

Old Dominion Hounds Point to Point 4-3-2010

Beautiful weather brought out a near record crowd for the Old Dominion Hounds Point to Point at Ben Venue, Virginia on April 3. For the second week in a row the competition for entries was fierce as the NSA's circuit moved to Stoney Brook in Southern Pines, North Carolina as well as point to point racing at Elkridge – Harford in Maryland on Saturday, and Brandywine Hills in Pennsylvania on Sunday. Actually the competition for riders was probably worse than that for horses. Most of the races at Old Dominion attracted decent entries, but there were several two horse races, and one race was split to accommodate the available riders.

The featured race on the card was the Leeds Don open timber race; and when this race had scratched down to only two starters, the race committee allowed two late entries, who would not be official starters. Holbrook Hollow Farm's Across The Sky (Fritz Boniface) and Rosbrian Farm's More Fascination (Willie Dowling) were the extra starters and Indian Run Farm's Endless Mountain (Ben Garner) and EMO Stable's True Blue Fingers (Barry Duncan) were the only two that remained from the original field. Fritz Boniface sent Across The Sky to the front with Endless Mountain close up in second and More Fascination in third. True Blue Fingers dropped back steadily and was hopelessly distanced when he was pulled up. When the field turned for home, it had become a two horse race between Across The Sky and Endless Mountain. In spite of the fact that all Endless Mountain had to do to win was to finish, these two raced to the last as a team with no quarter being given. The unofficial starter Across The Sky crossed the finish line first by a couple lengths, and Endless Mountain finished second but was the winner of the race for the second consecutive year. With this win Dot Smithwick assumed her normal position at the head of the trainer's standings.

The co-featured race was the open hurdle race, which attracted a quality five horse field. Charles McCann's Ottapaz set the early pace with Sam Cockburn up, but with more than one more time to go around Liam McVicar sent Julia Thieriot's Fantastic Foe to the front and none of the other entries threatened. This was trainer Mairead Carr's second win on the card. Gregg Ryan's Dynantonia finished second twelve lengths behind. Unfortunately Ottapaz was injured in a hard fall and was humanely euthanized.

Following the race Gregg Ryan announced his retirement after an incredible career that started in 1980. During this time he won 150 races over fences under rules and now holds the record for wins by an amateur in America. Last year he broke Rigan McKinney's record that had stood for seventy years. Add to this 125 wins over fences at the point to points, and you have a career that will not be equaled easily.

Earlier on the card Ryan added to his point to point total when he rode his Devil's Preacher to victory in the amateur/novice rider hurdle race. In the race Gary Baker's Marino Feliz (Chi) set the pace under Ben Garner, but with one more time to go around Ryan went to the lead. Aylor Racing Stable's Meshwaar made several moves at Devil's Preacher but was second best in a good effort. The final margin was $\frac{3}{4}$'s of a length but Ryan was clearly in hand and in command. His good friend Julie Gomena saddled both Ryan horses.

Mairead Carr sent out her Leinster Stable's Triton Light to win the maiden hurdle race under novice rider Muiris Hinchion. He sent Triton Light to the front when the flag dropped and stayed there most of the race. With less than three furlongs to run Ben

Garner asked Beverly Steinmann's Piney Mountain to quicken, and they briefly took the lead. But, Triton Light responded to the challenge and put Piney Mountain away within a furlong. Liam McVicar made a mild bid in the stretch with Michael Smith's Mask and Wig but the result was never in doubt.

The lady rider timber race was a two horse affair that featured two riders who had never won on two maiden horses. Normally this is not a good combination, but both riders, Natalie Wales on Pizarro and Scarlett Lovett on Untamed Hero rode at a sensible pace and had a good experience. At the start Untamed Hero went to the front but it didn't take long for Pizarro to move to the front with Untamed Hero close behind. With a half mile to run Scarlett Lovett made her move and challenged for the lead but couldn't sustain her bid for more than a furlong or two. From there to the finish it was all Pizarro, who won by 7 lengths.

There were two additional two horse races for owner/riders and foxhunters over timber, but by the conditions these two can be run together if there are insufficient entries. In both cases there was only one horse to finish, but in both the best horse won. In the race Ken Shreve set the pace on his owner ridden Cool Fellow. Pat Cooney was content to let Shreve set the pace with the two foxhunter entries – Sheiacraftydame (Bryan McDonald) and The Mint Bar (Sam Cockburn) racing second and third. For much of the race Sheisacraftydame forced Cool Fellow's pace with The Mint Bar fading and ultimately being pulled up. At this stage all McDonald had to do was get his mare home, and he did. With less than a half mile to run Cooney moved Crypto Cousin to challenge Cool Fellow. They raced together briefly but Crypto Cousin was drawing away and was the apparent winner when Shreve was unseated at the last. Crypto Cousin and Sheisacraftydame now lead their series.

There were two flat races on the card and with fourteen starters and far fewer riders one of these races was split. This race was part of the novice rider flat series and its leader Ben Garner continued to pad his advantage by winning one and running second in the other. Garner's win was for trainer Doug Fout on James Piper's Two Ticks and his second was on Indian Run Farm's Swimming River for Dot Smithwick.

In the first division Naomi Eastwood rated Oakwood Stable's Country Cousin off the early pace, rallied with a half mile to run taking command and won going away by 5 1/2 lengths with Swimming River second. Trainer Julie Gomena had the first of her two winners on the card. Garner used similar tactics to win with Two Ticks. He reserved him off the early pace, took the lead and won going away by 2 1/2 lengths.

The Virginia Horsemen's Benevolent and Protective Association sponsors the very popular series for Virginia-Bred or Sired horses on the flat. For the second time this season Don Yovanovich won this series race with Over The Lea. Diana Gillam had ridden him to a front running win at Piedmont, and at Old Dominion Liam McVicar had him in third early but when asked he quickly assumed command and won easily by 8 lengths.

Three horses and one large pony were entered to follow field master Gregg Ryan around parts of the timber course. Zoe Valvo's Idlehour Stormi Night refused the first fence leaving three in the field. When released to dash to the finish, Mary Motion quickly assumed command with Orpington, and Alex Bazdar made a valiant effort on Orlik but was second best. Madeleine Lohr won the large pony race but was no match for the horses.