the cost of the burial."

"We had her insured for \$325,000, what we paid for her. But no way in the world could money ever replace her."

She was laid to rest, buried in her entirety, in what would become Paddock Park; her gravesite is accessible by the public, and Toscano said she visits it annually. The Meadowlands held the first Tarport Hap stake for 3-year-old pacing fillies two months after the mare's passing. And at year's end, Tarport Hap and her 10-8-0-0 record were not forgotten, as voters honored her posthumously as 1977 Aged Pacing Mare of the Year.

Just days before Hap's death, Claire Mazik suffered a stroke and was hospitalized. "I called the [USTA Harness Racing] Hotline from my hospital bed to find out how Hap did," she said.

What she heard moved her to write a letter from Silk Stockings to her late rival that was published in the sport's weeklies [see sidebar]. It was a moving end to a monumental rivalry.

Racing on

Silk Stockings returned to the races six weeks later, with movie cameras capturing some early-season starts with intent to make her the star of a feature film. A "Silk Stockings Day" was even held at Northfield Park, with area schools sending bus after bus full of eager students to the track to meet the mare before the cameras. The film crews attracted TV crews, including that of *60 Minutes*.

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Although she set track records at The Meadowlands and Rockingham Park, Silky's star power didn't go far when she was pitted against big boys like Rambling Willie, Big Towner, Dream Maker, Arm-bro Ranger, Oil Burner, and Richmond.

"She would race her guts out week after week, but it wasn't [against] little timid fillies anymore," said Burris. "Against the open pacers you've got nine more horses to beat, not just one or two to worry about like when she was a 2- and 3-year-old."

Returning to distaff competition for an easy win in the Milton, though, seemed to give Silky a second wind. She won five of her last six starts, capturing free-for-all at Yonkers, Arlington, and Northfield, and then boarded a plane for Hollywood Park.

A shipping accident made it a flight to disaster. According to Burris, "she got one foot down between the [shipping] stall and the [loading] platform, and she almost pulled her foot off." The result was a three-inch separation between her left forefoot's coronary band and hoof that ended her racing career.

Outside forces also ended Silky's movie career. The plans had been noble enough: "The movie would have been promotion for racing as much as for anything else," explained Burris. "They planned on opening the movie in, say, Chicago, show the movie for two weeks, and then advertise, 'Come see Silky in person at this local racetrack.' It would've been a great shot in the arm for harness racing, but it never did happen."

Marital problems between the Maziks played a large part in abandoning the movie, the surviving footage of which is in Claire Mazik's possession. A divorce followed, with Ken taking the Au Clair School and Claire keeping her beloved Silk Stockings.

Claire Mazik and horseman Carter Duer had become friends while Silk Stockings was racing. When those racing days ended, Mazik wanted the best for Silky in her life as a broodmare—"She made us live great, like rich people, and I want to pay her back," she stressed—so she sent the mare to Duer. Staying with him throughout his tenures at Castleton and Kentuckiana farms to his own Peninsula Farm, Silk Stockings produced five colts and five fillies.

"She was a very good breeder," said Duer. "She still has as much charisma as any Standardbred mare ever had, and her name still means something. She had

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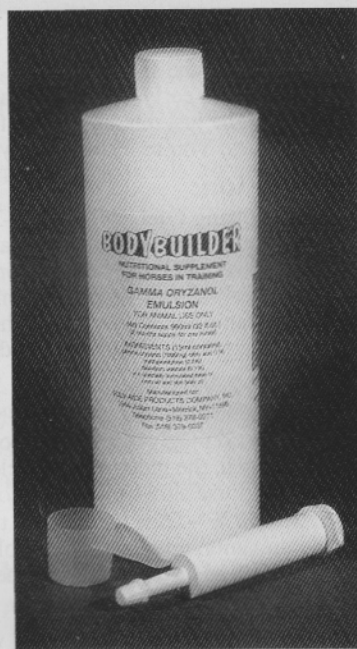
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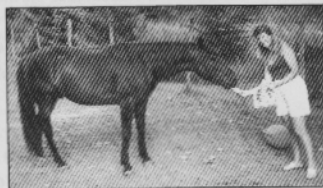
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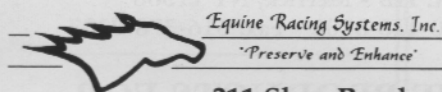
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Mazik is just as distinctive, Duer feels. "[Silk Stockings and her foals] weren't just figures at the end of a ledger sheet to her," he said. "To tell the truth, Silk Stockings was like one of her kids. It's refreshing to have someone that cares."

Silky's first foal, the Race Time horse Temujin p,3,1:54.3h (\$633,284), was her fastest and richest performer, winning the Fox Stake, the Kentucky Pacing Derby, and a heat of the 1982 Jug. Lady Longlegs p,2,1:58.1 (\$258,149), by B.G.'s Bunny, was a constant New Jersey Sire Stakes contender. Silk Spats, a Bret Hanover colt, sold for \$400,000 as a yearling but raced only three times, taking a 2:03.1f mark at age 3.

She's Pure Silk p,3,Q1:58.1f (\$16,430) is the only foal of Silk Stockings that Mazik felt she could afford to retain, and that daughter of Nihilator is among the broodmares in the Peninsula fields.

But it is Cyd Charisse p,2,1:58f (\$6,647), a now-4-year-old mare by Jate Lobell owned by Brittany Farms, that Duer has "a gut feeling" will be a top producer. "She was the closest thing to [herself] Silk Stockings had," he observed. Cyd Charisse delivered her first foal, a son of Life Sign, earlier this year.

After a difficult delivery with the smallish Artsplace colt Final Masterpiece in 1995, Silk Stockings was retired from breeding and pensioned to Taylor Palmer's Boxwood Farm in New Jersey. Boxwood is an easier trip for Mazik, who now lives in Pennsylvania and is battling cancer.

Today, 25-year-old Silk Stockings has some difficulty keeping weight on and is starting to gray, but she still welcomes fans and admirers. "She's not that active," said Mazik, "but she's happy. It's like she's away at school and I get to visit her."

"Silk Stockings has been good to everyone ever associated with her," said Duer. "It's been rewarding financially for everyone that's ever been associated with her, and the fact that you were acquainted with her and had something to do with her career was very rewarding mentally." **HB**