



The Grade California-Breds

by CRAIG HARZMANN

The first time he got an up-close look at Disturbingthepeace, Darrell Vienna was sold. Sure, the bay colt sported a mediocre pedigree, and his first race that spring had left a lot of room for progress. But despite that, the callow 3-year-old still cut a figure that gave the trainer cause for optimism.

"I looked at about a hundred other horses, and he was the horse that stuck in my mind," Vienna recently remembered. "To tell you the truth, he looked like horses I've seen in the winner's circle."

His instinct was dead-on. No one, however—not even Vienna himself—could have predicted just how good the California-bred would turn out to be. As the last and most inexpensive runner included in a five-horse package deal, he arrived at Vienna's barn midway through 2001 with equal parts talent and immaturity. Early on, it was the latter that usually won out. The first time Vienna saddled him, in fact, the son of Bold Badgett attempted to breed a topiary horse in the Hollywood Park paddock. Shortly thereafter—and for obvious reasons—he became a gelding.

It took several months still before Disturbingthepeace's raceday efforts began to resemble his promising morning rehearsals. When he finally did put everything together, everybody paid attention. As a budding 4-year-old, Disturbingthepeace went from not to hot almost instantly, throwing together three wins before his big-time breakthrough in Hollywood's Triple Bend Breeders' Cup Handicap (grade II). Additional victories in Del Mar's Bing Crosby Breeders'

Cup and Pat O'Brien Handicaps (both grade II) eventually gave Disturbingthepeace six straight, and by late summer, the childish horse who had gone just 1-for-9 to start off had suddenly grown into one of the West Coast's premier competitors. His skein made him a logical threat to take the Breeders' Cup Sprint (grade I) in Chicago that October.

Grade II Pat O'Brien Handicap Sunday, August 17, 2003

In its short history, Del Mar's Pat O'Brien Handicap has been won by some of the finest sprinters the West Coast has ever seen. The last decade alone has yielded stylish efforts by Lit de Justice and Alphabet Soup—each a future Breeders' Cup winner—as well as the brilliant but frail-footed El Corredor. No horse, however, ever managed to take the grade II Pat O'Brien twice. That is, until David and Rita Milch and Herrick Racing's Disturbingthepeace turned the trick on Aug. 17.

After a narrow decision a year ago, the son of late sire Bold Badgett easily dispatched nine others this time around, crossing the finish two lengths clear of Rushin' to Altar. Bred by Old English Rancho and Patsy McKuen, the 5-year-old gelding finally snapped a 9-1/2 month losing streak in the seven-furlong Pat O'Brien. The bliss didn't last for long, though. The California-bred cracked a hind sesamoid in early September, according to trainer Darrell Vienna, and won't return until 2004.



And then the wheels began to come off.

"The mistake is, when you win six in a row, that people think you're unbeatable," Vienna remarked. "I think he's one of the tougher sprinters, but sometimes he's going to get beat. Sometimes he's going to get outrun. They act like he fell off the end of the earth."

Disturbingthepeace was swinging for the bleachers, of course, but like a batter in a bad slump, he couldn't connect. Beginning with his Breeders' Cup flop at Arlington Park—"I didn't have much hope the day of the race," Vienna admitted. "He just never took any liking to the track"—the ensuing period was tough for hardcore Disturbingthepeace fans to handle. Another six-race streak,

this of a decidedly different sort, soon began to garner headlines. At face value, the skid insinuated a career free-fall. Vienna, however, scoffs at that idea.

"Here's the difference. Are the six races bad races, or are they races in which he didn't finish first?" he reflected. "Not finishing first doesn't mean a horse ran a bad race. When he gets outrun or he gets defeated because things don't go his way, it doesn't mean it's necessarily a bad race. It means his race didn't do it."

There were, naturally, circumstances that at times played against him. A sloppy track, for example, was apparently his undoing last February in Laurel's General George Handicap (grade II). When Vienna sent Disturbingthepeace overseas the following month for a lucrative turf sprint in Japan, the 5-year-old never found his groove. His attempt at a Bing Crosby defense in July was doomed, too, when he pulled off a hind shoe leaving the starting gate.

It was only a matter of time, though, before he managed to pull it all together once again. His dominant run in August's Pat O'Brien—his second victory in the seven-furlong race—indicated that Disturbingthepeace is indeed still a force to be reckoned with.