

The Sensational Filly Beats the Boys

The sensational filly Ramona Hill took a well-deserved gulp from the Hambletonian trophy after beating the boys on Saturday (Aug. 8) in the \$1 million trotting classic at the Meadowlands Racetrack.

It was the latest chapter in the developing saga of harness racing's newest superstar.

The victory, the 15th by a filly in the race's illustrious history, was hardly a surprise. She was the 2-5 favorite following the previous week's jaw-dropping win from an impossible spot, kicking home with a :25.4 final quarter in the Hambletonian eliminations.

She was just as good in the final. Andy McCarthy turned Ramona Hill loose down the backside and she easily surged past Threefiftytwo to take command for good.

"When I came out early there, I sensed I could find the front," McCarthy said. "I went for it, and she knows her job."

As Ramona Hill made the lead, main rivals Ready For Moni — the other elimination winner — and Back Of The Neck took up the chase.

Through the lane, Ramona Hill remained solidly in command, beating Ready For Moni by a length with Back Of The Neck third.

"She was starting to work a little bit towards the wire, but she finished it off," McCarthy said.

The time for the mile only confirmed what observers already knew: Ramona Hill is the real deal. The 1:50.1 clocking equaled the stakes mark set by her sire Muscle Hill in 2009.

It was a muted winner's circle celebration with access limited and everyone masked to ward off the coronavirus.

John Campbell, president of the Hambletonian Society, summed up the day and the performance eloquently.

"What a great performance by a tremendous filly," Campbell said. "Throughout history, society has dealt with crises and troubles, but great horses and great horse racing have found a way to bring people together to forget about what's going on in their everyday lives. I think that's what's happened here today."

It was the first Hambletonian victory for McCarthy and

trainer Tony Alagna, who took a very patient approach with his talented filly. The race was only her fourth of the year and 11th of her career.

"People talked earlier about how COVID affected this filly's schedule," Alagna said. "Honestly, this was our schedule from the beginning, with or without COVID. She's very much like a Thoroughbred. She doesn't need the starts to be at her best."

Of course, the Hambletonian Oaks for fillies earlier in the day was a possible target. But after Ramona Hill cruised to a convincing win in the Del Miller on July 18, Alagna set his sights on the bigger goal.

"We always had it (the Hambletonian) in the back of our minds, but nobody wanted to be the first one to say it," Alagna said. "After the Del Miller, it became a reality."

It had already been a great afternoon for McCarthy with four victories. Number five, the Hambletonian, will be the one he'll always remember.

"It was a very good start to the day and I was trying to keep my cool, and I was trying to let it sink in too much because I still had a lot of work to do," McCarthy said.

The driver and the filly completed the mission in style.

"The adrenalin you get from winning a race like this, words can't explain it," the Australian reinsman said. "It's an amazing event and a privilege to be involved."

With the victory, Ramona Hill improved her record to 9-0-2 in 11 starts for Bradley Grant, Crawford Farms Racing, Robert LeBlanc and In The Gym Partners. The 2019 Breeders Crown and Dan Patch Award winner is the second filly to capture the Hambletonian in the last three renewals, joining Atlanta (2018).



Ramona Hill

RAMONA HILL, bay filly 3, by Muscle Hill-Lock Down Lindy by Lucky Chucky
 Driver: Andrew McCarthy
 Trainer: Tony Alagna
 Owners: Bradley Grant, Crawford Farms Racing, Robert Leblanc, In The Gym Partners
 Breeder: Crawford Farms

FINAL TIME BY QUARTERS	1/4	1/2	3/4	MILE
FINAL	26.2	54.3	1:22.2	1:50.1

Final Payouts

RAMONA HILL	2.80	2.10	2.10
READY FOR MONI	3.40	2.40	
BACK OF THE NECK		2.40	

READY FOR MONI, bay colt 3, by Ready Cash-Nothing But Moni by Credit Winner
 Driver: Yannick Gingras
 Trainer: Nancy Takter
 Owners: John Fielding, Lindy Farms of Conn, Herb Liverman, Bob Hatfield
 Breeder: Moni Maker Stable

BACK OF THE NECK, bay colt, 3, by Ready Cash-Big Barb by Andover Hall
 Driver: Scott Zeron
 Trainer: Ake Svanstedt
 Owners: Howard Taylor, Order By Stable, Judith Taylor
 Breeder: Order By Stable



Jason Lisa/Lisa Photo ©