

News from the **North**

By Richard Scheidt

Tapeta Produces

Golden Gate Fields began its 2007 fall meet on November 7 with a new foothold. *Tapeta Footings* is the name of the engineered racing surface installed at Golden Gate Fields this past summer. *Tapeta*, which is Latin for “carpet” was designed by trainer-turned-trackman extraordinaire Michael Dickinson. Engineered with the health and welfare of horse and jockey in mind, *Tapeta* is also an all-weather racing surface selected to enhance racing in the typically wet winter months.

If you build it, they will come! Racing office staff at Golden Gate Fields was challenged with something they hadn't seen in quite some time: a demand for stalls far exceeding the number of stalls available. Typically running a meet at about 80 percent occupancy, the barn area is currently at capacity with 1,350 horses on the grounds and others waiting to get in. The backstretch has over a dozen new trainers shipping in from places such as Washington, Ohio, Arizona, and Vancouver – accounting for some 150 horses new to the Northern California circuit.

The winners' circle at Golden Gate Fields saw a lot of different faces early in the meet. Through just the first week of races – 5 days and 44 races – 42 different owners won with horses saddled by 32 different trainers. After two weeks and 86 races, those numbers rose to 50 owners and 47 trainers with win photos.

Not only are more owners and trainers finding their way to the track, but more horses as well – a lot more. Through the first 20 days, average field size was 8.4 horses per race, up 1.5 horses. More horses equals additional handle. The result: total handle was up over 7 percent from the previous year.

If early reports are any indication, the \$10 million dollar investment in a new engineered surface is already paying dividends.

Seminar Update

TOC's Continuing Education Series made its first appearance at the Big Fresno Fair in October. Track announcer Frank Mirahmadi hosted Ownership 101. Participants were treated to ownership insights from owner/trainer Rene Amescua. Mirahmadi and Amescua touched on the ins and outs of acquiring a Thoroughbred and choosing a trainer. The inquisitive crowd asked many questions about the costs of ownership. Amescua detailed the average monthly costs of owning a Thoroughbred, the day rate and what that includes, what a monthly veterinary bill might come to, and other miscellaneous costs such as a shoeing. A few lucky participants received copies of the popular *Thoroughbred Owners' Handbook* in a raffle following the seminar.

In November at Golden Gate Fields, long time owner Kent Ochs was joined by Burnie Lenau, an owner of two years, to discuss the varied “Avenues to Ownership.” Ochs, who primarily owns in partnerships, shared his ownership philosophy and his goals. Ochs is responsible for bringing dozens of new owners into the game over the past 30 years including Lenau. Lenau shared his experiences and his preferences as a sole or majority owner. The two panelists informed and entertained a group of 25 participants with

their differing views on ownership opportunities. They also touched on the various ways to acquire a Thoroughbred. Ochs has substantial experience as a breeder, while Lenau is active at the claim box. Following the presentation and question and answer session, participants mingled with representatives from partnership groups including Blinkers On Racing Stable and Trojan Racing.

The Seminar Series continues in 2008 with TOC's first panel scheduled for February at Bay Meadows. Visit www.toconline.com for the entire 2008 schedule of events.

Farewell Bay Meadows

February 6 marks the last scheduled opening day for a Bay Meadows race meet (The San Mateo County Fair is scheduled to run two weeks in August). The meet will be a time to reflect, and to remember that Bay Meadows was once ahead of the curve in welcoming Californians to Thoroughbred racing. The historic track first opened for business in 1934 and welcomed some 15,000 people in attendance. The track was also the first to use many amenities we now take for granted, including the totalizator system, the photo finish camera, and the electric starting gate.

Many great horses graced the Bay Meadows track at one time or another. As Hollywood filmmakers recently reminded us, Seabiscuit ran there of course; so too did others like Native Diver, Citation, John Henry, Cigar, Tabasco Cat, Charismatic, Brown Bess, and Lost in the Fog, to name just a few.

Let's not forget the wingiest jockey of all time, Russell Baze, who in December of 2006 broke the all time mark set by Laffit Pincay Jr. at 9,531 wins and is now closing in on 10,000. In fact, all three of the winningest riders – Bill Shoemaker being the other great – rode and won races on the San Mateo track. Jerry Hollendorfer, the all-time leading trainer in Northern California – and just the fourth trainer to ever win 5,000 races – has won the training title at Bay Meadows 36 straight race meets.

With 70 days of racing scheduled to run this spring, make your way out to bid a fond farewell to Bay Meadows. With luck, perhaps history will repeat itself on closing day May 11; let's aim to have 15,000 people on track to say goodbye to the grand old track!



The sun will set on historic Bay Meadows in May 2008