



By Ray Cotolo (Sarah Lauren Scott Photo)

HYPNOTIC AM (Chapter Seven—Daydream AM S—Muscle Hill)

Breeder: Courant AB, *Stockholm, Sweden*

Owners: Courant Inc., *Delray Beach, FL*

Trainer: Marcus Melander

Driver: Brian Sears

Purchase: Homebred

Winning the Jim Doherty Memorial last year, **Hypnotic AM** will try to become just the third filly to also win the Hambletonian Oaks, joining the likes of Ariana G (2017) and Manchego (2018).

Hypnotic AM started her career undefeated in seven starts, winning four New York Sires Stakes (NYSS) preliminaries and its \$225,000 final along with the elimination and final of the Doherty Memorial. Trainer Marcus Melander then shipped the filly north the Woodbine Mohawk Park, where she suffered her first defeat in the Breeders Crown elimination and her second in the \$600,000 final.

“She was actually kind of perfect until like late in the year when she got a little aggressive,” Melander said. “It was after a couple starts last year that she got fired up.”

Returning in late June, **Hypnotic AM** won her next two starts, taking a NYSS prelim and the \$207,250 Empire Breeders Classic Final at Vernon Downs. However she faced defeat again in her next start, going a tough trip in the \$253,500 Del Miller Memorial and finishing third.

“She got a tough trip and was interfered with, but she needed that race,” Melander said in a USTA interview. “It’s been a little bit too easy on her in New York. She gets to the lead and has had some pretty soft halves and sprinted to the win. It was good that she got tired in that Del Miller race. That really helped her to get in form.”

Two weeks later, **Hypnotic AM** rebounded with a wire-to-wire win in the \$15,000 Hambletonian Oaks “Prep” with a 1:52.3 win as the even-money favorite.

“She was very well in hand Saturday, but it was a :56 half,” Melander said. “It’ll be a lot faster Saturday; it’s going to be different. She was well in hand, she felt like she was very sharp. I don’t think I could have her any better at least.”

Trainer Melander will make his third start in the Hambletonian Oaks. He previously sent What A Knockout (2018) to a 10th-place finish and Miss Trixton (2019) to a fourth-place finish, both of whom were driven by Brian Sears. Melander came to the U.S. from Sweden and worked for four-time Hambletonian-winning trainer Jimmy Takter before starting his own stable in late 2014. He is based in New Egypt, N.J., at a farm that was home previously to each the legendary Stanley Dancer, a five-time Hambletonian winner, and Continental Farms stables. Melander has won more than 150 races and \$6 million in purses in his career.

Brian Sears tries for his third win in the Hambletonian Oaks, winning with Broadway Schooner (2009) and Bee A Magician (2013). He debuted in this race in 2003 with Stroke Play for trainer Trond Smedshammer and has driven in every final since. For his career, Sears has won more than 10,000 races and \$199 million in purses. He ranks 18th in North American history for wins among drivers and fifth in purses. He led the sport in earnings in 2005, with a then-record \$15 million, and has finished among the top 10 in purses 14 of the past 16 years. He was inducted into the Harness Racing Hall of Fame in 2017.