



A Grand Day on The Prairie



Oklahoma's first major racetrack opened September 1 with much celebration, an absence of mishaps, and a visible assortment of Texas winners

Texas Thoroughbreds made their presence known at the grand opening of Oklahoma's brand-new \$94 million Remington Park Race-track, when two Texas-breds and a Texas-owned horse captured three of the historic day's nine races.

September 1 was sunny and warm in Oklahoma City, matching the collective mood of the more than 15,000 fans who went through the turn-styles to subsequently wager \$1,258,757. Jazz bands serenaded patrons as they entered the main gates, a dignified color guard launched the first post parade, Charley Pride sang the national anthem, and the Central State Band offered a rousing rendition of "Oklahoma." With all the ceremony and celebration, even many of the non-Oklahomans in attendance could not help but feel nearly as excited as the state's residents who had waited a

Story & Photos
By ANNE LANG

long time for this, their first "major facility" racetrack since the Sooner State approved pari-mutuel racing in 1982.

The opening day card began with the featured race, the \$25,000-added Remington Park Inaugural Handicap for Oklahoma-bred or foaled horses three years old and up. Fourteen horses broke from the gate for the mile and 70-yard contest over the greatly publicized all-weather racetrack surface, Equitrack. At the wire it was 26-1 longshot Bold Les by six lengths in an unremarkable 1:43.2 with Buddy Winnett aboard. The Mark Holder-trained son of Bold Clarion is owned and bred by Oklahoman James Willms, who col-

lected \$19,980 for the win. Second by a head was Northern Writer; third by one length was the not-so-lucky favorite, Lucky Salvation.

The second race of the day was won by Texas-bred Time Waster (Spread The Rumor/Clare K) owned and bred by Ran Ricks Jr. of Oklahoma City. The three-year-old Steve Hobby trainee covered six furlongs in 1:13.2 under veteran David Whited. Another Texas-bred, Sea Oh Say (Rig Up/Royal Say), won the ninth race, for fillies and mares. Her time for the 1 1/16-mile event was 1:49.1. Oklahoma City resident Lloyd Schultz is the owner/breeder; Qyet Bui rode the five-year-old mare to a 2 1/4-length victory.

The third Texas link of the day occurred in the fifth race, also for fillies and mares, when Odessa resident H. Loyd Woodward's six-year-old Rene's Queen came from last



Texas-bred winner Sea Oh Say (Rig Up/Royal Say)



Texas Racing Commissioner Demarious Frey DVM



Texas-owned winner Rene's Queen



Jack Van Berg, top trainer (and TTBA Life Member)

place (through the ¾-pole) to win by a neck. The daughter of *Advocator* clocked the six furlongs in 1:14.1 under Glenn Murphy. Doyal Roberts saddled the mare.

Numerous other Texas-bred and Texas-owned horses were sprinkled throughout the day's card; several finished in the money.

Despite the extra adrenalin surge the horses might have experienced due to the highly-charged opening day atmosphere, none of the winning times were extraordinary, even though morning workouts had been consistently fast since the day the track opened for training on August 1. However, Remington Park's track superintendent Dennis Moore upheld the Equitrack surface's virtues in a press conference following the final race.

"I've heard a few negatives [about Equitrack], but many more positives. The times may have been slow today, but they were safe — and that's the main thing," Moore said, alluding to Equitrack's proven capacity (due to its all-weather durability) of helping reduce the risk of horses slipping and falling.

"It's going to revolutionize horse racing," Moore predicted.

(Remington Park is the first racetrack in the world to conduct racing on Equitrack, which is native Oklahoma sand treated with a non-toxic polymer binder. Each grain of sand is coated to allow water to rapidly pass through to the base and off the racetrack. It is unaffected by sub-zero temperatures and heavy rainfall because of its unique draining facilities, it does not harden or create dust, does not need water, is easy to maintain, and is expected to greatly reduce maintenance and

operating costs. And, its consistent resilience and cushion minimizes jarring. Equitrack is used at training centers in Hong Kong, England and Ireland.)

Jockey Buddy Winnett, following his victory in the Inaugural Handicap, said "the track felt a little heavy. But he [Bold Les] handled it great. The horses liked it. Right now I like it."

Earlier in the day Jack Van Berg, the winningest U.S. trainer who has 22 of his horses at Remington Park, told the *Texas Thoroughbred* he was very happy with how his horses had been training on Equitrack.

"It's the safest possible surface," he declared. "And I think this track is just beautiful. They've done a hell of a job their first day." Van Berg also said he expects to add another eight or more horses to his Remington Park stable this fall.

Executive Vice-President and General Manager David Vance told reporters at the evening press conference that he was pleased with Remington's first day of racing.

"I couldn't be happier with the results," he stated. "Today was an unqualified success. Everything was accomplished, across the board. We did it." (The "we" referred to the more than 1,200 Remington Park employees, most of whom are local residents who had never before worked at a racetrack.)

Attendance, originally projected to exceed 20,000 on opening day, fell short of that number by about 25 percent, but Vance explained that lack of interest was not the reason why at least 7,000 pre-paid ticket holders did not show up. Track officials had announced early on that attendance would be limited to about 20,000 (per day) during the first five days, and that only mail-order tickets would be accepted for that period. Consequently, many people who didn't get their first choice for seating were no-shows; and, Vance admitted, there were some problems with the computer and the mail-order system.

Vance added that in retrospect the smaller crowd was probably a happier crowd, because track employees at mutuel windows, concession stands, parking lots and all other areas were performing their duties for the first time, which could have caused some serious delays if

attendance had been at capacity.

"We didn't want people coming to the racetrack for the first time to have to stand in long lines, become disgruntled with the whole experience and vow never to come back," Vance pointed out. And after all, he concluded, "this was a workday [Thursday] for most people. We were asking Oklahoma to take a day off work. Ticket requests were far greater for Saturday."

Overall, Remington Park proved itself worthy of its "major facility" status, and should ultimately provide a compatible link to the growing Southwest racing network — to be further enhanced by Class I Texas racetracks within the next few years. ▣



Horses travel from the paddock through a glass-enclosed tunnel that bisects the grandstand



Texas-bred winner Time Waster (Spread The Rumor/Ciare K)