

## NY-Bred Barn Bella heads 'out of state' for Miami Valley Distaff

by Rich Fisher, USTA Web Newsroom Senior Correspondent

**Trenton, NJ** --- For the first time in her life, Barn Bella will experience the thrill of crossing a state border. And her connections hope she continues to give them thrills while mixing with "open" company.

After tearing through the competition for two years on her home turf of New York, the 4-year-old mare will compete in her first race outside the Empire State when she makes her season's debut Monday (May 7) in the \$81,600 Miami Valley Distaff for female trotters ages 4 and up.

The Distaff, part of a Miami Valley Raceway card that also features the \$102,200 Sam "Chip" Noble III Memorial for older female pacers, attracted a field that includes defending champion and millionaire Charmed Life, multiple O'Brien Award-winner Caprice Hill, last year's Kentucky Filly Futurity winner Ice Attraction, Ohio Sire Stakes champ Rose Run Sydney, and Indiana Sire Stakes champ Churita.

"You're excited about it," Barn Bella's co-owner/trainer Steven Pratt said. "I would have liked to have a couple starts to have an idea of where she's at instead of going in blind. There's a bunch of good ones in this race, that's for sure. But she's a good mare."

Good does not really cover it. In 24 career races, most against only New York-bred horses, Barn Bella has won 18 (with all her losses coming in races in which she went off stride) and earned \$688,725. She was the New York Sire Stakes champion for filly trotters at ages 2 and 3.



*Mike Lizzi photo*

**Barn Bella has won 18 races and earned \$688,725.**

The horse has been so outstanding, Pratt is abandoning his usual practice of racing a horse at ages 2 and 3 and then selling it. As part-owner with wife Nancy and Wanda Polisseni's Purple Haze Stables, the trainer will take a horse out of state for the first time since he began working with young ones 12 years ago.

"Wanda was going to have to make a decision whether to sell or buy me out to race her," Pratt said. "We talked about it. For her, she enjoys watching the race, so I'm good with that."

So, Barn Bella will take on the Grand Circuit against some of the best female competition in the land. She came close to going out of state last year when Pratt wrote a \$62,500 check to supplement to the Breeders Crown before ultimately deciding not to go to the event.

"You had to be third to break even, or even lose about \$10,000 if you were third," he said. "We decided enough's enough. And rather than breed her this year we would give her a chance to race against the Grand Circuit horses and see what happens."

This year, she is staked to nearly a dozen races, including the Miami Valley Distaff, Graduate Series, Miss Versatility Series, Armbro Flight, Hambletonian Maturity, Dr. John R.

Steele Memorial, Joie De Vie, Allorage Farms for mares, Breeders Crown and TVG championship.

Pratt feels his horse is ready to meet the challenge.

"She went last year in (1):51(.3) pretty handy," he said. "She's never been beat that she hasn't made a break. With all the rest we've won.

"She's matured this year. She's heavier; I hope she's not too fat. But she's matured a lot. She has a very nice temperament. She's a nice horse to race; Jeff (Gregory) and Claude (Huckabone Jr.) have done a great job driving her."

A daughter of [Conway Hall](#) out of Bravissima, Barn Bella was purchased for \$32,000 at the 2015 SUNY Morrisville Sale. Barn Bella has lived up to Pratt's expectations, and has turned a tidy profit despite staying local.

"It's just limiting her starts and if they're good enough, they're going to win the Empire Breeders and the (NYSS) finals," Pratt said. "Half a million's enough without leaving the state.

"I'm just small, I buy and race two or three of them. The simpler the better. I'm getting near the end of the tunnel. I've maintained that if they're good enough, if they're the best in New York, you'll make enough. You don't have to run around. A lot of times you're just giving it back between stakes fees and shipping, stuff like that."

Pratt's biggest concern with this season is time constraints due to travel, but that cannot offset his anticipation to see what his mare can do on the big stages.

"The most exciting thing is that she won't see a half-mile track except for Delaware," he said. "She'll be on the big track and that's where she belongs, away from the half-mile. So we'll give her a couple starts and we'll see where she's at.

"She's been a good one for us. They had some real nice fillies last year at 3 but she just was dominant. She can race on the front or she can race from behind. She's just a nice horse. It's always nice to be lucky enough to have a real nice one. It really is. We'll see if she's a real nice horse against the good competition."

Racing begins at 2:05 p.m. (EDT) Monday at Miami Valley. The Distaff is race eight and the Noble, which honors the late Ohio Hall of Fame horseman Chip Noble, is race 10.

For the complete Miami Valley Distaff field, click [here](#).

For the complete Sam "Chip" Noble III Memorial field, click [here](#).