

JL Cruze edges Sebastian K in Sun Invitational

by Ken Weingartner, Harness Racing Communications

Wilkes-Barre, PA --- JL Cruze continues to cruise against harness racing's elite trotters.

After posting wins over Dan Patch Award winner [Father Patrick](#) in his previous two starts in preliminary rounds of the Graduate Series, JL Cruze rallied in deep stretch to upend world champion Sebastian K by a nose in 1:51 in Saturday's (July 4) \$75,000 Sun Invitational at The Downs at Mohegan Sun Pocono. The mile equaled the world record for a 4-year-old trotting gelding on a five-eighths-mile track set back in 2014 by Wind Of The North.



Curtis Salonick photo

JL Cruze nipped Sebastian K at the wire to win the Sun Invitational.

just gained so much confidence through those series at the Meadowlands and then coming here to Pocono (for the Weiss). It's just done wonders for him mentally.

It was JL Cruze's ninth consecutive win of the season. For the year, he has won 14 of 16 races and captured four winter/spring series championships -- the Super Bowl, Singer Memorial, Shiaway St Pat and Weiss -- for owners Ken Wood, Bill Dittmar and Stephen Iaquina. The group purchased JL Cruze for \$37,000 at November's Standardbred Horse Sale Mixed Sale.

"He doesn't go bad races," said John Campbell, who drives the horse for trainer Eric Ell. "He's raced good each and every time I've raced him, even when he got beat in the wintertime by Opulent Yankee. He's

"It can't be overstated. They know when they win or lose, especially when they can win and you're not stressing them. He just got stronger and stronger with those wins."

Sebastian K, making his 2015 debut at the track where last year he trotted 1:49 for the fastest mile in harness racing history, appeared to fight off JL Cruze's stretch bid but JL Cruze found one more gear in the final strides to get to the wire in front. Gural Hanover, who set the early fractions, finished third.

"There's no give-up in him," Campbell said. "He's shown me that before. He tries hard right to the wire. I kept right at him and he was able to wear him down right at the wire."

As JL Cruze raced through the winter and spring, Campbell began to think the son of [Crazed](#)-Topcat Hall could compete against the sport's best.

"I really didn't give it a thought until after the second series," Campbell said. "He had gotten so much better and Eric was working with his shoeing and got him really cleaned up with his gait. When he got done with that second series at the Meadowlands and had come here, I was pretty sure he could step up and compete at the next level.

"I'm not saying I thought he could beat those type of horses, but I was pretty sure he could compete at that level."

Gural Hanover led the field through an opening quarter-mile in :27.1 and was still on top by a nose over Sebastian K when he reached the halfway point in :55.3. Sebastian K, last season's Dan Patch Award winner for best older male trotter, was able to complete his move to the front, but trainer-driver Ake Svanstedt said "I lost the race there."

"I went very fast in that turn, very fast," Svanstedt said. "He was a little tired at the end. It was too tough in the second turn, too fast."

"But he did a good race."