

Gulfstream Glows

by RUDI GROOTHEDDE

From the moment that this Californian, who was part of a record crowd of 18,719 people, was greeted by the Brazilian Tropical Review Samba Line at Gulfstream Park's main entrance prior to the day's first post, to the final presentation of the stunning crystal Sunshine Millions Cup to the Florida connections almost five hours later, the inaugural running of this \$3.6 million event on Saturday, Jan. 25, turned out to be an absolute thrill. My first trip to the Sunshine State had been well worth the wait.

Yet my encounter with this event, pitting California-breds against Florida-breds, had begun over 24 hours earlier, when I jetted out from Burbank Airport to its Fort Lauderdale/Hollywood counterpart in anticipation of a great day that lay ahead. I would not be disappointed.

The following morning began for me hours before the gates opened with a trip to the track's backside. The time spent there was most enjoyable, as I made my way from barn to barn mingling with the California contingent of horses, breeders, owners and trainers who had also made the cross-country trip. The weather was cloudy and somewhat chilly but at least it was a little bit warmer than the previous few days had been, or so I was told.

Hours later, I witnessed the start of the richest day of state-bred Thoroughbred racing in history when the \$250,000 Padua Stables Filly and Mare Sprint Stakes ushered in the proceedings. And, what an opener that race turned out to be!

In a most thrilling contest, five of the race's nine runners (all Florida-breds, unfortunately) raced head-to-

head all the way to the wire where they ended up in a blanket finish. At least we did save a bit of face, however, with the winner Madame Pietra boasting substantial Golden State connections, namely owner C. T.

areas. Lest I forget, I also had an invite to the Directors' Room where I met up with MEC (Magna Entertainment Corporation) Chairman Frank Stronach, whom I congratulated for being the brainchild of this successful and groundbreaking event.

Valid Video, by California stallion Valid Wager, just shaded California-bred Excessivepleasure in the \$250,000 Ocala Stud Dash Stakes



Photos by Equi-Photo



At the Sunshine Millions Cup presentation were (left to right): Frank Stronach, Chairman of Magna Entertainment Corporation (MEC), Scott Savin, President and General Manager of Gulfstream Park, Harold Plumley, President of Florida Thoroughbred Breeders Association (FTBOA), and Jack Hammer, Director of the Florida Horsemen's Benevolent and Protective Association (FHBPA)

Grether Inc., trainer Howie Zucker and jockey Pat Valenzuela.

The balance of the afternoon was spent traveling back and forth from the television screens, watching the 'foreign' races back west, to Gulfstream's walking ring, Turf Club and Press Box

Headlining the program was the next race of the day, the \$1 million OBS (Ocala Breeders' Sales Co.) Classic Stakes where we did a little better. Though Best of the Rest and Booklet ran one-two for Florida, the Ridgeley Farm-bred representative Grey Memo produced his customary grandstand finish to be third, less than a length behind this duo.

In the penultimate event, the \$250,000 Ocala Stud Dash Stakes for sophomores, we fared even better when Excessivepleasure was only half a length inferior to Valid Video, who is by California stallion Valid Wager (Tommy Town Thoroughbreds LLC). However, the Florida-breds then completed a sweep over us, both in the last Sunshine Millions race and for the whole day, when Stay Forever visited the winner's circle after the \$350,000 Franks Farm Filly and Mare Turf Stakes.

So, even though the day had turned out as gloomy as the weather for us Californians, it proved to be one filled with wonderful memories to be cherished forever. From the great racing and the \$752,400 that our California-breds took home overall, to the record handles achieved at both Gulfstream and Santa Anita Park, as well as to the parties, competitions and sky-diving/cheerleader performances held coast to coast, the message was simple—the Sunshine Millions is here to stay and it's going to be bigger and better next year, so book your ticket now!