The 25th anniversary of the Meadowlands Pace was a race to the wire between a pair of divisional rivals and their Hall of Fame drivers, and in the end, it was Real Desire who took home the lion’s share of the $1,009,500 jackpot.

Both Bettor’s Delight and Real Desire entered the 2001 Pace off resounding victories in their eliminations. The defending freshman champion and North America Cup winner, Bettor’s Delight satisfied all expectations with a decisive win, while Real Desire, who flopped in the North America Cup, silenced doubters with a dazzling 1:49.4 win.

In the final, Bettor’s Delight and Mike Lachance claimed the lead from Whosurboy just past the opening quarter and quickly disposed of On The Attack on the outside. Real Desire, with John Campbell at the lines, got away fifth and worked his way up on the outer tier, following On The Attack. Campbell was forced to move his colt three-wide heading into the final turn, but was able to briefly tuck back inside behind Bettor’s Delight in the stretch. Bettor’s Delight held a one-length lead into the final strides and, despite digging in gamely to the wire, could not hold off the determined rally of Real Desire.

Real Desire gave Hall of Famer Campbell his sixth victory in the track’s signature $1 million event as the colt prevailed by a neck.

“They left hard on the inside,” said Campbell. “I stepped around three or four of them and dropped in. I had to go three-wide a lot earlier than I would have liked, but he was really pacing around that last turn. I got to drop in behind Mike’s [Lachance and Bettor’s Delight] back for awhile, he still felt strong. I knew he’d give me a run through the stretch.”

“He raced beautifully,” Lachance said of Bettor’s Delight. “I can’t fault him on anything. He raced hard out all the way to the wire. Even 50 feet from the wire, he was still coming back.”

On a cool and breezy evening, Real Desire paced the mile in 1:49.3, equaling The Panderosa’s 1999 stakes record. With his 1:49.4 win the week before, Real Desire became the only horse in Pace history to post sub-1:50 miles in both the elimination and the final.

Real Desire gave trainer Blair Burgess his second victory in the Pace. Burgess won in 1987 with Frugal Gourmet. Burgess’ outstanding Pace record also includes a second-place finish in 1992 with Driven By Design and a third in 1986 with Amity Chef from four starters.