

Warrenton Hunt Point to Point 3-13-2010

The severity of the winter delayed the start of the season as the Casanova Hunt Point to Point was canceled and the Blue Ridge Hunt Point to Point was postponed to May 2. In order to get racing under way in Virginia, we have had to deal with what I've named the "double whammy" - the recession and the record amounts of snow. Unfortunately the Warrenton Hunt Point to Point on March 13 at the Airlie Race Course had to deal with a third "whammy" - rain, rain and more rain. Warrenton always attracts good fields of quality horses, and after entries were taken it was clear that the first two whammies had done their damage. The entries were off by about 30 %, and that was just the start. Late in the week weather forecasts promised three to five inches of rain; and even though the actual rain was less, the damage had been done. The sixty two entries shrank to twenty five runners. The race committee did a great job preparing the course after our impossible winter and certainly did not deserve the rain on top of everything else. But the show did go on, and the first point to point this season is now history.

Trainer Jimmy Day brought five horses from Millwood, Va. and went home with four trophies. Three of these races were over fences and in each case veteran Carl Rafter got the call. Day's two flat entries were in the novice rider races, and he named Sarah O'Brien and Muiris Hinchion on them.

The first three races were match races, and in these two horse events the horse that sets the pace usually has the advantage. That fact didn't escape Rafter as in each case he dictated the pace and used his horses only as much as was necessary on the soft ground that quickly turned to deep going after a few races.

In the first race for maidens over the shortened 1 3/4 mile hurdle course, Randleston Farm's Diamond Fever faced off against Warren Owens' Xoxoxo. Novice rider, Sam Cockburn got Xoxoxo away well at the start and had the lead in the early stages, but it didn't take long for Carl Rafter to put Diamond Fever on the front end. From this position he could control the pace and even though Xoxoxo ran on even terms until the last, the result never seemed in doubt. From the last to the wire, Rafter let out a notch and drew away to an easier win than the 1/2 length margin would indicate.

The second race was over the same course and was for restricted maidens. A restricted maiden is a horse that has not started over hurdles prior to this season, and a field of two came under starters orders. Carl Rafter once again assumed pace setting duties on Bruce Smart's Better Than Even. At times Scarlet Lovett on FoxxView Farm's Attention Deficit challenged for the lead but once again Rafter chose the pace and the result. With a half mile to run he and Better Than Even separated from Attention Deficit and won handily by 3 lengths. Attention Deficit and his rider were making their initial starts over fences, and they got some valuable experience in a small field.

The third race was part of the Pageland hurdle series restricted to riders that are amateurs or novices riding over fences. The two riders in this race easily qualified as between them they had won one race in 9 starts over fences, and all of these statistics belonged to Sam Cockburn, who had won in this series last year at Casanova on Old Fellow (Arg). Jamey Price was making his first start over fences on Carrington Racing Stable's Bold Turn. Price has been riding in flat races since 2005, with nine winning efforts. Bold Turn has won twice over fences and has been ridden in flat races by Jamey Price, but this was their first time together over hurdles. Aylor Racing Stable's Meshwaar, Cockburn's mount, has made

23 starts over fences with one win and eight second place finishes at point to points and sanctioned races.

In the race Jamey Price did a great imitation of Carl Rafter as he assumed command at the break and held that position throughout. Meshwaar raced within striking distance, but Bold Turn had an answer each time Meshwaar threatened. Meshwaar was under pressure to overhaul Bold Turn in the stretch but to no avail. Former leading rider, Arch Kingsley, Jr., trained the winner.

The next three races were walkovers, which normally only require that the lone starter go to the head of the stretch and gallop across the finish line. In each case at Warrenton a new twist was added to the normal routine. In the fourth race, the Airlie open hurdle race, Jimmy Day sent Randleston Farm's So Amazing out for more than a trophy. Under Carl Rafter, So Amazing schooled around the course and got a valuable work. The race wasn't timed, but Rafter felt that this was the fastest race of the day.

The two walkover winners over timber chose to school over the fence at the head of the stretch before galloping across the finish line unopposed. Patrick Cooney rode his Crypto Cousin in the owner rider timber race, and Michael Harris was up on Pan Adam to take home the Springs Valley trophy in the open timber race.

The one and one half mile novice rider flat race was split into two divisions, and finally starter Graham Alcock had more than two horses at the start as each division had "big" six horse fields. In the first division Jimmy Day was sending out his fourth starter looking to extend his winning streak. Day put Sarah O'Brien up on Bruce Smart's Heart O Plenty, and for the first time all day a rider chose to come from off the pace with success. When the field went out of sight with a half mile to run Ben Garner was leading as he had from the start on Gary Baker's timber star, Antonio Star. O'Brien had kept Heart o Plenty in the middle of the field to that point; but when they came back into sight with less than a quarter mile to run O'Brien had made a bold and winning move. They veered a bit at the head of the stretch while leading but corrected that mistake and went on to a two length victory.

Day had another chance to add one more win in the second division. This time Muiris Hinchion got a leg up on Randleston Farm's Officer Pepper. As his stablemate had done in the first division, he was rated off the early pace. Scarlett Lovett sent FoxxView Farm's Untamed Hero to the early lead, but with a mile to run Ben Garner put Indian Run Farm's Endless Mountain on the lead. He opened up by as many as twelve lengths; and when Hinchion rallied Officer Pepper, it was a case of too little, too late. He made up a ton of ground but not enough. The final margin was a half length with Endless Mountain on the winning end.

Two things come to mind as a result of the races. One is that Jimmy Day has done a great job getting his stable ready to run under adverse conditions. The other is that Dot Smithwick, as well, has her stable ready to go. Antonio Star and Endless Mountain are multiple winners over timber, and their efforts on Saturday would indicate their fitness for upcoming engagements over fences.

Pennsylvanian Ricky Hendriks has found a home away from home in recent years for two Virginia-bred flat horses that he trains. Debra Kachel's Dixie Colony and Liza Hendriks' Love Colony were both bred by Mrs. C. Oliver Iselin, III from Middleburg and were entered in the \$2,000 seven furlong Virginia Horsemen's Benevolent and Protective Association race at Warrenton. Both of the Hendriks horses had won the \$20,000 Old Dominion Turf Championship for Virginia-breds at Great Meadow - Love Colony in 2009 and Dixie Colony in 2006. Hendriks scratched Love Colony but left Dixie Colony in with Jake Chalfin up. Dixie Colony had won this race in 2006, and duplicated that effort. Chalfin sent him

to the lead at the get go and was never headed. Randy Rouse's Protocol Chief and Tom Foley threatened with a half mile to run, but tired. Mary Fleming Finlay's Hey Doctor also made a run at him at the head of the stretch, but Chalfin had a little extra for the run to the wire and won by two lengths.