

Atlanta beats the boys in Hambletonian

by Mike Farrell, for the Meadowlands

East Rutherford, NJ --- Rick Zeron, an admitted crier, had reason to well up Saturday after the 93rd Hambletonian. Not only had the veteran horseman won the trotting classic in his first try, but his son Scott was in the sulky to make it a family affair, and the high point of a 43-year-old career.

And he got the job done with a filly, the very determined Atlanta.

"This is a dream come true," said Rick Zeron. "That's my specialty, trotters. I live and breathe to train a trotter, especially a filly. It's more satisfying for me to train a filly to get where I am today, to win what I did today, than with a colt. It's a bigger challenge."

Atlanta won the \$1 million Hambletonian on Saturday, becoming the 14th filly to capture the famed trotting race for 3-year-olds.

It was an emotional victory for the father-son team from Oakville, Ontario.

The filly won the Hambletonian the hard way, setting the pace and holding on gamely in the lane. Scott Zeron employed those tactics earlier in the day in the first of two eliminations, and got Atlanta beat after setting a wicked pace. Remarkably, Atlanta regrouped quickly after the punishing mile.

"I spoke to my assistant trainer Ernie Henry who has looked after her since she was 18 months old," said Rick Zeron. "He said it took her about seven to 10 minutes longer than usual to get her wind back. After that, she was absolutely perfect. He said we were good to go."



Atlanta hit the wire on top in a time of 1:50.4 for driver Scott Zeron.

USTA/Mark Hall photo

"I've said it to a few people close to me," said Scott Zeron. "She's the best horse I ever drove. Everything is so fluid and effortless. The mile (in the elimination) just got away from me. I was mad at myself. That's not how I wanted to head into the final. If she was a champion, she would bounce back and she did."



USTA/Mark Hall photo

Trainer Rick Zeron (far right) celebrated in the winner's circle after Atlanta won the Hambletonian.

That was an understatement.

In the final, Atlanta was again on the lead. This time, Zeron did a better job of rationing her speed. Atlanta responded by kicking away from challenger Tactical Landing at the top of the stretch to open a three length advantage. She trotted strongly to the wire, winning by one length over 29-1 shot Met's Hall.

The time was 1:50.4 for the mile.

It was the second Hambletonian victory for Scott Zeron. He was at the lines when Marion Marauder won in 2016.

Atlanta, the 2-1 second choice, paid \$6.40, \$4.20 and \$3.60. Met's Hall returned \$19.40 and \$7.60. Tactical Landing paid \$3.40 to show.

Crystal Fashion was fourth as the 9-5 favorite followed by Evaluate, Alarm Detector, Classichap, Patent Leather, Hat Trick Habit and Fashionwoodchopper.

The win in the final was worth \$500,000 for the ownership team of Rick Zeron, Crawford Farms, Holland Racing, Howard Taylor and Brad Grant.

The Hambletonian kicks off the Triple Crown for trotters. The series continues with the Yonkers Trot on Sept. 1 and Kentucky Futurity on Oct. 7.

Crystal Fashion and Tactical Landing win eliminations

Crystal Fashion reeled in filly Atlanta at the wire to win the first of Saturday's (Aug. 4) two \$100,000 Hambletonian eliminations in 1:50.1 at the Meadowlands.

The time is a world record for a 3-year-old gelding.

Atlanta, who set fractions of :26, :53.2, and 1:21.1 in opening up a big lead heading around the final turn, finished second followed by Met's Hall, Evaluate and Hat Trick Habit to advance to the \$1 million final.

Tim Tetrick drove Crystal Fashion for owner Jules Siegel's Fashion Farms and trainer Jim Campbell.

Tactical Landing won the second of Saturday's two \$100,000 Hambletonian eliminations in 1:52.1, followed by Patent Leather, Fashionwoodchopper, Alarm Detector and Classichap to advance to the final.

Favorite Six Pack failed to advance after hooking wheels and interfering with Classichap in the stretch.

Tactical Landing was driven by trainer Jimmy Takter for The Tactical Landing Stable.

Big Crowd At Big M: A total of 18,252 came out for the on-track Hambletonian experience, despite bad weather early in the day.

"I'd like to thank our fans, owners, drivers, trainers, grooms and employees for supporting what is not only our biggest day here at the Meadowlands, but harness racing's biggest day," said Jason Settlemoir, the track's chief operating officer and general manager.



USTA/Mark Hall photo

Crystal Fashion reeled in filly Atlanta at the wire to win the first of Saturday's two \$100,000 Hambletonian eliminations in a world record 1:50.1.

Hambo Highlights: Tim Tetrick swept the late double and finished the day with four driving victories. Scott Zeron and Yannick Gingras won three apiece. Trainer Jimmy Takter had five winners on the day.

The first 14 races on the card saw only one winning favorite, before Tetrick finished the day with the all-chalk double at odds of 3-5 and 7-5.

On-track handle was just short of \$1.1 million, with all-source wagering totaling \$5,669,720, smashing the previous 2018 industry-best (established on Meadowlands Pace Night) by \$1,586,330.

Harness racing returns to the Big M on Oct. 12.