

Karl rallies, Takter repeats in Hambletonian

With files from HRU & Mike Farrell

Karl won the \$1,050,000 Hambletonian on Saturday (Aug. 3) at The Meadowlands as trainer Nancy Takter continued a family tradition and Hall of Fame driver Yannick Gingras scored his first win in the trotting classic.

Contested in a driving rainstorm, Karl closed resolutely to beat Highland Kismet by a length as the 3-5 favorite. No one in the winner's circle seemed to mind the raindrops falling on their heads.

Takter, a part owner of the 3-year-old colt, became the first trainer to win consecutive Hambletonians since her Hall of Fame father, Jimmy Takter, in 2014 and 2015. She was just the third female trainer to win the Hambletonian when Tactical Approach finished first last year.

"I was definitely a lot prettier in the winner's circle last year, and a lot drier," said a thoroughly-drenched Takter. "He's just an amazing horse."

The other female trainers who have won Hambletonians in the sport's 99-year history are Paula Wellwood, with Marion Marauder in 2016; and Linda Toscano, with Market Share in 2012.

Only three trainers have won the race in consecutive years: the Taktors; and Per Eriksson, in 1991 and 1992.

"I don't think I've screamed so much in my entire life as I did the last eighth of that mile," Takter said. "It was really exciting, and I'm extremely proud of the horse and the entire team. I'm happy for Yannick for his first Hambletonian."

For Gingras, it was the end of a lengthy quest. He was winless in 11 previous Hambletonian finals, finishing second three times. Perhaps the most excruciating loss was the defeat by a nose to Triple Crown winner Marion Marauder in 2016 with Southwind Frank, and settling for second with the filly phenom Mission Brief (2015) and Ready For Moni (2020). In 2014, he was driving heavy betting favorite Father Patrick, but the colt broke stride at the start and effectively ended his chances.

Gingras was extremely emotional, twirling his whip in a victory salute roughly 50 yards from the finish line.

"It means so much," said Gingras who drove his 9,000th career winner earlier this week.

"Especially for my kids. As they got older, I saw the disappointment in their faces every year. They're not disappointed that I'm not winning.

They're disappointed for me because they know how much it means."

It means everything, especially when it finally happens.

Karl was away sixth in the early stages before tracking Highland Kismet into the outer flow down the backstretch. Karl needed several strides in the sloppy stretch before kicking into high gear to claim the trophy.

"At the top of the stretch I thought, 'Blankity-blank, this race is getting away from me again' when Highland Kismet kicked clear for a little bit, but I just had to wait," Gingras told interviewer Gabe Prewitt in the winner's circle. "I had to wait on mine for a couple of strides and there was tight quarters. I didn't want to do anything that would jeopardize that. I just figured an eighth of a mile was enough to show what a champion he was."

The time was 1:51.3 for the mile.

Karl posted his 15th win in 17 starts for the ownership of Nancy and her mother, Christina Takter, along with Black Horse Racing and Bender Sweden.

Until the Stanley Dancer Memorial on July 13, Karl was unbeaten on the year; he was an uncharacteristic third in the Dancer, which Takter shrugged off as just a slightly dull day for her champion. He justified that sentiment with a sharp 1:50.3 mile in his \$100k Hambletonian elimination, going off the favorite and keeping a comfortable length and ¼ win margin over Bella's Muscleshill.

Since elimination winners draw for the inside posts, Karl drew post one, which is considered advantageous but not ideal at the Meadowlands. Takter's 2023 winner Tactical Approach got the job done from post 10 so she wasn't about to complain about the big inside shift. And though he got away sixth Gingras put the fleet footed colt on the move just past the quarter and kept on improving his position.

Last season's Dan Patch Award divisional winner, Karl paid \$3.40, \$2.40 and \$2.20. Highland Kismet returned \$4.00 and \$4.00. Amazing Catch paid \$9.60 to show after surviving a judges' inquiry that determined he was not guilty of a penalty for racing inside the pylons.

While it marked Gingras' first time in the Hambletonian winner's circle, Takter and all but one of the other owners of Karl were savoring their return to the podium. Nancy's mother, Christina, also shared ownership of Hambletonian champions Pinkman and Trixton; Karl's breeder and owner Crawford Farms also co-owned winner Atlanta and Ramona Hill; and Bender Sweden

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campaigned 1992 victor Alf Palema. Barry Guariglia's Black Horse Racing, which campaigned 2018 Oaks winner Manchego, celebrated Karl as its first Hambletonian champion.

TV star and fashion maven Carson Kressley was the first Hambletonian ambassador to actually lead the post parade riding his own high-stepping Standardbred.

"I thought it was a great exciting race. I couldn't see a lot of it through the rain but it's a thrill to be here. And I just love harness racing, it's a great day," he exclaimed while presenting the Hambletonian trophy to the happy bunch.

BOB "HOLLYWOOD" HEYDEN NOTES

- Karl, a son of the Jimmy Takter-campaigned Tactical Landing who won a heat of the 2018 Hambletonian and was third in the final also in rein to Takter, and the RC Royalty mare Avalicious, was sold for \$135,000 at the 2022 Lexington Selected Yearling Sale. Tactical Landing was himself the sale topper of 2016, fetching \$800,000 as a yearling.
- Southwind Farms' Tactical Landing is now the first stallion in 65 years to win the Hambletonian in his first two crops with Tactical Approach (2023) and now Karl. Stars Pride did it in 1958-59 with Emilys Pride and Diller Hanover, respectively. Tactical Landing and Walner (also a Southwind stallion), were the only two sires on the card to double up.
- For the sixth time in the last seven years, all-source handle on the Hambletonian Day program at The Meadowlands topped \$7 million, with the 2020 COVID-19 card the only one to fail to reach that plateau.
- Despite several downpours during the course of the day, a total of \$7,427,223 — an industry 2024 best — was wagered on the blockbuster 16-race program Saturday (Aug. 3) at The Big M, good for an average per race of \$464,201. International figures would push the handle over \$8M on the day.
- Business was predictably brisk on the Hambletonian itself, as \$1,115,982 was pushed through the windows on the 99th edition of "America's Trotting Classic," the third year in a row where betting busted the million-dollar barrier.
- Nancy Takter walked away as the top dash-winning trainer at the Winter- Spring-Championship Meet, which spanned Jan. 5-Hambletonian Day, a total of 61 race cards. Takter, 43, whose barn is normally associated more with quality than with quantity, walked away with the dash-win crown despite registering only 93 starts entering the weekend. Her students won 36 times as she claimed her first Big M crown. Per Engblom was runner-up with 31 tallies.
- There's no doubt that Hambletonian Day was also Nancy Takter Day. She entered the day as one of eight prior Hambletonian- winning trainers on the card joining Trond Smedshammer, Linda Toscano, Ake Svanstedt, Luc Blais, Tony Alagna, Noel Daley and Jim Campbell. She won her second-straight Hambletonian and is the first to do that since dad, Jimmy Takter, did it in 2014-15.
- Crawford Farms are the first to breed two Hambletonian winners since Steve Stewart did it in 2014 with Trixton and 2019 with Forbidden Trade. Prior to Karl, the Crawfords bred Atlanta (2018). They also owned Ramona Hill who won the Hambletonian in 2020.
- Marcus Melander's streak of seven-straight Hambletonian checks ended when Security Protected broke and finished last. He's the only trainer to be in eight Hambletonians by age 32.



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- Ake Svanstedt, 65, just won the \$525,000 Hambletonian Oaks, making him the first driver past his 65th birthday ever to win a race worth more than half a million dollars.
- Dexter Dunn showed off his six-pack on Hambletonian Day. He won with Upallnight Hanover (\$8.20), Supernova Hanover (\$34.20), Slip Sliding Away (\$53.20), Jiggy Jog S (\$3), Champagne Problems (\$5.20), and Twin B Joe Fresh (\$3.20).
- Dunn is the first Hambletonian driver to get three checks from post 10. He finished third this year with Amazing Catch and was fourth in both 2019 (Soul Strong) and 2020 (Amigo Volo).
- Yannick Gingras has the highest career earnings ever for first-time Hambletonian winners and the first member of the \$200 million club — that has seven members in it — to then break through.
- After the Hambletonian Karl racked up three straight wins in the lucrative Kentucky Sire Stake program. He lost the \$400,000 final by a neck followed by a fifth place finish in the Kentucky Futurity, as he battled a lingering sickness. Though he made the Breeders Crown final in the fall he was scratched by the connections who felt he was not at full strength.
- Divisional Dan Patch honors again came down to the Breeders Crown, going to Sig Sauer who made a strong showing at year's end, winning the KY Futurity and Breeders Crown final.

KARL, bay colt 3, by Tactical Landing-Avalicious RC Royalty
 Driver: Yannick Gingras
 Trainer: Nancy Takter
 Owners: Christina & Nancy Takter, Black Horse Racing, Crawford Farms Racing and Bender Sweden
 Breeder: Crawford Farms, LLC
 Caretaker: Miguel Guerra

KARL, bc, (Yannick Gingras) 1 X 1
 Highland Kismet, bg, Father Patrick (B. McClure) 4 X 2
 Amazing Catch, bc, Walner (A. Svanstedt) X 3 3
 Sig Sauer, bc, Muscle Hill (D. Dunn) 3 X 4
 T C I, bc, Cantab Hall (D. Miller) 1 X 5

Private Access X-2-6, Secret Agent Man X-4-7, Mars Hill X-5-8, Bella's Muscle Hill 2-X-9, Security Protected 5-X-10.

FINAL TIME BY QUARTERS	1/4	1/2	3/4	MILE
FINAL	26.4	54.3	1:22.4	1:51.3

Final Payouts

KARL	3.40	2.40	2.20
HIGHLAND KISMET		4.00	4.00
AMAZING CATCH			9.60

