

# WOLVERHAMPTON MEETING A WINNER IN EVERY RESPECT.

Thanks to the foresight and funding of Shane and Claire Fletcher and their supporters, Harness Racing under BHRC rules was able to return to Dunstall Park, Wolverhampton, on June 12<sup>th</sup> 2015 for a packed card of 10 races.

Only a week shy of 21 years earlier, Wolverhampton's then custom-built track had been the scene of one of the greatest performances in the UK sport. That calm June evening, Stoneriggs JR and Stevie Lees astonished the screaming crowd into hair-raising silence as they watched the partnership power clear of a top class field, knowing this was history in the making. The flickering clock stopped at 1.55.7, clipping almost 4 seconds from the British mile record. The crowd went wild, and that time stood for 16 years.

So, despite the shattering changes over the intervening years at the venue, which is now mostly devoted to all-weather Thoroughbred racing, harness racing *wants* Wolverhampton, not just to savour the memories, but to create fresh ones – new heroes to endure the test of time.

Organised with military precision by the hard-grafting Jackie Maguire and her legion of helpers, the 8 paces and 2 trots were run in 3 action-packed hours.

No harness racing had ever been run previously in this country on the new tapeta surface, so this was an unknown quantity for all the competitors, and as the evening unfolded, the going was found to be a little 'dead' and certainly demanded stamina. But the judges were kept very busy with tight finishes in every race, and the crowd were very appreciative of the spectacle.

There were many notable guests in the Premier suite and boxes, including Brant Dunshea, head of Raceday Operations for the BHA. And as a former head of operations for Harness Racing Victoria, he is a man who appreciated what he was seeing for The Standardbred Sales Co Battle of the Big Guns, the cream of our Standardbreds. Stamp Hill (Rocker Laidler ) and Wellfield Ghost (Sarah Allen) were only a nose part as they flashed over the line, with Claire Fletcher's Major League Star (Willie Drysdale) in 3<sup>rd</sup>, justifying all her efforts to promote the fixture. A great advertisement for our 'product'.

Earlier, Dreamfair I Say (Brian Gilvear) indeed had the dream start to his career when taking the first Maiden and Novice event on his track debut, scoring by 2 lengths from Rhyds Pirate (David Bevan) and Articulation Hall (Mick Lord). In the other division, Mick asserted with Desert Rose in the home straight, and she came home 31/2 lengths clear of Sports Trick (Alan Haythornthwaite) and Ayr Major (Rocker Laidler).

The 5/8ths track clearly suited the trotters well, and it was the reserve horse, Soze Vermont (Fr) (Richard Haythornthwaite) who stormed 2 lengths clear of his father, Alan, behind Very Cornuallaise (Fr) and Tanis de Viro (Ian Pimlott) for the FFA Trot over a mile and a half.

Stephen Gilvear's American import Rewrite History (USA), a 3 year-old by Sportswriter, is clearly sprinkled with stardust, unbeaten to date, and was hot favourite for the Grade I Pace, but drawn 11 in the Preferred handicap with Gordon Gilvear. Hendre Bob (Mike Evans), drawn 2, was at the head of affairs turning for home as Rewrite History began to sweep wide past the field. Surging past Temujin (Gary Wakefield) who finished 3<sup>rd</sup>, the colt sensed a battle as Hendre Bob looked him in the

eye and kept going. The pair flashed over the line locked in combat, and were inseparable. The judges pondered, measured and re-measured their image, but it could be nothing but a dead heat.

Sure lam Shady (Vikki Gill) was the easiest winner of the evening, running on late to collar Mochart (Andrew Cairns) and Imadreamer (John Wright) and stay on by 5 lengths for a family victory. The 5 year-old son of Sure Cam is owned by Vikki's mother, Viv, and trained by her father John.

Rocker Laidler notched the second-leg of an evening's treble when galvanizing Laneside Lotus to a neck's triumph over stable companion, Serrano Hall (Willie Greenhorn) in the Grade 4-6 Pace, with the home-bred Bumble B responding to Claire Bousefield in 3<sup>rd</sup>.

Patrick Kane Jnr was content to bide his time at the rear of the field when Ayr Majesty could not find the early pace in the Grade 6-9 Pace, but his tactics paid dividends as the 5 year old strode from last to first in the closing stages for a clever win from Wellfield Earl (Sarah Allen) and Camden Casanova (David Bevan).

The French-imported trotters have given a real breath of life to the square-gaited sport on the mainland UK, and many are enjoying racing them. But few can have equalled the thrill for John Foy when he sent Sulky Du Blequin to the front early in the back straight in the mile and a half Free For All Trot. Turning for home he was being stalked by Show Business (Paul Mather), Robec (Richard Haythornthwaite) and Solicitor (Ian Pimlott), who all looked ready to pounce as he wavered. But far from wavering, Sulky Du Blequin increased his lead, and John Foy's smile as he crossed the line would have lit Wolverhampton even without the floodlights.

The final race on the card, a top class Free For all Pace, clocked the fastest time of the evening over the 1 mile, 100 yard course, 2.12.5. Rocker Laidler sealed a successful evening on the sulky seat behind the talented 5 year-old, No Regrets, sailing 31/2lengths clear of Brywinsmagicpotion (Alan Haythornthwaite) and Major League Star (Willie Drysdale) having his second cracking run on the card.

An exultant evening of harness racing that owes much to Shane and Claire Fletcher, Jackie Maguire and their teams. A memorable occasion that has left all involved with a burning desire to see more of our sport under BHRC rules at Wolverhampton.

**Stella Havard.**