

Cutler-bound trotters eye 2017 turnaround

by Ken Weingartner, Harness Racing Communications

Freehold, NJ --- Crazy Wow and JL Cruze didn't have the best of luck last year, but their connections are hoping for better fortunes this season. The two horses are among a dozen ready for Grand Circuit action in Saturday's \$200,000 Arthur J. Cutler Memorial for older trotters at the Meadowlands Racetrack in New Jersey.

The Cutler attracted 13 horses, with European newcomer Tuonoblu Rex eliminated from the 12-horse field based on 2016-17 earnings. Tuonoblu Rex will race Sunday at The Downs at Mohegan Sun Pocono.

Because the size of the field will require two horses to start in the second tier --- Windsun Revenge and Muscle Diamond --- the race will be contested at 1-1/8 miles.

JL Cruze, the 2015 Dan Patch Award winner for best older male trotter, won five of 18 races in 2016 and earned \$231,355 in purses. He battled issues with dehydration and synchronous diaphragmatic flutter, more commonly referred to as thumps, throughout the season.



Lisa photo

JL Cruze has won 26 times in his career, with lifetime earnings of \$893,808.

"He wouldn't drink away from home very well," trainer Eric Ell said. "We fought that most of the year. It was an issue with a little bit of dehydration. We finally did get him straightened out at the end of the year. As far as soundness, he was fine. He had an OK year. He probably should have made double or three times what he made if he didn't have the thumps. But it is what it is. We hope this year is going to be better."

JL Cruze failed to win on the Grand Circuit last year. He finished third in the Breeders Crown Open Trot, Cashman Memorial, and Allerage Farms Open Trot.

"He was in the hunt a lot, but he was always like fourth or fifth best," Ell said. "He's come back real good. He's carrying his weight better than he ever has, he feels better than he ever has. He's had a little bit of foot issues, which he's had in the past and they're still with him. But other than that he's fantastic. If I could ever get him a hundred percent I think he could go with most any of them out there."

In 2015, JL Cruze won the Hambletonian Maturity at 1-1/8 miles in a world-record 2:04.2 at the Meadowlands. He also won the Graduate Series championship at the Big M in a world-record 1:49.4 and captured the Sun Invitational at Pocono in a world-record equalling 1:51.

JL Cruze began this year with a third-place finish behind Rock Of Cashel and Opulent Yankee last Friday at the Meadowlands. He was beaten by a nose in 1:51.3.

"He was tremendous," Ell said. "He lost a little bit of ground in the last turn and that's the only thing that got him beat."

David Miller drove JL Cruze in his seasonal debut, but will be unavailable Saturday because of his daughter's college graduation, Ell said. Corey Callahan will get the assignment in the sulky. JL Cruze will start from post No. 7.

Crazy Wow, who won \$1.02 million in 2015 at age 3 and banked \$280,524 last season, will start the Cutler from post six with Yannick Gingras driving for trainer Ron Burke.

Last year, Crazy Wow won one of 14 races, but he finished the campaign strongly with a second-place finish by a nose to Obrigado in the TVG Free For All Series championship at the Meadowlands. He also was second in the Allerage and fifth (beaten by 2-1/4 lengths) in the Breeders Crown.



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"He started to turn it around at the end of last year," Burke said. "I was happy with the way he finished. Anything that could go wrong did go wrong earlier in the year. Finally things started to go better for him. Maybe mentally he matured too. They have to get tougher to race in that division against the older horses. Maybe he toughened himself up mentally.

Crazy Wow has banked \$1,546,064 in his career, with 15 trips to the winner's circle.

"He has plenty of ability. He wasn't that far from the best ones last year. I definitely think he has the right to get even better this year."

Crazy Wow made his seasonal debut April 21 at the Meadowlands and finished second to Tuonoblu Rex in 1:52.1.

"I was very happy with his first start," Burke said. "He came back excellent."

Burke has two more starters in the Cutler, Rose Run Parker and Gural Hanover. Rose Run Parker will start from post eight and Gural Hanover from post nine.

"They're both working their way back," Burke said. "I think they're all right, but they drew the worst two spots. It's going to be a long road from out there. They're going to have to try to find a way to get in the flow without getting locked in and try to pick them up late. So we'll see."

Burke's Hannelore Hanover, who received the 2016 Dan Patch Award for best older female trotter and finished one vote behind Marion Marauder for Trotter of the Year, will skip the Cutler in favor of Sunday's \$86,400 Miami Valley Distaff for trotting mares.

"I had her in (the Cutler) and then I took her out of the second payment," Burke said. "She's going to race against the boys enough this year that I'm not going to do it starting off the year. Pretty much every other time there's a bigger race, with boys going for more money, if she's as sharp as I think she is I'll give her shots against the boys."

Following is the Cutler field in post order with listed drivers and trainers. The Cutler is race seven on Saturday's Meadowlands card, with a 9:15 p.m. estimated post time.

PP-Horse-Driver-Trainer

- 1-Centurion ATM-Brett Miller-Ake Svanstedt
- 2-Crazshana-Tim Tetrick-Jeff Bamond Jr.
- 3-Maestro Blue Chip-Tim Tetrick-Jim King Jr.
- 4-Rubber Duck-Joe Bongiorno-Richard Johnson
- 5-Resolve-Ake Svanstedt-Ake Svanstedt
- 6-Crazy Wow-Yannick Gingras-Ron Burke
- 7-JL Cruze-Corey Callahan-Eric Ell
- 8-Rose Run Parker-Yannick Gingras-Ron Burke
- 9-Gural Hanover-Matt Kakaley-Ron Burke
- 10-Musical Rhythm-Tim Tetrick-Benoit Baillargeon
- 11-Windsun Revenge-Scott Zeron-Jeff Durham
- 12-Muscle Diamond-John Campbell-Brett Bittle

Windsun Revenge and Muscle Diamond start from the second tier.