



The Grade California-Breds

Bilo: Hats Off To This One

by **LARRY BORTSTEIN**

It was his first grade I victory in nearly 14 years, and Ed Nahem's only regret was that he couldn't be there to enjoy it in person.

When his homebred gelding Bilo captured the \$300,000 Triple Bend Invitational Handicap at Hollywood Park on July 7, Nahem was at his home in Beverly Hills, only one day after a two-week hospital stay.

"I was so sick, they had to fill me full of antibiotics," Nahem said, his voice still sounding weak several days after the upset victory by his seven-year-old dark bay or brown son of Bertrando, out of the Devil's Bag mare Raffle's Bag.

Bertrando, a California-bred champion at two, three and four and voted an Eclipse Award as North America's top older male as a four-year-old in 1993, was the best horse ever owned by Nahem.

Bilo's Triple Bend win was Nahem's first grade I triumph since Bertrando captured the grade I Woodward Stakes at Belmont Park on Sept. 18, 1993—four weeks after the colt captured the grade I Pacific Classic at the Del Mar Thoroughbred Club.

Nahem's imprint was all over Bilo's Triple Bend triumph by a head in 1:21.65 under Joseph Talamo.

The runner-up in a field of seven sprinters was 8-5 favorite Surf Cat, who was making his first start since winning the Mervyn LeRoy Handicap 14 months earlier.

"The horse was nominated for an easier spot, but Eddie wanted to run in the Triple Bend," recalled Marty Jones, who has trained for Nahem for nine years.

Nahem also chose to put Talamo on his horse for the first time and the sensational 17-year-old Louisiana-born rider, who was scheduled to lose his apprentice allowance at Del Mar on July 21, turned in a masterful ride.

Talamo refers to Nahem as "Uncle Hat" because the retired international art dealer has a colorful collection of headwear.

"Uncle Hat told me he wanted me to take this horse to the rail no matter how fast they were going," Talamo said. "He said this horse ran big every time he was on the rail, so that's what I tried to do."

"In the stretch, the horse was switching back to his left lead and I was kind of worried. That's why I was hitting him left-handed. But he's got such a big heart for such an old guy."

Bilo's victory was not only his first in a grade I race, but his first stakes success overall and sixth triumph in 14 career starts. He didn't even begin his racing career until he was four and didn't race at all in 2006.

"He's always had talent," Jones said, "but he's had physical problems, too, bone and leg problems. The Cushion Track has really helped him."

"He just came up to this race really good and ready to run," Jones said after the seven-furlong Triple Bend. "He's the kind of horse that will not let you by if he gets to the rail."

Bilo is the 22nd Cal-bred to win the Triple Bend, which has been run 56 times, and the second gelded son of Bertrando to win the race in the last three years. Unfurl the Flag, out of the Storm Cat mare Escape the Storm, won in 2005.

Bertrando, who stands at River Edge Farm in Buelton, California, has now sired three grade I winners. The first was Officer, who won the 2001 Champagne Stakes at Belmont.

Raffle's Bag, by the 1983 two-year-old Eclipse champion, was unplaced in her only start. Now 18, she was owned by Nahem and boarded at Ridgeley Farm in Hemet, California, until last year. She is now in Korea. 🐾

Grade I Triple Bend Handicap—Hollywood Park—Saturday, July 7, 2007



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