

Piedmont Fox Hounds Point to Point

The Salem Course near Upperville is a true cross country point to point course. The races are run over hills and through dales jumping the Piedmont Fox Hounds' hunt country of stone walls, planks and rails. This meet is always a favorite for horsemen, and the beautiful spring weather with temperatures in the mid 70's brought out a good crowd eager to rid themselves of the winter doldrums. Saturday, March 20 happened to be the first day of spring, and it was the cure for what has ailed all of us.

The feature race is the traditional Rokeby Challenge Bowl that always attracts a top field of timber horses; and when entries closed, the field of eight included four sanctioned winners. One of these was Robert Kinsley's Incomplete, who had won this race the past two years and would make history with a third win. Alas, this was not to be as Incomplete was scratched as well as his stablemate, Askim, a former winner of the Maryland Hunt Cup. The five that remained after scratches, however, still included NSA winners - Augustin Stables' Irish-bred Radio Flyer and Irvin Naylor's Hot Springs and multiple point to point winner, Indian Run Farm's Endless Mountain.

When Graham Alcock dropped the flag in the Rokeby Bowl, it didn't take Michael Harris long to send Pan Adam to a big lead. Endless Mountain (Ben Garner) and Radio Flyer (Gus Brown) were kept off the pace and ran most of the way together. When the field came back into view from the east end of the course, Pan Adam's lead had diminished, but he continued to hold up until the last half mile. At this stage Endless Mountain went to the lead with Radio Flyer close up as well as Hot Springs (Jeff Murphy) and Larry Levy's maiden, Finally Home (Tom Foley). Approaching the last fence, a three horse race had developed for the win as Radio Flyer, Endless Mountain, and Finally Home were racing as a team. Upon landing Radio Flyer started to separate from the others but Endless Mountain and Finally Home still had a chance. Radio Flyer pulled away from Endless Mountain in the stretch and won by 1 3/4 lengths with Finally Home soon to follow in third.

The winning rider, Gus Brown, had retired in the fall of 2004 after an extremely successful career. He was the National Steeplechase Association's leading rider in 2000 and 2001, and he is now going to ride as an amateur with some of the big timber classics as a goal.

There is a saying about "winning the paddock", and Radio Flyer did that as well as winning the race. Trainer Richard Valentine and his staff had him turned out to perfection, and he ran to his looks. The same thing could be said for another Valentine winner, Anna Stable's Irish-bred Music To My Ears, who won the owner rider timber race with George Hundt, Jr. up. In the race, Ken Shreve set the pace on his Cool Fellow. This team had won the Seven Corners Series in 2009, but they had finished second a year ago here at Piedmont to another George Hundt entry, Michele Marieschi (who went on to win the Maryland Hunt Cup).

Cool Fellow led most of the way but Music To My Ears was well within striking distance as was Crypto Cousin (Patrick Cooney). Crypto Cousin made a run at the leader as did Music To My Ears with a quarter mile to run. Crypto Cousin couldn't sustain his rally but Music To My Ears did and took the lead approaching the last fence. In the run in from the last he pulled away to win by three lengths. Cool Fellow finished second and Crypto Cousin was third.

The foxhunters timber race followed and when Darren O'Brien pulled up Tumultuous after the third fence this race became a match race between Aylor Racing Stable's The Mint Bar (Sam Cockburn) and Brandy and Bryan McDonald's Sheisacraftydame (Bryan McDonald). Cockburn set a leisurely pace

with McDonald content to race in his wake. After they jumped the last fence, the pace changed dramatically and The Mint Bar sprinted away to win by 10 lengths.

A year ago Karen Eyle's Brands Hatch put in a winning effort under Jeff Murphy in the maiden timber race, but they had to settle for second place behind Bay Cockburn's I'm Telling. This year they duplicated that winning effort and won the race. Brands Hatch trailed early but started to rally and moved into contention four fences from home. He jumped to the lead at the last with Cary Jackson's Mr. Pike (Jody Petty) and Kinross Farm's Sand Box Rules (Chris Read) close up. Brands Hatch drew away to win by 4 lengths with Mr. Pike taking second and Sand Box Rules third. Jeff Murphy added a fourth place finish over fences later in the day and was the meet's leading rider.

In the lady rider timber race last year, John Pettibone's Antonio Star was the front running winner in a romp under leading lady rider, Diana Gillam. Racing in W. Gary Baker's silks this year, Gillam used similar tactics with the same end result, but Sarah Green made it interesting along the way with Wheatland Farm's Sing and Hoist. Sing and Hoist was tucked in behind Antonio Star most of the race well within striking distance. As they raced to the last, Sing and Hoist threatened to overtake the leader, and these two battled over the fence and into the early stretch. Antonio Star responded to Gillam's pressure, though, and eased away to win by 1 3/4 lengths. Sing and Hoist held on well to finish second, and Natalie Wales finished third on her Pizarro - both rider and horse were making their first starts. Last year's leading trainer, Dot Smithwick was the winning trainer.

There were three flat races on the card and all were run at 1 1/4 miles. Maidens had the first opportunity, and a good eight horse field went under starters orders. Trainer, Teddy Mulligan and rider, Jeff Murphy added a second win to their totals for the day as Ellen Clark's Final Straw came from off the pace to win going away by 4 lengths. Wheatland Farm's Easy Eight (Sarah Green) was second and Peter Jay's Mojave Moose (Jody Petty) was third.

In the open flat race that followed, trainer Charlie McCann put Tom Foley up on Celtic Venture Stable's Zulla Road. He broke well and stalked the early leader, Don Yovanovich's In No Time (Diana Gillam). Zulla Road assumed command with three furlongs to run and won easily by 4 1/2 lengths. Randleston Farm's Spy In The Sky (Liam McVicar) rallied for second and Tom Hulfish's What A Warrior (Ben Garner) finished third.

Diana Gillam added a second win on the card in the last race, the VHBPA flat race for Virginia-bred or sired horses. When the flag dropped, she sent Don Yovanovich's Over The Lea to the front, and that's where they stayed. The final margin was an easy 8 lengths over Northfield Farm LLC's Expel (Jeff Murphy), and Randy Rouse's Black Tie Knight (Tom Foley) took home the show money.