

Steve Jones Has Made Quite an Impression

By Bill Heller

It's a cliché, but it's true: there is only one chance to make a first impression. Driver-trainer Ray Schnittker will always remember his first impression of his neighbor, breeder/owner Steve Jones, who owns Cameo Hills Farm in Montgomery, New York, 10 miles from Goshen and 60 miles from The Meadowlands.

"He sent me a horse named Poodle Party (in 1990)," Schnittker said. "Chip Miller had her in Ohio. We wanted to race her in the open at Yonkers. We made more than one hundred grand with her. She retired and she did well as a broodmare, too (producing Partywiththebigdog and Iron Legend who combined to earn nearly \$1 million). So that was a good start."



And if anyone wonders what Jones has done lately for Schnittker, there is that undefeated trotter Deweycheatumnhowe, who was two-year-old champion of 2007 and will begin his three-year-old season this summer as the early favorite for the Hambletonian.

Jones also bred undefeated Lady Annie, the two-year-old Pennsylvania-bred champion two-year-old filly pacer who won all six of her starts last year.

As ridiculous as this sounds, this year may be even better for Jones, thanks to the decision by the New York Sire Stakes to reinstitute breeder awards beginning this summer. "It looks like everything is going well for harness horse breeders in New York State," the 47-year-old Jones said. "They're reinstituting breeders' awards. The purses for the sire stakes are substantial, and that makes racing in New York very attractive. I don't breed all my mares in New York, but probably 90 percent of the mares I own are being bred to New York stallions."

Schnittker is also a fan of the growing program for New York-breds. Asked about the breeder awards, Schnittker said, "That's not going to hurt. They used to have it years ago. I own three mares. It's hard to make money breeding horses. For every horse you sell for \$100,000, you have three or four that never make it."

Schnittker boards his mares at Cameo Hills Farm, which was purchased in 1982 by Steve and his dad, Hal, who previously managed Pickwick Farm, Hanover Shoe Farms, Blue Chip Farms and Lana Lobell Farm. Cameo Hills Farm is now home to 65 mares, 50 yearlings and just under 40 foals.

Hal Jones is 83 and continues to work on the farm. "I'm getting to 84 and I never have done anything else," he said May 12th. "My father, Walter, was a blacksmith. I'm a product of the depression, so I know what it means to not have anything."

What he and his family have now is one of New York's top breeding operations.

Cameo Hills Farm was named for Cameo Wick, a strawberry roan who was

the first horse Hal Jones ever bought. The farm's incredible growth from 118 acres to 225 wasn't expected. "This was a nice little piece of land," Hal said. "When I first started out, I thought I'd build one shed and keep my mares there, eight or 10. I never envisioned having other people's mares here. My older son, Mike, decided to move on, so it was Steve and me."

Steve had just graduated from Delaware County College in Pennsylvania with a degree in animal husbandry. He was more than happy to work with his dad. He calls him the best horseman he's ever met.

Yet for all the great horses Steve saw his father help develop at Hanover Shoe and Lana Lobell - as well as the \$2 million earner Goalie Jeff and the \$1, 1 million winner Housethatruithbuilt they bred and raised at Cameo Hills - he realizes that Deweycheatumnhowe is a once-in-a-lifetime joy. "That was the biggest thrill last year, watching Dewey race and continue to keep winning," Steve said. "We bred and sold him at Lexington for \$80,000 in 2006. So we're very proud of him, and we're keeping our fingers crossed that he finds his way to the winner's circle a few times as a three-year-old."

As a two-year-old, he was a perfect 10-for-10 and earned \$936,000. "Dewey's been a real story, him being an orphan," Hal said. "His dam (Trolley Square) died when he was six weeks old. We just left him with the other mares."

Owned by Schnittker, Ted Gewertz, Charles Iannazzo and the Deweycheatumnhow Stable of Alan Leavitt and Walnut Hall Ltd., Dewey was named for a character from a Johnny Carson skit on "The Tonight Show."

Steve and Hal believe Dewey couldn't be in better hands as he seeks to extend his perfect record into his second season of racing. "We're thrilled with Ray having him," Steve said. "He lives about seven miles from here. He saw Dewey several times at the farm before he bought him."

Since beginning his career in 1977, Schnittker has won more than 2,200 races and driven the winners of more than \$26.6 million. He's won the Dexter Cup four times and been a force on the New York Sire Stakes for years.

But even he has a hard time digesting Dewey's undefeated two-year-old season, which, ironically, began with an unofficial loss when he finished second to In Focus in a qualifier at The Meadowlands June 13th, 2007. Dewey hasn't lost since, taking two qualifiers and all 10 pari-mutuel starts, including the Valley Victory and Breeder's Crown Finals.

"I'll probably never have another one like it; that was a dream season," Schnittker said May 11th. "The horse showed up and performed every week." Schnittker thought highly of Dewey's dam, the late Trolley Square, before he bought Dewey. "I'd seen every foal out of her," Schnittker said.

And Trolley Square, a daughter of Speedy Somolli, had made quite a first impression, too, both on the racetrack, where she had two wins and a second in three career starts, and as a broodmare. Her first foal, Giant Checkerboard, won \$97,204. Her second foal, Giant Motion, earned \$128,432. Both were by Giant Victory. Trolley Square foaled two more winners by Giant Victory, Giant Move, who earned \$24,125, and Giant Emotion, who bankrolled \$72,306.

Trolley Square then produced five foals by Muscles Yankee: Charles Atlas, Mr. Bada Bing, Drinks Like A Fish, Smokeslikeachimney and Dewey. Their earnings

were, respectively, \$81,909, \$47,222, \$60,040, \$8,065 and \$936,191 and counting.

"I liked Drinks Like A Fish," Schnittker said. "She showed speed, but couldn't get her air right. She had a breathing problem. Steve bought her back as a broodmare. I was looking for a Muscles Yankee. I think he's the best."

Schnittker liked what he saw in Dewey. "It seems like the big ones are the good ones," Schnittker said. "And he was big. We bought him for \$80,000."

Having previous success with the Jones family didn't diminish Schnittker's enthusiasm for Dewey. "I like the way Steve runs his farm," Schnittker said. "He buys his horses. They're not in a stall until the last day before the sale. With Steve's horses, what you see is what you get. He's got a real good feed program, good quality hay. I've done well buying horses off him."

So have others. Last year, Dewey was not the only undefeated two-year-old bred by Cameo Hills Farm. Lady Annie, trained by Steve Elliott, won all six of her starts, including the \$105,793 Champlain Stakes at Mohawk Raceway and the \$100,000 Pennsylvania Sire Stakes Final at Chester.

But Dewey could take the Joneses to the Promised Land - the Hambletonian. "I saw the Hambletonian Trophy in the office at Hanover when Christopher T won and at Lana Lobell when Speedy Somolli won," Hal said. He wouldn't mind seeing it again in his office.

Because Dewey raced through November 24th last year, Schnittker penciled in the Stanley Dancer in June as Dewey's first major goal as a three-year-old.

"Then, hopefully, the Hambletonian next," Schnittker said.

That would be a lasting impression.

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