

Orange County Hunt Point to Point 3-28-2010

This has been a season when the point to point circuit has been at the mercy of Mother Nature. Even though the skies threatened rain throughout the day, it held off until after the Orange County Hunt Point to Point was run on Sunday, March 28 at Locust Hill Farm near Middleburg. With three point to points in the Mid Atlantic and one sanctioned meet in South Carolina over the weekend, entries were spread a little thin. But the sport at Orange County was good, and the race with the smallest field may have been the most exciting.

Only two horses went to the start for the George L. Ohrstrom Memorial open timber race, and last year's winner, Mrs. Magalen Bryant's Erin Go Bragh (NZ) was certainly a short priced favorite. He is a multiple stakes winner over timber; and his opposition, Northwoods Stable's Battle Op, was a winner in two point to point timber races in 2008.

In the race Chris Read put Battle Op on top and dictated the pace. Jeff Murphy had Erin Go Bragh (NZ) in what seemed like a perfect spot never more than two or three lengths off the lead. When they turned for home with one fence to jump, Murphy made his move. Erin Go Bragh (NZ) joined Battle Op at the last and after landing took the lead briefly, but Read asked Battle Op to come back again and he did. They battled to the wire with Battle Op scoring the upset by a head. Regina Welsh trained the winner.

The co-featured Locust Hill open hurdle race attracted a strong six horse field that included four 2009 sanctioned winners. Point to point winner, Celtic Venture Stable's Zulla Road went to the lead at once under Tom Foley. Liam McVicar placed Randleston Farm's Irish-bred So Amazing in a stalking position and with a mile to go took the lead as Zulla Road faded. From that point to the finish no one threatened So Amazing (Ire), and he won by 2 1/2 lengths over Augustin Stables' Rainiero (Chi), who came flying in the final furlong under Matt McCarron. Rainiero's rally fell short as he ran out of ground. This win capped a great weekend for Randleston Farm and trainer Jimmy Day. At Camden on Saturday they won the \$75,000 Carolina Cup Stake with Spy In The Sky, Paddy Young up.

Leading novice rider, Sam Cockburn, continued to show good form winning the amateur/novice rider hurdle race on Aylor Racing Stable's Harry's Crown. Trainer Pete Aylor is holding a hot hand winning races at a brisk pace. Harry's Crown had won on the flat at Bull Run, and Cockburn had won that point to point's amateur/novice race on Aylor's Meshwaar.

At Orange County W. Gary Baker's Marino Feliz (Chi) (Ben Garner) set the pace and was still going well with a half mile to run. Harry's Crown had forced the pace throughout; and when Marino Feliz (Chi) started to shorten strides, Cockburn went to the front. Jake Dunning's Church Ghost (Muiris Hinchion) rallied for second in the three horse field but was no threat to the winner, who scored by 3 1/2 lengths.

Eight horses went to the post in the first of two maiden hurdle races on the card. The winner, Woodslane Farm LLC's Lion's Double (Willie Dowling) raced in the middle of the field most of the first time around, but he was well within striking distance. He started to make his move with six furlongs to run and joined North Wales, LLC's Preachers Pulpit (Jeff Murphy) on the front end with a quarter of a mile to run. Lion's Double put Preachers Pulpit way as they turned for home and held off Kinross Farm's Poplar Grove (Matt McCarron) winning by 1 length. Jack Fisher was the winning trainer.

The restricted maiden hurdle race went to Mrs. Magalen Bryant's Moto Cat, who was ridden by Jeff Murphy and trained by Doug Fout. Moto Cat was never far off the pace that was set by Matt McCarron on Kinross Farm's Old Timer. With a quarter mile to run, Murphy sent Moto Cat to the front and he drew away to win by 2 1/2 lengths over Old Timer. Mrs. Bryant owns Locust Hill Farm where the race are run so this was certainly a win for the home team. In fact this was their second win on the card.

Earlier in the day, Mrs. Bryant's Ptarmigan had won the first division of the novice rider flat race with leading novice flat rider Ben Garner aboard. Ptarmigan made most of the running on the front end and turned back Don Yovanovich's Indian War (Muiris Hinchion), who threatened in the stretch. The final margin was a half length.

Ben Garner won the second division on Mary Fleming Finlay's Hey Doctor. Mrs. Finlay is the chairman of the Orange County Point to Point so this was a popular win. Trainer Dot Smithwick had saddled Hey Doctor to win the novice timber race at Bull Run last week and had him ready to go a week later on the flat. Don Yovanovich's Cat Walkin set much of the early pace under Muiris Hinchion and held on well when Hey Doctor went to the front with six furlongs to run. Cat Walkin came back again to challenge at the head of the stretch, but Hey Doctor responded and beat him to the wire by 2 1/2 lengths.

The novice timber race also went to a stable with Orange County connections. Local trainer Richard Valentine won his third race on the circuit this year when Matt McCarron guided Anna Stable's Fond Of A Drop (GB) to a come from behind win. Rosbrian Farm's Like A Bee (Ire) set the early pace under Tom Foley, but Chris Read took the lead on Kinross Farm's Ordered To Listen with a half mile to run. Ordered To Listen led over the last fence, but couldn't hold off Fond Of A Drop (GB), who rallied from off the pace to win by 1 1/2 lengths.

The first two races were for novice foxhunter riders, who followed Master Gregg Ryan in two field master chases. In the junior division Mary Motion had her Orpington in a perfect spot to sprint to the lead when the field was released at the head of the stretch. Alex Bazdar tried to make up ground with Orlik, but they were second best. Orpington won by 4 lengths and continues undefeated in seven starts in junior field masters chases.

A two horse field followed Greg Ryan in the senior field masters chase. When released, Erika Beck went to the front on Rusty Cline's Company Man and Bryan McDonald on Mega Tsunami had to settle for second 1 1/2 lengths in Company Man's wake.