

Back Stretch

Continued from page 6

direct ratio to the decline of the Thoroughbred sport, even in Germany.

NOT IN U.K.

"On the other hand, trotters have made but little progress in the British Isles, where the traditional equine sports medium is of course, the Thoroughbred. There are a few enthusiasts, and even fewer in Ireland where the one track, outside Dublin, attracts a few hundred at most. This track is of poor quality, I hasten to add. The spectacle of rider, horse and sulky lying in the ditch provides some locals with a quota of laughs on occasion! On balance, however, can we view with equanimity that in several countries the trotter has virtually replaced the runner? From my viewpoint, there is no connecting economic link between the trotting sports. Therefore, any gain by equine sports is a corresponding loss to the other. This is not so with other forms, as with quarter-racing, for example, and I am aware that several present Thoroughbred owners graduated from the short name.

ECONOMIC FACTORS

"It seems clear that several economic — perhaps social — factors are at work towards the trend I write of. The trotter is cheaper to buy, condition, and maintain than the Thoroughbred. He is about one-third cheaper. The trotter is usually a quiet sound disposition, not nearly as highly strung (or unmanageable) as so many race horses. He is found suitable for many outside duties, farm work and the like, and stands up to hard work. They are graduated to race from 500 yards to 2 miles and up. "Again, the prices expected for Thoroughbred stock has forced out many former enthusiasts among the smaller groups, who have turned to the competitor sport. The prices of trotting stock, even of the highest quality, is now comparatively low and within reach of the common man. With more owners and breeders coming into the sport, and with a good public reaction, it is not hard to figure why the game is progressing. Purses are rising and the chances of any individual owner making money is good. Can the same be said of the average Thoroughbred owner or breeder?"

As evidence of what the above writer states we give some particulars from a recent release by Jim Harrison, Publicity Director of the U.S. Trotting Association. "Harness racing attendance and pari-mutuel handle reached record highs in 1956 and the 12 states which permit wagering on the trotters and pacers shared in the bonanza according to the U.S. Trotting Association reported recently. The USTA said attendance rose 2.8 per cent and handle jumped 12.2 per cent while revenue to the states was up 10.9 per cent. Attendance climbed from 10,242,078 to 10,533,133; pari-mutuel handle was up from \$476,628,009 to \$534,857,847 and state revenue rose from \$34,342,535 to \$38,074,639. All figured were new national records.

ATTENDANCE UP

The attendance figure was further bolstered by the inclusion of an estimated 9,000,000 fans who watched harness racing at more than 300 county fair tracks. Total harness racing attendance, thus, is just short of the 20 million mark. Attendance was up in eight of the 12 states, handle increased in nine and the state revenue was ahead in 10. Numerical highs were established in New York State but better percentage increases were noted in other states. Top percentage jumps were in New Jersey which registered a 23.4 per cent increase in attendance and a 31.1 per cent increase in both wagering and state revenue.

The only states which did not show an increase in at least one of the three categories were Louisiana and Kentucky. In each of these states the number of racing days was less than a year ago. Second highest attendance increase was in Delaware which registered a 13.8 per cent gain. Illinois was second in the percentage increase column for both handle and state revenue with a 15.4 per cent jump in attendance, handle and state revenue were reported in California, Delaware, Illinois, Maine, Michigan, New Jersey, New York and Ohio. Attendance 2 per cent in each instance in Maryland while state revenue rose and Massachusetts was off 6.9 per cent in attendance, though up 11.33 per cent in handle and state revenue. Attendance in the Maritime Provinces is estimated as 900,000 persons and the amount paid out in purses was \$445,826.

The many friends of Blair Andrew, New Glasgow, will be glad to learn that he is pretty well recovered from the bad accident he had in a race in Saint John last fall. Blair had a splendid record as a driver there and also as a good sportsman, being well regarded by the public, the management and the competing horsemen. Blair states that during the season he drove Earl Forbes of Hills 2:09 2-5, Tom Dax 2:12 4-5, Danny Dale Boy 2:11 2-5, Wayne Bannery 2:11, W.C. Brook 2:14 2-5, Mr. Lee Chips 2:15, Allen Spence 2:03 1-3, Crusader Chief 2:09 4-5, Bayona Hanover 2:11 4-5 and Top Royal 2:11 1-5 and had 42 firsts with them, a record which Mr. Andrew can feel proud of.

ICE RACING

With the extremely cold weather, excellent ice is being made near ponds and above the North River Causeway and in a short time we should be able to do some stepping over the ice. This brings back to mind the days of long ago when an ice racing club functioned in Charlottetown and regular race meets were held throughout the winter months. A lot of good trotters and pacers

were discovered in that way, in fact that was the way I got my first winner, Iona Girl. I had what I thought was a good prospect stepping along nicely on the ice when a tall, slim looking mare went by me just as if I was tied. I followed the sleigh across to the owner's home and bought the 4-year-old Iona Girl from Duncan Robinson. She had a lot of speed and it was with her I made my first venture as a reinsman.

The late Hammond Kelly and I went to New Glasgow for the 24th of May, 1911 races. I drew a back tier and didn't get anywhere but perhaps it was just as well because I didn't know anything about driving. My next start was in Summerside where the spokes were torn out of my wheel and I landed on the track and the mare ran away. Parker Hooper was then in his prime as a Maritime quarter mile runner and it was Parker who taught Iona Girl and brought her back to the stables. My next venture was in Hallifax at the mid-summer races held in August. The only class I could get into was the 2:22 pace and there were three horses with records of around 2:19 1/4 to 2:20 1/4 in it and others with records better than 2:23.

I drew trailing position and instead of trailing the pole horse I trailed the center horse and it was just as well as three horses went down on the first turn and I scooted around and won the dash and also the next two and gave her a record of 2:20 1/4. I also won at Moncton and had other wins. That gave me confidence and the next year I had a good stable and in 1914 was leading driver at the Nova Scotia Exhibition, the biggest meet in the Maritimes, so I have happy memories of ice racing, my stable holding world's records for half a mile and still hold the world's record for a mile trotting on a half-mile track made by the Yank at Mount Clements, Michigan, Jan. 24, 1924, with Ernie McTague driving.

Fred Lahey of Dartmouth who has always taken great interest in ice racing, is putting on an international ice race meet over Dartmouth Lakes on February 9th and 10th. It will be featured by an International Free For All Trot and an International Free For All Pace, each for a purse of \$1,000, and there will be other classes to suit slower contestants. The meet will be under the auspices of the Eastern Driving Club and given decent weather conditions should be a great success. He understands that there is a possibility of Angli Allen and William Fleming coming down to take part.

Ben White Raceway, the world's largest training center for harness race horses, has become once again the winter home for horses and men who have made the Raceway and Orlando famous throughout the world. Here in this neatly manicured Fairview Park will be some 500 horses from the U.S. and Canada. With them is a sizeable colony of caretakers, trainers, owners and a group that caters to their particular needs. Visitors to this key attraction in Orlando will enjoy viewing some of the world's greatest harness horses; horses that are champions on the basis of speed and money winnings. Here, too, are yearling colts purchased this past fall and headed for their first season of racing in the summer of 1957. Some of these colts should be gold-plated, judging by their sale price. The highest priced yearling in Orlando this season is Meadow Bucky, a \$34,000 purchase in the John Simpson stable.

The three Raceway tracks are filled with the drama of preparing these yearlings for the track spotlight now, there is much speed on tap for the rail bird. That comes later. However, the yearlings provide lots of excitement and a good bit of comedy. They are gawky, awkward, and unpredictable. The casual Raceway visitor should enjoy watching these future race track stars begin their education at Ben White Raceway.

In 1938, when Billy Direct paced a mile in 1:55 and Greyhound trotted in 1:55 1/4, jubilant harness horse breeders were predicting "a 1:50 mile in the not too distant future." However, in the decade since then about 100,000 harness horses have been foaled and most have gone to the races. Yet only one — Adios Harry 1:55 — has cracked the 1:56 mark, and very few have been able to better 1:58. Some spectacular pacer may come along within a few years and hang out a record better than that of 1:55. If a trotter may obliterate the 1:56 mark, but that is almost as remote as a small star that is 1:50,000,000 light year away.

The first trotting record to the high wheeled sulky was 2:29 1/4, by Lady Suffolk, in 1845. The last high wheeler record was 2:08 1/4, by Sunol, in 1891. Thus, during 46 years of old-style sulky racing, the mark for the mile was bettered only 21 1/4 seconds, or around one-half of a second for an annual average.

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