

CLASSIC WISH: A MARYLAND MARE OF DISTINCTION

by Ted Black

Classic Wish could hardly be considered an all-time racing great. But in 2004, the talented Standardbred entered the Harness Racing Hall of Fame as one of the sport's premier broodmares.

A bay daughter of noted broodmare sire Armbro Emerson from the Albatross mare Best of the Best, Classic Wish resides at Winbak Farm in Chesapeake City. Her biggest claims to fame are her two most productive offspring to date: national champions Bettor's Delight and No Pan Intended. Both pacing colts far exceeded their dam, who won 26 of 144 races, made over \$435,000 and took a mile mark of 1:52 at age 3 in 1993.

A Fast Prospect

Joe Thomson, who owns and operates Winbak Farm with his wife JoAnn, recalled purchasing Classic Wish for \$42,000 soon after her 5-year-old campaign. At the time, Thomson was looking for fast mares – not all of which develop into quality broodmares – to strengthen his farm's breeding operation. His collection of mares has since grown to a figure even Thomson himself cannot pinpoint.

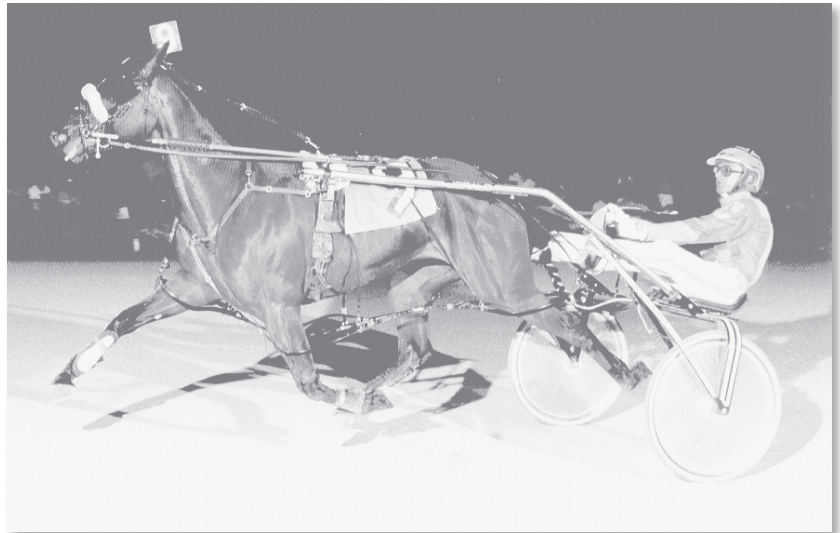
Still, Classic Wish remains a standout. "What I liked about her was her breeding and her speed," Thomson said. "She was by [Canadian Hall of Famer] Armbro Emerson and out of an Albatross mare, and she had a mark of 1:52, which for mares back then was very fast. It's still a good time. She's one of those mares that has been good right from the start."

Though not a big mare – she stands just 15.1 hands – Classic Wish possesses a long body. During his years in the breeding business, Thomson has discovered that mares built this way often develop into top broodmare prospects. "I think the lengthy mares cross better with many of the sires," he noted. "[And] the big mares don't often pan out as productive broodmares."

Thomson also called Classic Wish a "nice" mare. "She's got a great disposition," he said. "A lot of mares that raced for years can be nasty, but she's actually quite pleasant."

Classic Wish first gained prominence through her son Bettor's Delight, who won 15 of 26 races and banked nearly \$2.6 million during his two year career. Bettor's Delight won the prestigious Little Brown Jug and was second in the \$1 million Meadowlands Pace en route to being named Champion 3-Year-Old Colt Pacer. Although he yielded the American Horse of the Year title to Bunny Lake, the Champion 3-Year-Old Filly that season, Bettor's Delight was Canadian Harness Horse of the Year in 2001 and was later part of a large syndication deal.

"Bettor's Delight was a slight colt, not very big when he was a foal," Thomson noted. "He went in the Hanover Sunday night sale as a yearling and went for \$65,000. John Grant out of Canada bought him. He was good as a 2-year-old, but he was really good as a 3-year-old. He would have been Horse of the Year if he didn't have to race against [the record-setting] Real Desire every start. He made \$2.6



Courtesy of Winbak Farm

Small but speedy as a racehorse, Classic Wish has forged a formidable reputation as a broodmare.

million on the track and then he was syndicated for \$4 million, so they made a big return on their investment."

Native Son

Bettor's Delight never raced in Maryland, but Classic Wish's next foal, No Wishes, trains and races here virtually year 'round. A No Nukes gelding conditioned by William "Bib" Roberts of Brandywine (for owners Adam Ainspan and Mary Roberts), No Wishes sports a solid 25-42-23 slate and a \$240,000 bankroll from 164 career starts. Most of his races have been at Rosecroft Raceway in Fort Washington, one of Maryland's two remaining harness tracks.

"We had bred Classic Wish to Cam's Card Shark the year before, so we wanted to try her to No Nukes to see what we could get," Thomson said. "Cam's Card Shark was really not a big horse and no one knew what type of impact he would have as a sire. So Bettor's Delight was still a yearling when No Wishes was born. He went for \$100,000 initially, but then they didn't like how he was doing, so they put him in the Meadowlands fall sale."

Because he never materialized into a stakes horse, No Wishes is more or less the "forgotten foal" between Bettor's Delight and No Pan Intended. However, he has performed well for Roberts, and can usually be seen competing in Rosecroft's higher conditioned events on Monday and Tuesday nights – typically with Jonathan Roberts, the trainer's son, in the bike.

No Wishes' trainer has plenty of praise for the gelding. "Bob Boni actually turned me on to him," Roberts said. "He was in the Meadowlands fall sale and Bob thought I should take a look at him. We looked at him and thought he was small, but he looked sound; so we ended up getting him for \$22,000.

"He's actually a real nice horse to be around. He's put in some very good miles over the years. There are some classes that are too tough for him, but he's a solid overnight horse. He's done well for us."

Triple Crown and More

When Bettor's Delight was in the midst of his superb 3-year-old season, Classic Wish's next foal, No Pan Intended, was a yearling. Perhaps sensing that Classic Wish was about to become one of the sport's top broodmares, Bob Glazer (of Peter Pan Stables fame) visited Winbak Farm several times to look at No Pan Intended. When the yearling arrived at the Kentucky Standardbred Sales, Glazer was there hoping to purchase him – and did so, for \$150,000.

“No Pan Intended was definitely a good-looking yearling,” Thomson recalled. “He was a nice-looking colt and he looked like he could be a nice racehorse. Bob Glazer was here three or four times to have him X-rayed and then he bought him at the Kentucky sale. He didn't do all that well as a 2-year-old, and Bob told me he thought about castrating him. It was a good thing that he didn't.”

After winning only once in eight starts at age 2, No Pan Intended developed into the sport's best 3-year-old in 2003. Trained by Ivan Sugg and driven primarily by David Miller, he won 17 of 25 starts, also earning over \$1.5 million and capturing harness racing's version of the pacing Triple Crown (the Little Brown Jug, the Cane Pace and the Messenger Pace). He then capped his career with a victory in the Breeders Crown.

To no one's surprise, No Pan Intended was named the Champion 3-Year-Old Colt Pacer, Champion Pacer and Horse of the Year in 2003. He was the first Maryland-bred since Fresh Yankee in 1970 to be named Harness Horse of the Year, and the next would follow right on his heels. (Rainbow Blue, another Winbak Farm product, won 20 of 21 starts in 2004 en route to being Champion 3-Year-Old Filly Pacer, Champion Pacer and Horse of the Year).

'On Her Own Merits'

“Classic Wish is one of the very few mares in our industry that has [produced] more than one million-dollar winner,” noted Winbak Farm's general manager Bill Gerweck.

“It was good to see Classic Wish meet the criteria and earn a spot in the Hall of Fame,” Thomson reflected. “There was nothing subjective about the voting; she got in on her own merits. She's been a good broodmare from the start. Vesta Blue Chip [dam of Rainbow Blue] didn't throw anything that was any good until Rainbow Blue. Sometimes mares can be that way. There's no real explanation for it.”

Classic Wish gave birth to Classic Card Shark in 2002, and the full brother to Bettor's Delight fetched \$240,000 as a yearling. But after a year in Canada, Classic Card Shark, much like No Wishes, failed to make it as a stakes horse. So Thomson bought the horse privately and has since turned him over to trainer George Teague Jr., who conditioned Rainbow Blue.

Classic Wish has a Cam's Card Shark foal on the ground, and is currently in foal to Rock N Roll Hanover, last year's Champion Three-Year-Old Colt Pacer and Horse of the Year.

“I think I got lucky when I purchased her,” Thomson concluded. “It was one of those things where I thought she would boost our breeding product because of her speed. Some people may not have taken a chance on her, but in business you have to go away from the norm sometimes and do things that others might not try.

“It's worked out for me so far. She's a great broodmare ... and I hope she keeps producing quality racehorses.” ■

Editor's note: Ted Black lives in Lanham, works for the Prince George's Gazette, and has covered Maryland horse racing since 1987. His articles also appear regularly in The Spirit of Jefferson, The Eastern Shore News, The Kent County News, and The Horseman & Fair World magazine.