

The Meadowlands • August 5, 1989 • Purse \$1,131,000 Park Avenue Joe & Probe: Dead Heat Excitement

The 64th Hambletonian looked to be one of the most exciting, eagerly anticipated battles in many years — pitting two-year-old champion colt Valley Victory against two-year-old filly champ Peace Corps.

The Hambo did indeed live up to its hype but neither Valley Victory nor Peace Corps played a part in it.

Valley Victory, suffering from a virus, never entered the race, leaving Peace Corps the overwhelming favorite. The filly carried a 17-race winning streak into the Hambo, and the hopes were high among her trainer Tom Haughton, driver John Campbell, and owner Bjorn Pettersson of Sweden.

Her main competitors appeared to be Bon Vivant and Demilo Hanover. But logic disappeared once the first heat began.

Peace Corps had the lead when the field turned for home. But the gallant filly who hadn't raced in five weeks tired and faded, finishing fifth. The surprise winner was lightly-raced Probe, who was fifth at the half-mile. He went three wide at the head of the stretch to take command and win in 1:54³, edging another lightly-raced colt, Park Avenue Joe, by a head.

In the second heat, driver Ron Waples let Park Avenue Joe trot on the outside in fifth, while Classic Aire grabbed the early lead. Probe, with Bill Fahy at the lines, followed Park Avenue Joe's cover.

Classic Air still had the lead at the three-quarters in 1:27¹, as Park Avenue Joe was steadily closing in, but Probe was squeezed between horses and went on a break.

Park Avenue Joe took command in mid-stretch, and Peace Corps came on strongly to finish second.

The resulting race-off between Park Avenue Joe and Probe was the first such contest since 1984, when Historic Freight beat Gentle

Stroke.

Park Avenue Joe's trainer Chuck Sylvester made a daring change between the first two heats to a modified harness. The logic was that the elastic girth would help free the colt's breathing, something he'd had surgery for earlier.

Only one more heat separated two horses and two drivers from the Hambletonian trophy. Not the original cast, the two that were expected to be there, but two drivers who'd never won a Hambletonian and two colts that few people had ever heard of.

Park Avenue Joe drew the rail for the race-off and Waples sent him to the lead early, setting soft fractions. Probe and Fahy patiently stalked him. Joe trotted to the quarter in :29⁴, the half in 1:01³, and the three-quarters in 1:33⁴.

Fahy then moved Probe up to challenge. When the pair hit the head of the stretch, they were moving as a team, one the other one's shadow. First one, then the other, appeared to have the lead as they neared the wire. The two drivers worked frantically on their mounts, urging with lines, with whips, with voices.

Park Avenue Joe and Probe hit the wire together, amidst roars from the crowd that shook the Meadowlands. It took the judges five minutes and two photo finish prints to declare a dead heat for win, the first in the race's history.

Within days after the historic finish, a legal battle ensued with the connections of Probe challenging the judge's decision to place their horse second in money earnings.

More than two years after the race, the decision of an administrative law judge to declare Probe and Park Avenue Joe co-winners, but to distribute the winner's share of the purse to Park Avenue Joe, was agreed to by Lindy Farms.



- The anticipated showdown between 1988 2-year-old divisional champions Valley Victory and Peace Corps failed to materialize when Valley Victory was not entered because of illness. The Meadowlands had to hold onto thousands of "I like the colt" buttons. They still gave away the "I like the filly" buttons. Peace Corps (on a 17-race winning streak, though she had not raced in five weeks) finished a tired fifth in the first heat and second in the next heat, failing to qualify for the third heat race-off.
- The two-horse race-off resulted in the only dead heat in the Hambletonian history.
- Both horses paid \$2.10 to win, producing the only minus win pool in the Hambletonian.
- The last quarter of the race-off was :26², the fastest quarter ever in the Hambletonian. The mile was in 2:02².
- Bill Fahy won in his first drive in the Hambletonian.
- Park Avenue Joe was the second Hambletonian winner for caretaker Randy Beeckman, who also groomed Mack Lobell (1987).
- Park Avenue Joe was the second of only three black trotters to win.
- Park Avenue Joe was foaled at Pin Oak Lane Farm in Pennsylvania, in the same barn in which 1992 Kentucky Derby winner Lil E. Tee was born.
- More than two years after the race, the decision of an administrative law judge upheld the opinion of the Hambletonian Society that both horses be declared co-winners of the Hambletonian, although Park Avenue Joe garnered first money as best in summary (2-1-1dh versus 1-9-1dh for Probe).