



CTBA Member
PROFILE

BILL SPAWR

BY EMILY SHIELDS

Trainer Bill Spawr had plenty of confidence in Skye Diamonds before the \$200,000 Great Lady M. Stakes (G2), at least until he looked at the field. The four rivals in the July 8 contest included Eclipse champion and Breeders' Cup Filly & Mare Sprint (G1) winner *Finest City*, grade 1 winner *Constellation*, and dual grade 2 winner *Pretty N Cool*.

"She was training so well; I thought she could win," Spawr said. "But when I saw the competition, I knew she would have to be at her very best to beat those kinds of fillies. I still can't believe she won so well and so fast."

Skye Diamonds raced in midpack early, rolled four wide into the stretch, and cruised past David Flores on *Constellation* to win by 2½

lengths, stopping the clock in 1:14.79 for the 6½-furlong distance. The next day, Flores told Spawr, "I was loaded with a fresh horse and I couldn't believe that your filly went by us!"

The 77-year-old Spawr has a long history with California-breds. He has trained such wickedly fast state-bred sprinters as *Sentient Jet* Breeders' Cup Sprint (G1) winner *Amazombie* and warrior *Sensational Star*, as well as Cal-bred fillies such as stakes winners *Enjoy the Moment* and *Ismene*.

Spawr first gained an interest in racing when he came across the *Daily Racing Form*, and he eventually worked as a blacksmith and veterinarian assistant before he turned to training in the 1980s. While most barns operate on an early schedule, with the track closing for morning training

around 10 a.m., Spawr takes "early" to another level.

"We are always working by 3 a.m.," Spawr said, admitting that he arrives at the barn by 2:45 many days. "You can get a lot done at that time of day. We are done training by 8." Then he admitted that some days they are "late" and don't finish "until 8:10."

Spawr's earlier methods have worked, with a parade of top runners streaming through his care. Multiple graded stakes winner *Sensational Star* won several stakes in 1989 and 1990. He was heavily favored to win the inaugural California Cup Sprint Handicap but finished a disappointing second. Just hours later Spawr's former claimer *My Sonny Boy* saved the day by upsetting the \$300,000 Wells Fargo Bank California Cup Classic Handicap.

The exceptional grass mare *Exchange* gave Spawr three grade 1 victories amidst her record of 15 wins and seven seconds in 30 starts. The brilliant distaffer earned \$1,287,795 while winning stakes in five consecutive seasons.

Enjoy the Moment and *Ismene* became California-bred champions in 1999 and 2011, respectively.

Enjoy the Moment earned more than a half million dollars that included the winning purses from three graded stakes. Although she did not win outside of California, she did ship to compete at Belmont Park in New York, Gulfstream Park in Florida, and Fair Grounds in Louisiana.

The high-strung *Ismene*, whom Spawr needed to pacify with rubber cones and balls to play with in her stall, won

DEVELOPING FIGHTING SKILLS FOR THE TITLE BOUTS



Jockey Mike Smith recounts *Ismene's* Cal-bred Champion Stakes victory with trainer Bill Spawr, right, and owner Stephen Ferraro

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“Every day I miss him. He’s at Old Friends in Kentucky now, and he’s one of the favorites there. He gets a lot of attention. He’s a friendly guy, as long as you have a carrot”

— Bill Spawr on Cal-bred favorite Amazombie



An exuberant co-owner and trainer, Spawr celebrates Amazombie’s grade 1 Bing Crosby victory with jockey Mike Smith

the 2011 Anoakia Stakes and California Breeders’ Champion Stakes, and returned off an 11-month layoff to run second in three stakes. She earned \$236,990.

While all of them are standouts in their own right, none wormed their way into Spawr’s heart as much as Amazombie did. The gelding, who surprised Spawr by coming as part of a package deal with another colt he actually meant to purchase, went on to become one of California’s brightest stars.

The son of Northern Fleet—Wilshe Amaze, by In Excess, was named the Eclipse Award champion sprinter of 2011, having won the Breeders’ Cup Sprint by a neck at Churchill Downs in Kentucky. He retired after four productive seasons, earning \$1,920,378 while winning 12 of 29 starts.

“Every day I miss him,” Spawr said. “He’s at Old Friends in Kentucky now, and he’s one of the favorites there. He gets a lot of attention. He’s a friendly

guy, as long as you have a carrot.”

Spawr reminisced about Amazombie’s career as well. “We’ve been fortunate enough to have some real good ones, but him winning the Breeders’ Cup was the best moment. He’d be a top favorite; he brought us so much joy.”

In Skye Diamonds, Spawr sees similarities to Amazombie. “She has the talent to do what he did,” he explained. “She’s special.”

Skye Diamonds broke her maiden second out at Los Alamitos in 2015, then won an allowance optional claimer and two high-priced claiming events in 2016 before her smashing success so far this year. The 4-year-old filly, owned by Tom Acker, Allen Racing, and Bloom Racing Stables, won two allowance optional claiming events to start the season, including a 5¾-length romp in February. Spawr recalls the race vividly.

“I always watch on two TVs at once, so I can view both the head-on and the pan,” he said. “The way she won and

the way she finished, I was speechless. I couldn’t move. That’s when I knew we really had something.”

After that effort Skye Diamonds added the \$101,035 Dream of Summer Stakes before her Great Lady M. score. Donald Dizney’s Dizney Double Diamond bred the chestnut daughter of First Dude—Exonerated, by Johannesburg. She has won eight of 15 starts, with four seconds, and has earned \$449,150.

Spawr said he would look to get Skye Diamonds into the \$100,000 Rancho Bernardo Handicap Aug. 13 at Del Mar, which will host the 2017 Breeders’ Cup World Thoroughbred Championships. “It’s 6½ furlongs, which helps her closing style,” Spawr said.

Although winning over the same surface that holds the Breeders’ Cup is an ideal plus for many horses, Skye Diamonds has already taken care of that, having scored there as the favorite in August 2016. **CTB**