

New Owner Seminar helps new owner gets his wish and much, much more

By Tim Bojarski

Steve Stewart has come full circle in harness racing. Now living in Berlin, New York, Stewart first got involved in the sport decades ago while living in Long Island.

He started going to the races in the late seventies at Roosevelt Raceway as a fan and eventually became a groom for trainer Bob Bencal. His career path eventually took him through several jobs both in and out of the business including a stint at the Sports Eye.

As life took over, Stewart (who now works in online sales) moved upstate away from the city where he and his wife Laura raised their family. Living only about an hour's drive from Saratoga Raceway, Stewart's love for the trotters was rekindled and it came time for him to revisit an old passion; he wanted to buy a Standardbred.

"The idea just kind of came to me randomly since I was living up here and it's been something I've always wanted to do. It was a line on my bucket list to be crossed off. That's all I wanted to do was get into the winner's circle one-time; that was my main goal" said Stewart.

Decades removed from the business and not quite sure how to get started, Steve and Laura signed up for a new owner seminar that was being presented by the Harness Horse Breeders of New York at Saratoga Raceway in 2014. That was all it took for him to start what has turned into a very successful venture.

"After i attended the seminar I needed to find a trainer to get started and went to the race office at Saratoga. I got the contact information of a couple trainers I was interested in and went from there. The first one I spoke with just didn't feel like a good fit but the next guy clicked with me and that's who I got started with" Stewart recalled.

That guy was Mark Beckwith.

His first horse was a trotter named Sixth Man. After winning three races, Sixth Man got injured and unfortunately had to be put down. He then bought pacer Artistic Blue, who they raced and then resold after a few starts.

After getting off to a less than stellar start, Stewart needed to re-think his strategy and stepped away for a couple of months to regroup.

"When I finally decided to get back in I called Mark to see if he had any horses on the radar. But his stable was full and he really couldn't take any more training bills. So he recommended I call Scott Mongeon who he said would be able to get a horse for me" said Stewart.

Mongeon told Stewart he could help him out and in a couple of weeks called him about a trotter he knew was for sale named Twisted Pretzel.

"When Scott called me about Twisted Pretzel I told him I knew the horse because Sixth Man had raced against him several times and ironically I had a win photo of him with Twisted Pretzel second, just a neck

apart. I told him I was definitely interested. We had the horse vetted out, sent them a check and the following week the horse was in the box.”

Twisted Pretzel won his first start for his new owners in September of 2016 in a lower level condition race. He won two more races after that and moved up the ranks into the weekly trotting feature at Saratoga where he finished third in 1:54.1. But the best was yet to come.

The following year in 36 starts, Twisted Pretzel won 13 races (six of which were Open Handicaps), was second three times and third another seven while amassing \$121,909 in purses and taking a new lifetime mark of 1:55.

The career year Twisted Pretzel had, earned him the designation of 2017 Trotter of the Year from Saratoga Raceway.

Now having a solid race horse in his barn, Stewart was ready to expand the operation and get another one. This time however, he wanted a New York bred yearling.

“I thought it was time and I wanted to buy a horse that was staked in New York. But I also wanted one sired by Crazyed, who was Twisted Pretzel’s father. I got the Morrisville Sale catalog and started looking at Crazyed-sired yearlings. I saw a few but I particularly liked a horse named Party Saver who was hip #55, which just happened to be my year of birth. Oddly enough my trainer had him on his list as well” Stewart said.

Stewart went into the sale with a price of \$20,000 in mind. As the bidding went on he reached that plateau, and then was outbid with a \$21,000 counter. Stewart thought, turned around and walked away from the ring.

“The auctioneer stopped the auction and started talking about the horse, his breeding and such. By the time the bidding resumed I was back to my seat just in time to watch my wife put her hand up and bid \$22,000! The gavel fell and we walked away with the horse, thanks to my wife” Stewart recounted.

With respect for their stable star, Party Saver was renamed “IM TP’s Crazyed Bro” and he made his first lifetime start for the Stewarts at Saratoga this year on June 14 in a baby race where he finished second.

He will also be starting in the New York Sire Stakes this summer where Stewart will hopefully stand in the winner's circle once again with his wife and New York bred winner.

On Sunday (June 24) the Harness Horse Breeders of New York State will be holding another new owner seminar at Tioga Downs and would like to invite all interested parties to join them. This seminar will provide valuable information for prospective new owners and focus on all aspects of horse ownership that can get you on your way to standing in the winner’s circle with your own horse.

Registration is at 9:30 a.m. and the seminar begins at 10:00 a.m. with beverages and Danishes. The seminar will include materials, lunch, programs and live racing.

Tuition is \$20 per person or \$30 per couple and will be collected upon arrival at registration.

To register for this seminar, contact the Harness Horse Breeders of New York State at 518-785-5858, email info@hbnys.com or through this link. (<https://www.eventbrite.com/e/harness-horse-breeders-of-ny-ownership-seminar-tickets-46525686581?aff=es2>)