

California-Breds Prove Worthy of the Challenge

by RUDI GROOTHEDDE

That the inaugural NTRA Great State Challenge was going to be a day to remember was always on the cards. That it would have some teething problems was also never in doubt. So, when Saturday, December 7, came along, all those involved in this unique state versus state challenge comprising six races worth a maximum of \$1.65 million in purses, that was four years in the making, could have been excused for being just a little bit nervous about the outcome.

Yet, only a few hours after the opening flag-carrying ceremonies were concluded, everyone could proudly hold their heads up high for being a part of something that can only benefit the racing industry in the years to come. Hosts Sam Houston Race Park were applauded for doing such a marvelous job in ensuring that the event was a success, especially when it came to the day's live and all-source handle figures which achieved record numbers of over \$5 million and over \$5.6 million, respectively.

Granted, the final crowd of just over 12,000 was a little below what had been hoped for, but as track President and General Manager Robert L. Bork proudly declared, "This was an incredible day for Sam Houston Race Park. We knew that our track surfaces

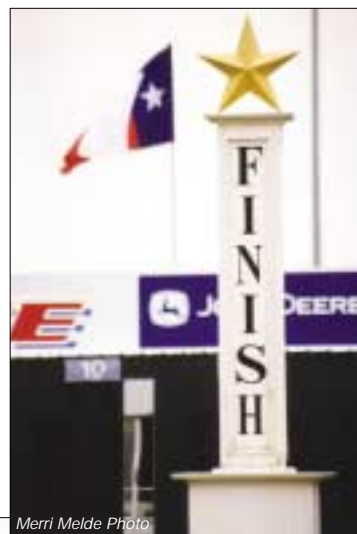
and facility would be well regarded by national horsemen and have received compliments from members of each participating state."

Additionally, even though the Kentucky-breds won the overall points competition, at least it was not a walkover. The Bluegrass state and Maryland both scored a win, while California and Florida each had a couple of victories. In fact, going into the last event it was Florida who actually held the lead but with no runners in the Classic to improve on its two previous

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winners of the day, the sunshine state thus was destined to finish as the runner-up in the contest.

Furthermore, the final race of the day would prove to be the crowning glory for the golden state of California, for even though we had ended up with just four runners in three races, Continental Red came through with an exciting victory that more than matched fel-

low California-bred Crackup's exhilarating triumph in the Juvenile earlier in the afternoon.

Crack Cal-Bred

After Miss Nicolie, the Ron Gomez homebred who had won the Generous Portion Stakes back in September, finished an indistinguishable seventh to the Florida-bred Elegant Designer in the \$214,000 Juvenile Fillies, the pressure mounted for California's duo of representatives to excel in the 10-horse field of the Juvenile. Both Only the Best and Crackup were coming off impressive wins in the Sunny Slope Stakes (six furlongs) and California Cup Juvenile Stakes (1 1/16 miles),

respectively, but it was the former who went to post as the 2-5 favorite to snare this 7-furlong event.

Yet it was Crackup, with Tyler Baze in the

irons, who came away with the spoils when he burst clear of the pack in the middle of the stretch to record a 1 1/4-length victory over Supah Blitz, while Only the Best faded to finish sixth after showing his usual customary speed. With his \$150,000 share of the purse, Crackup increased his

bankroll to \$274,828 from a record of 5-3-1-1, all earned in less than four months of racing in the silks of his owner, Stan Fulton.

Bred by Brian Boudreau's Malibu Valley Farms Inc., in partnership with Arthur and Mary Alisi, Crackup is a son of leading freshman sire Distorted Humor out of the Habitony (GB) mare, Lightly Go Lightly, an unraced half-sister to the stakes winner, Princess Afleet. For Crackup, it now may well be on to the \$250,000 Sunshine Millions Dash at Gulfstream Park on Jan. 25, if the words of his trainer Rafael Becera are anything to go by. He concluded that, "The horse has a lot of talent. I was worried about the speed but he had no problems. I am very happy to have Stan Fulton's horses and hope to do more with him in the future."

Classic Continental

With a win under their belt, the expectations of the California contingent had been somewhat satisfied, and there was more good news on the way. Even though it was a bit disappointing for them to have only one more runner for the day, he was a promising one in the guise of Continental Red. This imposing chestnut came into the 1 1/8-mile Classic, the last of the six headline races on the program, already boasting a banner year but still thirsting for more.

In fact, in the lead up to this big day there had been much conjecture as to whether the 6-year-old gelding would opt for this race on the dirt or tackle the Turf. That was because he had to his name only one start on the main track since April Fool's Day 2001, namely his most recent when he went down admirably to Calkins Road by a mere head in the California Cup Classic at Santa Anita Park on Nov. 2.

His eight previous starts of last year

had produced a grade II win and five other graded stakes placings, including a third-place finish in a grade I event, but all of these had been on the grass. So, a possible win in Houston by Continental Red was probably hoped for, more than expected, by the home-bred's popular and respected connections, California Thoroughbred Breeders Association (CTBA) President Wes

coming together with no particular blame being attributed to any single one of them

Brian Lynch saddled Continental Red on behalf of the horse's regular trainer Ian Jory who, due to a herniated disc, had to unfortunately watch his charge take the honors from back home in California. With the \$120,000 winner's share of the \$210,500 purse, lower than the advertised \$275,00 because only six horses (including an entry) went to post, Continental Red upped his lifetime earnings to \$830,853 from a hard-knocking and consistent record

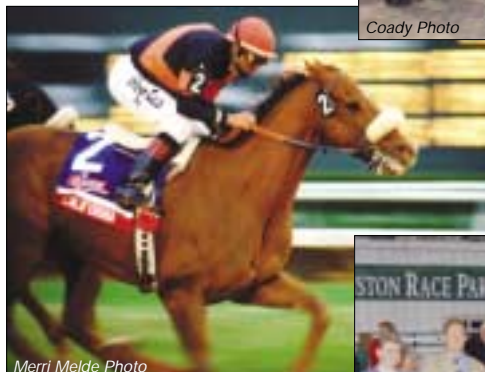


Henna Haroon/Coady Photo

Crackup—NTRA Great State Challenge Juvenile—Dec. 7, 2002



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Continental Red—NTRA Great State Challenge Classic—Dec. 7, 2002

of 46-6-9-10. And, like Crackup, the Sunshine Millions—Turf or Classic, in his case—certainly beckons on the horizon.

So, as dusk turned to night at an

Fitzpatrick and wife Sharon.

At the end of the day, though, jockey Pat Valenzuela and the son of Flying Continental (Harris Farms) out of Sharp Looking Lady, by Glaros (Fr), carried the distinctive black and orange silks of the Fitzpatricks to a one-length victory over Pass Rush. However, he did have to survive both a stewards' inquiry and rider objection, but the result stood when it was decided that the bumping he was involved in the stretch was just a case of horses



Coady Photo

event that had also brought together leading trainers like Steve Asmussen and Scott Lake, influential owners of the stature of Richard Englander and Robert McNair, and horses of the caliber of Take Charge Lady and Forbidden Apple, to name but a few, the air was filled with the sounds of success as well as the promise of even greater things to come.