

GUEST FORUM

Spending the Summer with Seabiscuit CARF and CTBA Working Together on a Seabiscuit Summer Marketing Theme

by **CHRISTOPHER KORBY**

The California Authority of Racing Fairs (CARF) and the California Thoroughbred Breeders Association (CTBA) have renewed a long-standing spirit of cooperation by working together this year on a Seabiscuit theme for promoting the fair circuit in Northern California this summer.

Fairs are the cradle of horse racing in California, with a long tradition going back 150 years ago to the days of the Gold Rush. Just consider some of these inaugural dates: San Joaquin County Fair in 1852; California State Fair in 1854; Alameda County Fair in 1854; and Fresno District Fair in 1884. Horse racing and the Fairs share a common heritage which is deeply woven into California's social life, history and tradition.

Both the local fairs and Thoroughbred breeders share an old and important historical association. In 1933, cooperation between them was instrumental in assuring passage of the referendum approving pari-mutuel wagering. That referendum laid the foundation for modern horse racing in California.

The California fairs and the Thoroughbred breeding industry also share an agricultural heritage. The former have deep roots in agriculture, while the breeding industry is the agricultural foundation of the racing industry. With that connection in mind, we worked together with CTBA last year on an educational exhibit that traveled to the Northern California racing fairs. In the course of planning displays for that exhibit, Doug Burge, the Executive Director of CTBA, mentioned that the family of Charles Howard, the owner of Seabiscuit, had donated a significant collection of photos, trophies and memorabilia to the California Thoroughbred Foundation (CTF). This fine collection resides in the CTBA's Carleton F. Burke Memorial Library in Arcadia.

CARF and CTBA Working Together

When we began planning for our 2003 summer racing at the fairs, we recognized that the interest generated by the release of the *Seabiscuit* motion picture, scheduled for July 25, would create a unique opportunity to reach out to new fans. We were looking for a signature theme or image that would connect to *Seabiscuit* and tie back to the breeding industry to reinforce the connection to agriculture. Remembering the earlier conversations with Doug, a visit to the CTBA archives uncovered a perfect image that hit all the marks—a Howard family Christmas card photo, *Seabiscuit at Ridgewood Ranch with his First Little Biscuits*.

The photo was taken in Northern California, at the Howards' Ridgewood Ranch in Willits, circa 1940. For us, the image connects all the themes we wanted to establish. It links this famous horse to the breeding industry, the agricultural foundation of the racing industry, and connects to the long heritage of racing in Northern California. It

even strikes a chord with the underlying family values that are so much a part of the fairs' tradition. We knew then and there that we had the anchor image that would connect our marketing and promotions themes for the summer of 2003. CTBA generously offered to allow us to use it in any way that would promote California racing.

Consequently, thanks to this cooperative association with the CTBA, the fairs will be using the Seabiscuit photo for our daily racing program cover, for direct mailings in advance of each fair, and for other promotional considerations. The photo resonates so deeply with other aspects of the Seabiscuit story that it would not surprise us if some of these items become collectibles in their own right.

Reinforcing the Seabiscuit theme, the fairs will be offering Seabiscuit bobble-head give-away days through the course of the summer circuit. Our daily "Win Place Show" promotion, designed to attract fair patrons into the racing grandstand, will also pick up the Seabiscuit theme. We also look forward to working with CTBA again this year on educational displays in each fair grandstand.

The Fairs are Committed to Racing for the Long Term

Over their long history, the fairs have made a continuous commitment to the California racing industry. Nine race-tracks and 23 satellite wagering facilities built by the Fairs, represent a substantial capital investment in horse racing. The

Fairs are proud to be an important part of California's satellite wagering network, the finest in the country. Last year, patrons at our satellites wagered in excess of \$600 million.

In recent years, the Fairs have maintained the financial commitment to build, maintain and improve their racing and satellite wagering facilities. In addition to substantial commitments from each individual fair, the California Department of Food and Agriculture (CDFA), working with CARE, annually re-invests over \$4 million toward improvements at those facilities. Funds are directed to such projects as construction of new satellite wagering facilities and upgrades, race track safety and backstretch improvements.

The fairs have an abiding interest in the continued vitality of racing. Racing is an integral part of their history and tradition. It provides revenues that sustain the fairs' mission of public service, family values and support of agriculture. The fairs are committed to sustain and protect that interest.

So, we hope to see you all at the fairs this summer.



Christopher Korby is the Executive Director of the California Authority of Racing Fairs (CARF). CARF provides technical, administrative and legislative advocacy services on horse racing matters for its 23 member fairs.