

ARMBRO EMERSON WEARS CROWN WITH FASTEST MILE EVER AT ROOSEVELT

Late Friday afternoon, when Breeders Crown publicist Moira Sullivan attempted to hand out a sheet listing the Roosevelt track records, one member of the ESPN broadcasting crew (who shall remain nameless) handed it back to her. The skies had unleashed a brutal downpour, and the raw winds made the conditions more suitable for sea lions than pacers. A mere six hours later, however, Armbro Emerson emerged from the chill with a 1:54.1 Breeders Crown Aged Pace victory, the fastest mile recorded in the forty-seven year history of the Westbury oval.

The skies began to clear just before the first post, and the wind, which made life unpleasant to that point, became Roosevelt's ally. The racing surface rapidly began to dry, and with each race, the clockings became faster and faster, and with all the speed in the Crown field, a fast mile began to sound plausible.

Although many of the Crown races have been interesting to handicap, the 1987 Aged ^{Horse} Pace was perhaps the most difficult in history. Without Franz Hanover, whose connections were caught unaware of the Crown's ^{five-day} ~~early~~ declaration date, the field was an amalgam of brilliant inconsistency and bizarre racing luck. Among the most consistent horse in the race was Stonebridge Skipper, whose owners wrote a check for \$46,632 to supplement their pride and joy to the race. Their pride and joy drew the eight hole, a nearly insurmountable disadvantage on a half-mile track. Tucson Hanover, driven by local megastar Mike Lachance and trained by Vinnie Aurigemma, was racing in his own backyard. Aurigemma, who had not

lost a Breeders Crown with two previous Aged Pace victories, stables on the grounds at Roosevelt. Tucson drew position nine, and would be trailing a horse, Swapzee Bromac N, who was both a New Zealand-bred and was acquired by his current owners through a \$75,000 claim, both Breeders Crown firsts.

Dragon's Lair had carved out the fractions of the fastest race ever at Freehold Raceway the week before, and was beaten on the wire by a horse that had raced in \$35,000 claimers at The Meadowlands. Incredible Finale had made breaks in three of his most recent seven starts, and hadn't raced in two weeks. Brian's Breeze hadn't won a race in over two months, but had been off the board only once during that stretch. With his seeming lack of early speed, Quite A Sensation would obviously get away last from post seven. Armbro Emerson had looked super since a bout with a throat problem, but had only three competitive races since. To top it all, Robust Hanover, who had enjoyed his greatest success in Breeders Crown competition, stumbled and fell to the track during the post parade, and, although seemingly uninjured, was automatically scratched. Serious handicappers would consider this a race to watch.

It sure was. Gilles Gendron sent Swapzee Bromac into the first turn like a quarterhorse jockey, and, with Dragon's Lair and Incredible Finale also seeking the front, the chase was on. Campbell finally slid the Dragon to the lead past the 28.1 first panel, but Incredible Finale roared up on the turn, and Campbell was unable to give his charge a breather. Incredible Finale went offstride

approaching the half, but the teletimer damage was done. Dragon's Lair clicked off the first half in 56 seconds flat on a surface listed as good.

Tucson Hanover, the public's choice, lead the second tier's challenge as they hit the third turn. Brian's Breeze had been parked from the onset without ever really applying the pressure, and as he began to back off approaching the three-quarter pole, driver Walter Whelan, who had piloted Armbro Emerson to the great bulk of his \$990,000 bankroll, realized he was about to make his colt a millionaire.

"All we needed was to get out," said Whelan. "I knew he was sharp, and when I pulled him, he felt fresh and strong." Three-quarter time was an eye-popping 1:25.2.

Dragon's Lair had given his all in pursuit of his second Crown, and was unable to repel Tucson Hanover's challenge any longer. The Albatross horse crossed over to the lead as they turned for home, and Mike Lachance, desperately seeking to keep Aurigemma's win streak alive, went to work on Tucson. But Armbro Emerson, who tailed him from the five-eighths pole home, kicked into fifth gear, and Whelan just waved his whip as the Abercrombie colt lengthened his lead to three and one-half lengths at the wire. Tucson Hanover was a courageous runnerup, and Quite A Sensation, who had hugged the rail the whole way, squirmed his way clear to the far outside and managed a respectable third.

Credit trainer Brian Burton for having his horse sharp without a great deal of racing under his belt, and credit Whelan for yet

another in a series of cagey, opportunistic drives. Armbro Emerson is owned by Edward Weisz, a homebuilder, and the Light Heavyweight Stable, the moniker adopted by Marvin Michaels, Danny Chan, and Ralph Travis.

The 1:54.1 clocking ironically erased Franz Hanover's name from the Roosevelt Raceway record books as the fastest horse ever to win on Long Island.