

Blue Ridge Hunt Point to Point 5/2/10

The record breaking snow this past Winter wreaked havoc on the early point to point schedule in the Mid Atlantic causing Casanova to cancel completely and several meets to postpone. The Blue Ridge Hunt Point to Point cancelled their hunter pace but postponed their races to May 2 at Woodley Farm near Berryville. It has been more than twenty five years since the Blue Ridge races had to be postponed due to the weather to May in 1984. Considering the fact that the races are normally the second week in March, this really is not a bad record.

One result of the postponement was the increased importance of the George Greenhalgh Memorial owner rider timber race. Only a point and a half separated the leader, Crypto Cousin from the second placed Cool Fellow, who won the championship a year ago. If either horse won at Blue Ridge, the Seven Corners Championship was theirs. When the flag dropped Ken Shreve sent Cool Fellow to the front to assume his normal pace setting duties. Pat Cooney rated Crypto Cousin slightly off the pace with his brother, Michael on Crimson Lode close to follow. With three fences remaining Crypto Cousin separated from Crimson Lode and moved alongside Cool Fellow. Ken Shreve let out a notch, and Cool Fellow withstood that challenge. He led until they approached the last fence where Crypto Cousin was once again on the move. They jumped as a team with Crypto Cousin landing running. Cool Fellow gave ground begrudgingly but was second best as Crypto Cousin drew away to win the race and the championship by 3 1/2 lengths.

The only other jumping race on the card was the Clarke Courier Cup lady rider timber race. The race attracted a three horse field featuring Pizarro and Natalie Wales, who had won twice and placed once on the circuit, and was assured the lady rider championship. In the race Pizarro came away running and set the pace until the "clubhouse turn" with about a mile to run. The absence of a beacon on the turn prompted Sarah Green on Sing and Hoist to ride a different line and save ground around the turn. They moved from slightly off the pace entering the turn to at least a five length lead when they straightened away. Sing and Hoist maintained the lead the rest of the race and won easily by seven lengths. Pizarro was second and Smooth Flight (Suzanne Stettinius) was third. This was Sarah Green's first win over timber as well as the first win for Sing and Hoist.

The remainder of the card was devoted to flat racing with opportunities for horses and riders with almost any eligibility. The first of these was a novice rider flat race going 1 1/2 miles with a field of four. John Delaney sent Sam Cockburn's Maximize to the front and that's where he stayed until the field turned for home. Kristin Fischer had asked Flying Horse Farm's Farah T Salute to quicken with a half mile to run and entering the stretch they were clearly superior. Maximize held on for second but was no match for the winner who won by six lengths. Farah T Salute is a filly and mare hurdle stakes winner, who is trained by Jazz Napravnik.

Local interests had much to celebrate following the one mile Woodley Cup for Virginia Bred or Sired horses. Last year Northfield Farm, LLC's Expel had won the year end championship in this division but had only started once in this series this year placing second at Piedmont. At Blue Ridge with Liam McVicar up he had running and winning on his mind. He took the lead from the get go and that's where he stayed. Roddy MacKenzie made a run at him in the stretch on Gordie Keys' I'm A Wahoo, who had won at Fairfax, but MacKenzie was driving and McVicar was sitting chilly as he crossed the finish line a length to the good. Local trainer Teddy Mulligan saddled the winner.

The 1 1/2 mile open flat race was a match race between two horses trained by leading trainer, Dot Smithwick. Gregg Ryan's Three Bridge Road (Ben Garner) and Mary Fleming Finlay's Dr. Ramsey raced as a team for the first half mile. There, Three Bridge Road took the lead but was shadowed by his stablemate. When they turned into the long stretch Three Bridge Road was still on top, but Dr. Ramsey was gaining. They raced that way to the wire where Three Bridge Road was narrowly best by a head.

Kinross Farm sent out an entry in the 3/4 mile maiden flat race, and they finished first and fourth in the six horse field. Trainer Neil Morris put Ben Garner up on Its A School Night and Liam McVicar on Rain Stopped Play. Its A School Night was never worse than second, led when the field turned for home and won easily by seven lengths over Frank Zureick's Atleta (John Delaney) and Simon Hobson's Fleeing The Scene (Roddy MacKenzie). Ben Garner is the circuit's champion novice rider on the flat, and even though his two wins at Blue Ridge don't count in that division, he once more proved that he can perform well in open company.

The 1 1/4 mile race went to what would have been the prohibitive favorite if gambling were allowed. All eyes were on Riverdee Stable's Under Shirt whose half brother Good Night Shirt won two Eclipse Awards. At the start Roddy MacKenzie chose to rate Under Shirt off the pace as did Liam McVicar on Kinross Farm's Schoolhouse Woods. These two rallied together down the back side of the course and when they raced into the final turn they joined Gordie Keys Millard (Ben Garner) on the front. Under Shirt saved ground on the inside and took the lead when Millard went wide taking Schoolhouse Woods with him. Schoolhouse Woods came again in the stretch but couldn't get to Under Shirt who won by 3/4 of a length. Trainer Timothy Keefe had Under Shirt ready to win at first asking.