

# 2015

## The Meadowlands • August 8, 2015 • Purse \$1,200,000

### 90<sup>th</sup> Hambletonian A Taktertonian

by Dave Briggs for the Hambletonian Society

If the return to heat racing in the Hambletonian in 2013 was all about drama, the format provided that and more Saturday afternoon for the 90th edition of trotting's greatest race.

As nearly 22,000 at the Meadowlands Racetrack in East Rutherford, NJ and thousands more watching live, continent-wide, on the CBS Sports Network awaited driver Yannick Gingras' version of The Decision — would he pick the filly Mission Brief or the gelding Pinkman? — owner John Fielding knew exactly how it would play out. His trotter Pinkman would be looking for a driver and that driver would be Brian Sears.

"I actually knew what was going to happen when I saw the filly win the second division so easily," Fielding said of Mission Brief, who impressively won the second of two eliminations shortly after Pinkman won his from the 10-hole.

The final win photo said it all with Gingras watching Pinkman and Sears sail to victory with Ron Burke pupil Mission Brief a game three-quarters-of-a-lengths back in second in the \$1 million test won in 1:51.

The on-track product will be difficult to top and will go down in Hambletonian lore as the year Gingras had an agonizing decision, picked wrong and handed Sears the Hambletonian in front of a sea of hunter green Hambletonian ball caps.

"I know (Gingras) made the wrong decision and it was going to cost him," said Pinkman's trainer Jimmy Takter. "I asked him right after and he said, 'I've got to go with the filly.' I said, 'Are you sure? It's a bad choice.' I was a little disappointed, but Ronnie (Burke) would have been disappointed the other way around. I'll get over it."

So, too, will Gingras, who has yet to win the Hambletonian and was heartbroken a year ago when Takter-trained favorite Father Patrick made a break at the gate.

"I'm not disappointed in her effort at all," Gingras said of Mission Brief. "She wasn't quite as strong as in the first heat. She wasn't quite as good-gaited as before so I couldn't make the moves I wanted to with her... I knew I didn't have enough at the top of the stretch. You have to give it to Pinkman. He's a great horse and he's a winner."

Asked how quickly Sears agreed to drive Pinkman, Takter said, "I didn't have to twist his arm."

Sears, grinning like a lottery winner, said if he had inkling when the day started that he might end up a Hambletonian winner he likely wouldn't have agreed to race at Yonkers that night.

"Opportunity knocks and you try to take advantage of it," Sears said. "He is a great horse and he drew a great spot. When he landed in the two hole, I didn't know who Yannick was going to go with, but I knew (Pinkman) was in a good spot."

It was the third Hambletonian victory for Sears after Muscle Hill in 2009 and Royalty For Life in 2013, the first year the same-day heat format had been employed since 1996, which was also the last time a filly — in this case the great Continentalvictory — won the Hambletonian.

Apart from winning this year with Pinkman, Takter also finished third (Uncle Lasse), fourth (The Bank) and eighth (French Laundry) to grab \$680,000 of the total seven-figure purse. He also won the \$500,000 Hambletonian Oaks a race earlier with Wild Honey with Gingras in the bike. It was the trainer's second straight Hambletonian and fourth lifetime. In 2014, he drove his trainee Trixton to victory.

"I'm grateful for what God has given me," Takter said. "He granted me a very good gift. My father (Bo) is the one that probably was the most gifted horseman I know. Fortunately, I maybe got his talent to do this."

John Fielding, a Toronto native, owns Pinkman with his brother, Jim, fellow Canadian Herb Liverman, now living in Florida, Christina

Takter and Joyce McClelland of Zanesville, OH.

It was the first Hambletonian for the Fieldings and McClelland. John said he's tried to win the Hambletonian for 30 years.

"It feels fantastic. We've had a lot (of horses), but we're finally here. We finally did it," he said.

Takter was just as pleased to win it for Fielding. "It's very special," Takter said. "John has been with me a long time. Everybody knows in this sport that there's nobody better. I can race 20 horses and 19 race bad and one race well and he will never mention the 19 bad ones. Doing this for John means very much for me."

Liverman was part of the ownership group that won the 1998 Hambletonian with Muscles Yankee. The exact same group, minus McClelland, also owns Wild Honey.

"This is the best," Liverman said. "You can't do better. Last November we won two Breeders Crowns, but this is better. Even though I've won it before (with Muscles Yankee), to win this and the Oaks the same day is, wow."

Pinkman has won 14 of 17 races lifetime with earnings of \$1,766,800. Not bad for a horse the connections placed in the Harrisburg Mixed Sale as a two-year-old, but reconsidered after gelding the trotter improved his results on the track.

"I think castrating him was a big factor. It really was," Takter said last November after Pinkman won the Breeders Crown at the Meadowlands en route to U.S. two-year-old trotting colt of the year honors.

The card also included a major upset in the \$319,450 Cane Pace when 1-5 choice Wiggle It Jiggle It and driver Montrell Teague couldn't withstand hot early fractions and finished fourth. Dealt A Winner (David Miller), a 26-1 shot that was previously winless this year, held off Artspeak, the 2014 two-year-old of the year, by one-and-a-quarter lengths in a career best 1:47.3.

The win was so surprising owner Jeffrey Snyder had already left the Meadowlands to head home before Dealt A Winner was victorious, leaving his son Mike to pick up the spoils of the first leg of the pacing Triple Crown the first time it has been held at the Meadowlands.

"He didn't think the horse had a shot to win today. That's why he left," Mike said of his father. "He just contacted me. He's in shock now. He can't believe it."

Through it all, the Meadowlands threw a day-long celebration of its second Hambletonian in the new \$88 million building with a party that raged on the rooftop decks, in the owners' suites and from the tarmac all the way to the top of the lane in the track's stretch-running-park called The Backyard.

Even Gingras, who won the \$349,850 Peter Haughton Memorial for Burke with Southwind Frank, said, "it's still been a great day."

After all, Southwind Frank is now the early favorite for the 2016 Hambletonian where Gingras will try again to capture the Holy Grail.



## Pinkman

**PINKMAN**, bay gelding, 3, by Explosive Matter-Margie Seelster by Angus Hall  
 Driver: Brian Sears  
 Trainer: Jimmy Takter  
 Owners: Christina Takter, John & Jim Fielding, Joyce McClelland, Herb Liverman  
 Breeder: O Narutac Equine Nursery

**MISSION BRIEF**, brown filly, 3, by Muscle Hill-Southwind Serena by Varenne  
 Driver: Yannick Gingras  
 Trainer: Ron Burke  
 Owners: Burke Racing Stable, Our Horse Cents Stable [Marcia Gingold, Eugene Kurzrok, Scott Kurzrok, Stephen Springer, Richard Taylor], J&T Silva Stables, Weaver Brussemi  
 Breeder: S Stewart; Black Creek Farm

**UNCLE LASSE**, brown colt, 3, by Donato Hanover-Solveig, by Yankee Glide  
 Driver: David Miller  
 Trainer: Jimmy Takter  
 Owners: Solveig's Racing Partners [Goran Anderberg, John Fielding, John Fodera, Martha Frank, Frederick Hertrich III, Christina Takter], Goran C Falk  
 Breeder: Solveig's Breeders

TIME BY QUARTERS	¼	½	¾	MILE
1ST ELIMINATION	:26.2	:54.3	1:23.2	1:51.2
2ND ELIMINATION	:27.3	:54.2	1:23.0	1:51.3
FINAL	:27.2	:55.2	1:23.2	1:51.0

FIRST ELIMINATION			SECOND ELIMINATION		
PINKMAN	5.60	3.40	2.80	MISSION BRIEF	3.60 3.40 2.10
THE BANK		5.40	3.60	ALDEBARAN EAGLE	38.60 11.20
DONATOMITE			9.00	FRENCH LAUNDRY	3.00

FINAL PAYOFFS			
PINKMAN	5.60	2.60	2.60
MISSION BRIEF	2.40	2.40	
UNCLE LASSE		6.40	



- Pinkman, bay gelding, 3 by Explosive Matter – Margie Seelster by Angus Hall. Owned by Christina Takter, East Windsor, NJ, John & Jim Fielding, Toronto, Ont., Joyce McClelland, Zanesville, OH, Herb Liverman, Miami Beach, FL. Bred by O Narutac Equine Nursery [Vince Caturano], NY.
- There were 19 entrants in the Hambletonian, the third year of the return to same-day heat format. In 2014, only 11 entered and went straight to the final. In 2013, the last Hambletonian raced in front of the old Meadowland grandstand, there were 23 trotters entered.
- Pinkman posted his 14th victory in 17 starts, also providing a fourth training victory for Jimmy Takter. Takter is now tied with Chuck Sylvester at four wins. Bill Haughton, Stanley Dancer and Ben White all have five training victories.
- Pinkman overcame post 10 to take first elimination in 1:51 2/5, equaling the world record for 3-year-old geldings on a mile track with The Bank second. Donatomite, Habitat and Jackson's Minion also advanced to the final.
- Mission Brief took the second elimination by 4 ¾ lengths over long shot Aldebaran Eagle in 1:51 3/5. French Laundry, Uncle Lasse and Wings of Royalty also made the final.
- Elimination heat winners Pinkman and Mission Brief were both driven by Yannick Gingras. His choice to remain loyal to the filly Mission Brief in the final meant he lost the drive on eventual winner Pinkman (picked up by Brian Sears for his third Hambletonian victory.)
- Takter also continued his domination of Hambletonian Day at Meadowlands Racing & Entertainment. He swept both the \$1 million Hambletonian and the \$500,000 Hambletonian Oaks for a second straight year.
- In 2014, it was Trixton in the Hambletonian and Lifetime Pursuit in the Oaks. In 2015 it was Pinkman in the Hambo, and Wild Honey in the Oaks.
- Takter became the first trainer since Per Eriksson in 1991-92 to win the Hambletonian in consecutive years. The only other trainers to accomplish the feat are W. R. Haughton (1976-77), Frank Ervin (1966-67), Ben White (1942-43) and Henry Thomas (1937-38).
- Of his five trotters entered in the Hambletonian, four advanced to the final. Uncle Lasse (David Miller) was third followed by The Bank (driven by Takter's brother Johnny), so Takter horses finished first, third and fourth, good for \$680,000 of the \$1 million at stake. Ron Burke trainee Mission Brief was second for a \$225,000 paycheck, while the Tom Jackson trained and driven Jackson's Minion got the nickel for \$45,000.
- Gingras, who dominates the Meadowlands driver colony as well as national driver standings, has had a star-crossed record in the Hambletonian. Going into the 2015 race, he had earned just \$34,300 in five years. Most disappointing was a gallop before the start by heavy favorite Father Patrick in last year's Hambo edition. Mission Brief's elim win and runner-up effort in the final raised his bankroll considerably, but the Hambletonian remains one of the very few classic events Gingras hasn't won.
- Pinkman was a Lexington Selected Sale yearling purchase for \$77,000. Originally named Traffic Jam, he was renamed by the Taktters after Jesse Pinkman, a fictional character in the American television drama series Breaking Bad. The character is portrayed by actor Aaron Paul.
- He was the first foal of his dam, Margie Seelster, who was sold shortly before his divisional championship freshman year by breeder Vince Caturano's O Narutac Equine Nursery. "Story of my life," said Caturano. "At least I got some nice trophies."
- Margie Seelster, a solid earner of more than \$250,000 during her racing career, was sold to Jay Mossbarger of Ohio, but Pinkman's \$2.5 million bankroll remains her only claim to fame to date despite subsequent breedings to Jailhouse Jesse and Manofmanymissions.
- Pinkman failed to show Takter much as a 2-year-old, so he was gelded, and consigned to the Standardbred Horse Mixed Sale in Harrisburg in November of 2014. A change in the taciturn trotter's attitude caused Takter to withdraw him from the sale in mid-summer. Pinkman rewarded the ownership group by winning six of eight freshman starts, including the \$463,690 Valley Victory in 1:55.4 at Woodbine and lowered his own Meadowlands track record to 1:53.3 in \$500,000 Breeders Crown. He also won a \$77,120 division of the International Stallion Stake at The Red Mile.
- Pinkman kicked off his sophomore season in May, setting a track record of 1:52.2 in Pennsylvania Sires Stakes at Harrhah's Philadelphia, and went three-for-three in PASS events. Stake wins for Pinkman prior to the Hambletonian included a \$157,250 division of the Stanley Dancer Memorial in 1:52.2 on July 18; a world record 1:51.3f mile in the \$500,000 Earl Beal, Jr. Memorial at Pocono Downs on July 4; and a 1:52 stakes record in the \$370,000 Zweig Memorial at Vernon His sole loss

## Pinkman

- prior to Hambletonian day was when he was second, beaten a half-length in his Beal elimination.
- He is the first gelding to win since Vivid Photo in 2005, and one of three in the Meadowlands era of the race- Shiaway St. Pat being the first in 1981, the year the race moved to the Meadowlands. Add Flirth (1973) and Greyhound (1935) for a total of just five altered sons winning trotting's ultimate prize. Surprisingly, he was also one of three geldings entered in the race this year.
  - The last two Hambos have been won by the sires who were one-two in the 2009 version of the race: Muscle Hill (Trixton) and Explosive Matter (Pinkman)
  - Hambo entrants Centurion ATM won last year's Peter Haughton Memorial while Mission Brief captured the Merrie Annabelle, both in world-record-equaling times. 2015 marks only the second time that the winners of the Meadowlands' top races for 2-year-old trotters have returned in the same year for the premier event for 3-year-olds. The first occurrence was in 1986 when filly Britelite Lobell and colt Express Ride finished third and fifth, respectively, in the Hambletonian.
  - Mission Brief bypassed the Oaks, which is restricted to 3-year-old filly trotters, to attempt to become the first female to beat the boys and win the Hambletonian since Continentalvictory in 1996. She is the 161st filly to start in the Hambletonian, but only the fourth since Continentalvictory's win in 1996. Pampered Princess, who finished seventh-placed-sixth in the 2007 final won by Donato Hanover, was the most recent.
  - Thirteen fillies have won the Hambletonian, but only Continentalvictory and Duenna (1983) have accomplished the feat since Kerry Way in 1966.
  - Mission Brief was the 2014 Dan Patch Award winner for best 2-year-old female trotter and has won 12 of 17 career races and earned \$791,417. She also holds the world record for the fastest time for any 2-year-old trotter in history, 1:50.3.
  - She comes by her speed naturally, as the daughter of 2009 Hambletonian winner Muscles Hill and Breeders Crown champion Southwind Serena, who was not only the first Crown champion for driver Yannick Gingras but also an offspring of the world's fastest trotter, Italian-bred Varenne, who set a world record of 1:51.1 at The Meadowlands in the 2001 Breeders Crown.
  - Mission Brief, trained by Ron Burke, has won three of four starts this year and 12 of 17 lifetime. Leading up to the Hambo, she won three of four races while dealing with back woes, which were treated by an equine chiropractor. Mission Brief enters the Hambletonian off a 1:51 4/5 win in the Zweig Memorial for 3-year-old filly trotters.
  - That victory was the clincher in making the decision to pass the \$500,000 Hambletonian Oaks for fillies to take on the boys. "Maybe financially it would have been better to go to the Hambletonian Oaks, but pride-wise and for the sport, it would be better to go to the Hambletonian," said Ron Burke, who trains and co-owns the filly with Our Horse Cents Stables, J&T Silva Stables, and the partnership of Mark Weaver and Mike Brusceci. "If we won the Hambletonian Oaks, we'd have been happy, but it's not going to change anybody's life. We've all done things like that before. We thought this for some of us would be a lifetime experience, so we said let's go.
  - Mission Brief won her elim and was second in the final.
  - Centurion ATM, who won the 2014 Peter Haughton by 3-3/4 lengths over Uncle Lasse in a world-record-equaling and stakes-record 1:53.2, will try to join Donato Hanover (2007) and Muscle Hill (2009) as the only Peter Haughton winners to also win the Hambletonian. He is trained by Ake Svandstedt.
  - Centurion ATM finished eighth in his elim, failing to advance to the final.
  - Starter Muscle Diamond was owned and trained by a family with a rich Hambletonian heritage. Charlie Keller III, a recent Hall of Fame nominee, helped guide the fortunes of Yankeeland Farm, a breeding operation in Maryland begun by his father in 1955. Though the farm has closed operations, Keller III couldn't resist the colt with a double Hambletonian-Yankeeland pedigree on both the sire and dam side.
  - Sired by 2009 Hambo winner Muscle Hill (son of Yankeeland stallion and 1998 Hambo winner Muscles Yankee) from the 2002 Hambletonian Oaks winning dam Windylane Hanover, Muscles Diamond was a \$40,000 yearling. Yankee Blondie, a daughter of Yankee Bambi is the dam of Muscle Hill. Yankee Bambi was a sister to Yankee Bambino, runner-up to Bonefish in the four-heat 1975 Hambletonian at DuQuoin. Yankee Bambino was named after the legendary Babe Ruth. Yankee Duchess, the dam of Yankee Bambi was a foundation mare for the Yankeeland Farms producing for more than 20 years.
  - A runner-up to Pinkman in last year's Breeders Crown, Muscle Diamond was expected to be among the elite three-year-olds in North America this year, but instead has hampered by setbacks and minor injuries. An ill-timed break in his elimination ended the chances for another Keller-connected Hambletonian victory.
  - Hall of Fame driver John Campbell was on the sidelines for the Hambletonian for the first time since 1982, ending his record streak of 32 consecutive years of participation in harness racing's top race for 3-year-old trotters. Campbell was the regular driver of Muscle Diamond, but injured his wrist in an accident at qualifiers the week before the Hambletonian. He was also the regular driver of Oaks winner Wild Honey.
  - Trainer George Ducharme won the 2013 Hambletonian with Royalty For Life, driven by Brian Sears. This year, he sent out Wings Of Royalty for much the same owner connections, and the homebred colt finished fifth in his elim to advance to the final. Sears opted to go with eventual winner Pinkman, and Tim Tetrick drove Wings Of Royalty, who was tenth in the final.
  - Both Pinkman and Mission Brief were divisional winners last season. Pinkman was the first Dan Patch honoree since Muscle Hill in 2009 to capture the Hambletonian. He also captured the Kentucky Futurity, the third leg of the Trotting Triple Crown but in the second leg, the Yonkers Trot, a race marred by breakers, Pinkman was second to Habitat but eventually placed fifth.
  - Dan Patch Trotter of the Year went to Pinkman, for his 11 sophomore victories and \$1.89 million in earnings. He also was voted the best trotter in his division. Pinkman received 85 votes for Trotter of the Year. Hambo runner-up Mission Brief, a 3-year-old filly, finished second with 18 votes, followed by 2-year-old colt Southwind Frank with 14, 5-year-old mare Bee A Magician with 13, 4-year-old gelding JL Cruze with five and 3-year-old filly Barn Doll with one.
  - The Hambletonian Oaks, solely for 3-year-old filly trotters, began in 1971. The 2015 version, with a purse of \$500,000, turned into a wide-open affair with Mission Brief headed to the Hambletonian.
  - The elimination heats were held the prior weekend with one of those winners, Lock Down Lindy, getting the rail as the 3-1 second choice. Tragically, Spirit To Win, the other elim winner, suffered a fatal training injury Monday morning.
  - Wild Honey, owned by many of the same members of the Pinkman team, won giving trainer Takter a fifth Oaks. (1994: Gleam, 2003: Southwind Allaire, 2006: Passionate Glide, 2014: Lifetime Pursuit and 2015 Wild Honey.)
  - "This little filly overcame her size," Takter said. "She's not a very big filly but she's got a big heart. She gives her all every time."

## *Pinkman*

- Gingras put Wild Honey on the lead midway down the backstretch and she took it from there, securing a 1 ¾ length victory over Rules of the Road with Bright Baby Blues third. She paid \$4.60 to win. The time was 1:52 2/5.
- It was one of five wins on the afternoon for Gingras.
- Wild Honey ended her year with a slate of 13 wins in 19 starts for Christina Takter, the Fielding brothers and Herb Liverman. She lost divisional honors to the spectacular Mission Brief, despite besting her in the season-ending championship of the Breeders Crown and having the edge in money earnings.
- Hambletonian day 2015 also marked the first time the Cane Pace was raced at the Meadowlands and the first time any Triple Crown pacing event was contested over a mile track. It's also the first time two Triple Crown events were held on the same day at The Meadowlands.
- The switch to the mile track provided the opportunity to set up the fastest ever Triple Crown race in history in 453 editions of those vents. The record was 1:48.4 set by Dynamic Youth in the Cane Pace at Tioga Downs. A supplement by speedball Wiggle It Jiggleit increased the odds, but a battle to the half in 52.1 with In The Arsenal catapulted Dealt A winner to the finish line in 1:47.3, a new Triple Crown speed record.
- The Meadowlands is the 5th location for the Cane Pace. It has been races at Yonkers Raceway, NY; Freehold Raceway, NJ; Tioga Downs, NY; Mohegan Sun at Pocono Downs, PA; and now the Meadowlands, NJ.
- Attendance on the day was 21,968. Total handle was \$7.89 million. On-track handle gained slightly at \$1,320,325 compared to \$1,280,854 last year. This marked the first time since 2005 that the on-track handle showed a year-over-year increase.

