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THE EUROPEAN VIEW ~ By Klaus Koch

Impressions From Hambo Week

Year after year a large number of European harness racing fans come to New Jersey for the Hambletonian festival. I dare say that the majority come from Sweden.

Many of them choose to stay for a week or more in order to enjoy both the eliminations and finals in the big (trotting) races. Many also take the opportunity to visit some or most of the training centres and breeding farms in New Jersey. A visit to the historic track Goshen and the Harness Racing Museum with the Hall of Fame is also on most schedules.

I have made this trip many times and it is always utterly enjoyable. This time I came in on Thursday afternoon in time to watch the Peter Haughton and Merrie Annabelle finals. I am a big fan of racing two-year-olds; however, I am of the opinion that it should be performed in a restricted manner with (mainly) low purses in order not to force the young horses by going for gigantic purses.

I find it a little bit strange that the North American administrators insist on scheduling the most prestigious races for the young trotters, the Peter Haughton and Merrie Annabelle, at the end of July when most horses haven't even raced or

have only raced once or twice. With a couple of races, other than baby races in June, we would see better prepared two-year-olds rather than those which appear in those major stakes races.

That is not to cast a shadow over the best performers on that Thursday evening at the Big M. The Peter Haughton winner Muscle Hill made a fantastic impression on us Scandinavians present. The second horse, Swedish owned Symphonic Hanover, also seems to be a colt with a future ahead of him.

The Hambo weekend really was a victory parade for Muscles Yankee (sire of Muscle Hill), who is of course also the sire of Hambletonian winner Deweycheatumnhowe, and it made a big difference in the reputation he has in Scandinavia, where his local production must struggle in order to make themselves be accepted. So far they have not succeeded, unfortunately, a destiny "Muscles" shares with Self Possessed.

But both Muscle Hill and Dewey left us all very impressed. The Haughton winner Muscle Hill appeared to be a powerful machine without comparison. His future will be very interesting to follow.



Klaus Koch

By the way, I had the pleasure of getting acquainted with the colt's trainer Greg Peck the following day in the hotel lobby. Greg was, until recently, quite unknown to us Scandinavians, and I noticed that he carried a laptop around, the only professional Standardbred trainer I've seen so far with such equipment. I realized that Greg has a second job as a media trainer, and that he also has the good taste of frequently reading this column and he has developed a terrific colt, one must say!

Deweycheatumnhowe of course was very impressive as well, however, the trotting hobbles worry us Scandinavians to be frank, and it might have an impact on his future popularity amongst European breeders. The question will always remain: Would he have been as good without these "Indian pants?" Nevertheless, he is undefeated in 16 lifetime races and I must admit that I have rarely seen a trotter with a longer and more winning stride as Dewey.

Being a promoter of a number of international European races, with the Elitlopp as the most prestigious, I am expected to bring, or at least try to bring, the most interesting North American trotters over. Everybody wants to see the Hambletonian winner in the following year's Elitlopp, but it is only possible in those few cases where the Hambo winner is a gelding or a filly.

I must tell "my" people that, sorry, Dewey won't come either as he will be fully occupied at Walnut Hall breeding mares at the time of the Elitlopp and will be many months removed from wearing harness at that point.

But there are other candidates. The enchanting filly Snow White is one, and the connections seem to be interested in bringing her across the Atlantic next year. And a new, totally unknown to us, candidate appeared as

Canadian Misterizi surprisingly won the Nat Ray Trot. He came down from Toronto as the winner of five of his last six, only another son of Mr Lavec, Snazzy Hot Rod, who was sold to trainer Ake Svanstedt of Sweden during the Hambo week, had beaten him. Misterizi is a horse we will keep under surveillance.

As we come closer to the Elitlopp and the other major European races, totally different horses may come into the discussions. This year for instance, Enough Talk appeared very late, Before He Cheats was too late, but both horses' connections have expressed interest in Elitlopp participation next year.

Even 2007 participant Mr Muscleman, who has been out for a long time, may be a consideration. I went down to Magical Acres, and there was Mr Man looking terrific and ready for a

comeback. I know that trainer Noel Daley and the Victor family would love to bring the gelding back to Solvalla for a second attempt for the Elitlopp trophy.

This was all this time. Please do not hesitate to comment my articles. My e-mail address is ontrack@telia.com and as usual I would be more than happy to receive feedback from the North American racing fans. 📧

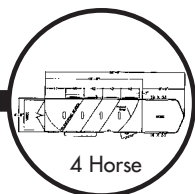
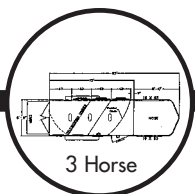
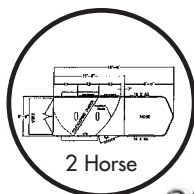
Till next time,
Klaus Koch

Klaus Koch is one of Scandinavia's leading racing administrators and is perhaps best known for his former role as director of racing at Solvalla Racetrack. His duties included orchestrating the Elitlopp, one of the world's most prestigious races, and attracting North American and Australasian horses to compete in the event.

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