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Reader Forum

Expert Advice

After reading the Tips of the Trade article on staying level in the December 2009 issue, I would like to share a few fundamental things about a racebike that the legendary William Haughton shared with me many years ago.

Mr. Haughton told me that years ago in the 1960s, he sent everything to do with a horse and his equipment to a company that did wind resistance for various sports and even for astronauts at NASA. Here are the following recommendations:

1. The horse by nature is very aerodynamic;
2. Eliminate blind bridles, Murphy blinds, back pads and even the race bike seats;
3. Shafts of the bike should be pivoted so that the air would flow over the top of the shafts like wings of an airplane;
4. The undercarriage of the sulky should be flat, not round;
5. The most important thing for wind resistance: put the driver's feet behind the horse;
6. Every race bike should be hooked 54 inches from the ground to the end of the shafts no matter the size of the horse.

William O'Donnell, Acton, Ontario

Memories of Goog

I was sitting here working when I opened my e-mail to find a message from my friend Martin Meyer in Germany, asking if I had read the article on I'm Dam Goog [November 2009].

The next sentence in his e-mail was the following: "I'll never forget training him at Los [Alamitos], when he was 2. Coming off the track, that loose horse almost killed both of us; in that case he would not have made \$600,000. Great horse, one of the tuffest [sic] on the planet. That left hip, good they don't race the wrong way in USA." I laughed when I read this as yet another reminder I witnessed firsthand what I'm Dam Goog has overcome in his career.

On one particular day at Los Alamitos, we put him out in the pen for some sun, and a few of my grooms were kicking an old deflated soccer ball

around. Goog had his ears up and was running around snorting, watching the action. So I threw the ball in the pen and jumped in with him.

I started to fake left and right, pretending I was trying to get by him, when he started doing the same, in unison, stopping me from getting by. Then, in what seemed like a blink of an eye, he bent down and grabbed the ball in his mouth, and took off.

When I looked at my help, the four of us were standing there with our jaws hanging. I could not believe what just happened. There were many more matches after that.

Thanks to Harvey Stein for the tribute. Horses like him are once in a lifetime, and to have played a part in some capacity is an honor.

Robert Marchand, Austin, Texas

Carson Not Humorous

Was Bob Carson's Nov. 16 Web column, "Venture Capitalist Needed," meant to be satire? If not, he must be [crazy]. Talk about what's wrong with the sport!

This is pure, wasteful idiocy, ranking up there with putting black saddlecloths on all competitors in Breeders Crown races; Rosecroft's old concept of drawing for post positions after the close of wagering; the late Dana Irving's idea to build a track in Delaware County, where only the horsemen could wager; and the lax enforcement of integrity at the old Liberty Bell and, to a lesser degree, Brandywine.

As the late, great Jack Kiser of the *Daily News* used to write: "Don't get me wrong, I love harness racing!"

William Waters, Gloucester City, N.J.

Muscle Hill Had a Choice

I feel the need to comment on the quote on page 32 of the December issue from Thomas Pontone, one of the owners of Muscle Hill.

Every year these stories appear in various publications where the owner of a great 3-year-old is lamenting the fact that this is the horse's last race and how sad he or she is to see the horse being retired. Considering that the horse did not ask to be retired,

our shrinking fan base did not ask to see the horse retired, the trainer, and neither the driver nor groom asked for the horse to be retired, I find it extremely annoying that someone would complain about something that is completely within their control.

I literally begged the three owners of Muscle Hill to race this horse next year—for the good of the sport—and all of them agreed that it would be good for the sport, but that the decision had been made to retire the horse and could not be reversed. I find it very discouraging if three of the most dedicated owners that we have in harness racing are not willing to race probably the greatest trotter of all time an extra year—if for no other reason than to give the horse an opportunity to break the 1:50 barrier and defeat any international challenger as well.

Clearly, the owners have every right to retire the horse and, incidentally, I purchased a share earlier this year, before the horse raced at 3, so I have a small stake in this. But they should not complain about how sad it is to see the horse being retired when the decision to retire the horse is purely theirs. If we do not break this cycle of retiring every good 3-year-old, we have no chance of creating new fans and new potential owners, and our sport will continue to decline until the various states decide to take away the subsidy that is keeping us afloat.

We all owe a debt of gratitude to an owner like Joe Muscara Sr., who kept Mister Big racing the last few years and provided our customers with races that gave us all a thrill.

Jeffrey Gural, New York, N.Y.

CORRECTION: In the story titled "And They're Off" from the January issue, both the limousine and Hummer starting gates pictured on page 86 are actually designed by Howard Starting Gates of Waynesfield, Ohio. *Hoof Beats* regrets the error.

We welcome your input. Here's how to reach us.

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Please include your name, address and phone number. Letters are subject to editing for clarity and space.



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