

Sassa Hanover is in top form heading into Fan Hanover

by Ken Weingartner, Harness Racing Communications

Freehold, NJ --- Sassa Hanover got "a perfect trip" in winning her elimination for Saturday's C\$479,000 Fan Hanover for 3-year-old female pacers and trainer Ron Burke is now hoping for a perfect ending to her stakes trip to Mohawk Racetrack by posting a victory in the final.

Last weekend, Sassa Hanover won her elimination by a half-length over Wrangler Magic in 1:49.4 -- a time faster than all but two Fan Hanover finals in history. Sassa Hanover was sixth midway through the race, but followed the cover of favorite JK She'salady around the last turn before taking the lead in the stretch.

JK She'salady, the 2014 Horse of the Year, finished fourth in suffering the first loss of her 14-race career, but still advanced to the Fan Hanover final. Following the race, trainer Nancy Johansson said the filly scoped sick.



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Sassa Hanover scored in 1:49.4 in her Fan Hanover elimination.

when you get a perfect trip."

Sassa Hanover, a daughter of [Rock N Roll Heaven](#) out of the mare Sayo Hanover, has won two of three races this year. She entered her Fan Hanover elimination off a second-place finish as the favorite in the Lismore Pace on May 30 at Yonkers.

"The only backward step was the race at Yonkers and we really don't know why," Burke said about the winner of \$544,422 in lifetime purses. "There were bitty reasons, but not big reasons why she should have been just average that day. Not that she was bad, but she wasn't herself. So it was nice to see her come back vicious.

"She's had a perfect schedule into this race and it should lead to her being very sharp I think."

Sassa Hanover and driver Yannick Gingras will start the Fan Hanover final from post three and are the 7-2 second choice on the morning line. JK She'salady, who starts from post five with driver Tim Tetrick, is the 9-5 favorite. Moonlit Dance, who won the other elimination in 1:50.4, leaves from post two with driver James MacDonald at the lines for trainer Tony O'Sullivan. She is 4-1.

Sassa Hanover has won 11 of 16 career races, including last year's Matron Stakes and divisions of the Bluegrass and International Stallion, and finished worse than second only once.

She faced JK She'salady twice last season, finishing second in both her elimination for the Breeders Crown and the Breeders Crown final.

"I've always had faith in her," said Burke, who owns Sassa Hanover with The Panhellenic Stable Corp., the partnership of Mark Weaver and Mike Bruscelli, and Larry Karr. "She's a very good filly. She got the perfect trip and she did what you're supposed to do

"I think (Sassa Hanover) is the favorite now," said Burke, who also sends out 20-1 Storm Point in the Fan Hanover final. "Nancy's filly is a great filly, but it always scares me when one of mine is not perfect to only have seven days to get it perfect. (JK She'salady) is a champion, though, and maybe she can handle it. But I like my position right now a little bit better."

Johansson said Tuesday afternoon that JK She'salady's condition was improving.

"She seems like she's heading in the right direction," Johansson said. "We had her scoped (Tuesday) and it was day and night better than what it was Saturday. I'm happy about that. She seems much more alert, so that's always a good sign. Hopefully we can keep her that way. So far so good."

JK She'salady, a daughter of [Art Major](#)-Presidential Lady with \$901,123 in the bank, was making only her second start of the season in her Fan Hanover elimination. She won a New York Sire Stakes division on May 25 at Tioga Downs and entered last weekend's race off a 1:51.3 qualifier win at the Meadowlands.

"It's not really disappointing considering I think she raced a good race," Johansson said. "She paced (1):50.2 first up for a ways."

"In some sense, it worked out. If she was in the other division she might have won and we would have been standing around saying how great she was. We might not have realized how sick she was because that race went a full second slower and the stress factor is a lot less. Now you look into it a little more because she was extended. I'm happy to know that she was sick so I could work on it for this week."

Whereas the connections of elimination winners earned the right to select their posts, Johansson sweated out the open draw for the remaining spots on the gate.

"I was so nervous when they started drawing the race, but it couldn't have worked out any better," said Johansson, who trains JK She'salady for breeder/owner 3 Brothers Stables. "From (post five) maybe she can work out a little more of a trip than what she's been able to in the past. I think she's been first up in about 90 percent of her lifetime starts. It's time for her to get a nice trip."

Following is the field for the Fan Hanover in post order with drivers, trainers, and morning line odds:

1. Better Said, Scott Zeron, Linda Toscano, 12-1
2. Moonlit Dance, James MacDonald, Tony O'Sullivan, 4-1
3. Sassa Hanover, Yannick Gingras, Ron Burke, 7-2
4. Doctor Terror, Corey Callahan, Blake MacIntosh, 10-1
5. JK She'salady, Tim Tetrick, Nancy Johansson, 9-5
6. Solar Sister, Doug McNair, Gregg McNair, 6-1
7. Wrangler Magic, Sylvain Filion, Stephane Larocque, 8-1
8. Storm Point, Brian Sears, Ron Burke, 20-1
9. Single Me, David Miller, Tony O'Sullivan, 20-1
10. The Show Returns, John Campbell, Chris Ryder, 30-1