

# What Were You Doing in 1974

As part of TROT's celebration of 40 years in print, the I Love Canadian Harness Racing Fan Club launched a contest in October for Fan Club members to submit interesting stories, anecdotes or memories about what they were doing in harness racing in 1974 - 40 years ago.

We received some great submissions from across the country and would like to thank everyone for taking the time to share their memories. The winner was horseman Gord Brown who recounted his vivid memories from that year:

## • WINNING SUBMISSION •

### FOREVER 13

BY GORD BROWN, COBOURG, ONTARIO

I was 13 years old in 1974 riding with Ernie Brown and Bob Woodward for Grand Circuit week every night. I remember holding Handle With Care by the halter for Freddy Grant while he braided her foretop prior to her winning yet another race.

I remember the awful smell of Lake Ontario like it was yesterday. A smell I yearn for today. At 13 I was young and impressionable and would talk to anyone

who would listen. The likes of Jimmy Arthur, Frank Ervin, Bill Haughton, Stanley Dancer and my favourite, Bruce Nickell. I remember horses like Ima Lula, Kentucky, Savoir and Bye Bye Max and many, many more.

Still etched in my mind is the memory of walking beside these horses as the grooms walked them across the Thoroughbred track, with a cooler on their backs, to the paddock, so the drivers could go their final warm up. I then went to the paddock where I am sure I got in the way.

I remember eating french fries in the backstretch kitchen out of a brown paper bag with so much vinegar the fries would fall

through the bottom. I then helped walk the horses for at least two hours after the race. I would listen to the race results on the way home in the back seat knowing full well the outcome. I would then hustle in the door at home to watch the 11:00 show with Jim Lampman.

The next night I would do it all over again. These are and always will be the greatest memories in harness racing for me. So many people and horses left us years ago but they will live forever in the heart and mind of a 13 year old boy.

*We would also like to share some additional submissions that are worthy of Honourable mentions:*

### SHE WAS CRAZY GOOD! *By Peggy Powell, Guelph, Ontario*

1974 was a very good year for Jack and I, all because we acquired a mare called Misty Grand. Jack and I had to race at Western Fair Raceway and couldn't go to the horse sale, so, Jack asked a friend, Carl Mayberry, if he would go and buy us a two-year-old trotting filly if he saw one that looked good and didn't cost too much.

Early the next morning, Carl was knocking on our door, grinning from ear to ear, and guess what, we had our trotting filly. He told us that she was big, good looking, already trained in 2:40 and she only cost \$800. In all fairness to Carl, she was big. She was also crazy and toed out like the Eiffel Tower. We thought she would be a knee knocker for sure but she never did touch herself anywhere.

The first day in the cart, in front of many skeptical on-lookers, she bolted out of the barn, went over the manure pile,

across two plowed fields and finally stopped up against the fence. Jack managed to remain on the cart and eventually did get her to the track where she insisted on going around and around because she was too afraid to come off. Needless to say she was a very tired girl that day.

Misty was always a little headstrong but she did settle down in the coming weeks and was soon racing in the Ontario Sires Stakes program. She won just two races that year but as a three-year-old she put up a string of six in a row and was picked as the Canadian Three-Year-Old Trotting Filly of the Year.

Misty and her offspring gave us the time of our lives and filled our house with trophies. We love and will never forget her.

## SOONER OR LATER I HAD TO BE RIGHT

*By Russell Henderson, St. John, N.B. (as told from his perspective as an 11-year-old)*

**It's July 6, 1974.** My family had settled into our new home quite nicely, considering we had only been there three weeks; but this day, Saturday, July 6, 1974, would prove to be the first test of how much I was going to like living there. I now had a two-mile walk to the Exhibition Park Raceway, and didn't want to be late. My father had left the house earlier and after dropping my brother off at the barns, had gone off to do a few other things, but the three of us expected to join up at the grandstand before the first race.

Although I faced a rather lengthy trek compared to what I had been used to, it was all downhill, which is how I would describe my father's and brothers betting record around that time. Of course, to my mind, I was the best handicapper in our house and on this day, I was going to prove it. Admittedly, however, anyone who plays the horses is a gambler pure and simple -- especially simple.

I didn't think I had much time for breakfast, so I decided that a large bowl of Count Chocula cereal topped with Hershey's chocolate sauce would have to suffice before dashing out the door. (Hey, I never said I was a healthy eater and, besides, I figured the sugar rush would help me get down the steep hill.)

Within a few minutes from home, I reached a crest from which I could see my racetrack in the distance. The day was turning out to be fairly pleasant but it had rained earlier in the morning, so as I scampered down the hill it struck me that the track might be a little muddy. That was okay with me because I knew that my pick for this race -- the Alexander Stakes -- who else but my favourite horse, La Cardy -- was a good mudder. For several days I had been telling anybody willing to listen that he was going to win this major race. However, he had drawn an outside post, number seven, and most people just dismissed my opinion as wishful thinking.

By the time I made my way through the gate, almost 4,000 handicappers and other spectators had already made their way to the grandstand. The din from all the conversations taking place was a bit overwhelming, but the fact is, that there are generally only two subjects of conversation at a racetrack: why one expects to win and how one happened to lose. I was heading toward the ground level of the EPR's old grandstand when I spotted my father and brother resting against one of the large beams that supported the worn-down building. As usual, they had arrived at the track with faith and hope; but as far as I was concerned, the odds were good that they would depart needing charity.

Approaching them, I blurted out, "Do you remember who I said would win the Alexander?"

"Yes, La Cardy," they replied.

Of course, why wouldn't they remember? I had only expressed my opinion to them 694 times during the preceding three days.

"He's got no chance," my brother shot back.

This remark might have bothered another person, but I was well aware that my brother lived in his own little world when it came to picking horses. Change that. On second thought, he was actually off in his own galaxy, far, far away when it came to predicting race outcomes.

At least my father acknowledged that La Cardy was a good horse, although Dad contended that he was just not good enough to be in this

field and was in fact more of a winter horse. One couldn't argue with the latter point because La Cardy had dominated races at this track all winter, but I knew he could also come through in the summer.

I decided to abandon my non-believing family members and made my way to the rail, just in time to see Blois MacPhail and a little horse named Rebel Jay take the day's second race.

I'll jump ahead to the ninth race, the one we really wanted to see.

As the post parade began, I was hanging so far over the fence that I was lucky not to fall onto the track.

After watching the first six horses come in front of me, there was only one horse left to be paraded: my hero, the longshot, La Cardy. By the time he reached the front of the grandstand, most fans had left the rail, a few to go make last-minute bets but most because they'd seen all in which they were interested and that frankly did not include La Cardy. I found that hard to understand. La Cardy may not have been the most handsome horse in the race but to my eyes, he looked sharp and ready to pull off an upset.

For me, there was only one thing to do: run in and put every cent I had raided from my piggy bank right on his nose. (Incidentally, I was aware of the old saying that if you bet a horse on the nose, it's 10/1 he has sinus trouble). Afterwards, when I arrived back at my spot on the rail, I had to push my way to the front to get through the crowd that had gathered. The odds had Canu Bay and Power Baron as slight favourites, but all the horses in the race were getting some action ... all except one, that is. No matter, my money was down and I had faith in La Cardy even if hardly anyone else did.

When the word "go" was given Blois had La Cardy off the gate strong, but Shawfield, Canu Bay, and Scotch Gamaun had also left well. As the field raced to the quarter pole, La Cardy found himself caught on the outside, but Blois somehow managed to get him to the rail as Shawfield and Scotch Gamaun battled for the lead. As the field made their way to the half mile mark, La Cardy began to move on the outside, taking dead aim at the new leader, Scotch Gamaun. These two raced heads apart all the way up the backstretch, to the three-quarter pole. Coming around the last turn, La Cardy had pulled ahead of Scotch but only to face a fast-charging Power Baron. Things looked bleak for my bet as they matched strides down the stretch. Power Baron had surged ahead of La Cardy and my voice had gone hoarse (bad pun) from yelling for La Cardy to keep fighting. Then the amazing happened: La Cardy somehow found the will to fight back on the inside lane. As they hit the wire, Ingham Palmer shouted, "It's La Cardy by a neck!" I was ecstatic, to say the least.

Looking back at this some forty years later, let me tell you exactly how I feel about it. If somebody could show me a more courageous effort than La Cardy put forth on that day, then I would cheerfully climb atop the tote board during Gold Cup night in Charlottetown, strip naked and attempt to further entertain the crowd by singing Broadway show tunes. I mean, really, La Cardy raced most of the mile on the outside, fighting the toughest horse in Maritime racing, Scotch Gamaun; and in the closing seconds, had to battle the most famous horse in Maritime racing, Power Baron, relinquishing the lead in the stretch, but somehow digging deeper for enough strength to score by a head at the wire. Gutsy doesn't even

begin to describe his performance on that July afternoon.

Post-race, there was a jubilant mood in victory lane where owner Edith McPhail explained that she had been so nervous during the race, that blood stopped flowing to her hands and they felt like ice cubes. Blois, a man of few words, simply said, "I guess he's pretty good. The son-of-a-gun couldn't have raced better".

That night, I had an interesting ride home from the track with my father and brother. I'd won close to a hundred dollars on the Alexander. I tried not to get caught gloating too much, but I'm sure I was even more insufferable than usual. However, that I treated them to Dairy Queen chocolate milkshakes with some of my winnings hopefully made up for any objectionable behavior. Since things had worked out for me with La Cardy's victory at the track that day, treating my family to an ice cream was the least that I could do!

## TRULY BLESSED

BY JOHN PATTERSON, BAYFIELD, ONTARIO

*In 1974 I was 20 years old.*

I grew up in Cape Breton watching the horses at Tartan Downs. In 1965 we moved to Woodstock, Ontario and I became friends with Andy Blackwood. Andy's father was a doctor and had several horses racing in the Bill Wellwood Stable. It was my first exposure to the quality of the Ontario Jockey Club as opposed to the Tuesday night fare offered at Woodstock Raceway.

This year I turned 60, and for my birthday, my sister found an old picture from 1974 taken at Garden City Raceway with the race winner Leroy N. She placed it in a really nice frame and of course my mind was flooded with so many fond memories. In the picture with me, were Andy, Dr. Blackwood, his son Jay who worked for Bill, and of course the Hall of

Famer, Bill Wellwood. It was such a wonderful gesture and it brought back so many memories of going to the races at Mohawk and Greenwood with Dr. Blackwood and his son.

The photo finish of this win picture had six horses struggling to reach the wire and there was Leroy N with his nose in front in a very good time of 2:03.4.

Harness racing has come a long way. And maybe I have too. Garden City rarely comes up in conversation, and this picture gives me so much joy.

And here we are 40 years later and I am now the owner of three fine Standardbreds. I love every minute of it and I can now appreciate how exciting this must have been for Dr. Blackwood. I have been truly blessed.

## A THRILL LIKE NO OTHER

*By Bob Megans, Guelph, Ontario*

I didn't just witness one of the most exciting events of 1974, I was part of it. The Ontario Sires Stakes became the new dream catcher for horse-people. When I woke that day in July (July 3rd, 1974), the trotting colt that my father, William Megens, had bred, raised, broke and trained was only hours from competing in one of the first Ontario Sires Stakes races.

Neither his sire nor his dam had raced. His dam, compensation for a \$1,000 deal gone awry, had been bred for a stud fee half that amount. None of that mattered as we loaded for Owen Sound, stopping at our old friend Buff Macquarie's place to switch trailers for one not topped by canvas.

Then, buffeted by adenoidal screeching from his anxious, adolescent groom, the photo revealed that our colt, Snegem Flight, had wheeled around the final hairpin, prairie-flat turn and crossed the finish line ahead of rivals by a mere nose, stopping the timer at 2:17.4. We had won.

The very first Ontario Sire Stakes race for two-year-old trotting colts. Ever. This was bliss.

Critics moaned that sires stakes rewarded mediocrity. They were wrong: Snegem Flight became Two-and-Three-Year-Old Trotter of the Year, and represented Canada in the Roosevelt International at four. Few moments matched, but none exceeded, that day in July, 1974.



## THE START OF A LIFELONG PASSION

*by Kendra Casselman, Peterborough, Ontario*

It's 1974, forty years ago - I was in college majoring in animal science optimistically hoping for a career in harness racing. My brother was a driver-trainer and we shipped horses to Chicago to race from our local fairgrounds. We also had a farm where we kept a couple broodmares and raised foals; I had just planned the mating of our most successful racehorse, a horse who would win the biggest race in 1977 at Sportsmans Park, an Illinois bred

three-year-old.

Throughout the years, reality set-in. I faced prejudice against women in agriculture in college. I graduated from college in a recession, where there were few jobs in any field, much less agriculture. In 1974, Chicago had a strong racing circuit, Sportsmans Park was flourishing; purses were better in the 1970s and expenses less than today.

In the 40 years since, I went to Florida and worked as groom

to try to make a living. I bred and sold horses including a Meadowlands Pace winner and Canadian Horse of the Year; trained horses; and owned horses. My brother got out of horse racing to make a living for his family; then got sick and passed away. Too many ups and downs in horse racing. Lots of hard work.

Fortunately, finally I got a good paying job outside of horse racing to support my interest in horse racing.