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From The Great White North: Frenchfry surprise

Friday, November 18, 2011 By: Karen Briggs

he Great White North: Frenchfry surprise

Friday, November 18, 2011 - by Karen Briggs, USTA Web Newsroom Senior Correspondent

Karen Briggs **Toronto, ON** --- We all know by now that the Oct. 29 Breeders Crown, at Toronto's Woodbine Racetrack, dealt us a few surprises -- not the least of which was that, while conditions remained relatively mild and cooperative in the Great White North, the weather deities were not nearly so magnanimous south of the border.

An autumn snowstorm paralyzed a good chunk of the east coast and shut down airports -- resulting in four high-profile drivers and two trainers not making it anywhere near North American harness racing's championship night.

Fortunately, that circumstance had no effect on local trainer Jeff Gillis, who had his good friend [Jody Jamieson](#) already slated to drive two of his three Breeders Crown entries (with [Brian Sears](#) listed to pilot the third, Mystician). That his 6-year-old trotting mare, Frenchfrysvinegar, came home a decisive winner in a contest against the best distaff trotters on the continent that night, however, was a bit of a shocker.

Consider that she left from post 10. And consider that stakes company -- let alone Breeders Crown company -- is something she has almost never kept in the past.

Frenchfrysvinegar was a 1:53.3 winner in the Breeders Crown. Frenchfrysvinegar, owned and bred by David Smith of Rockwood, Ontario, is definitely the sort of mare you'd like to have in your barn. As a 6-year-old, she has hit the board in 18 of 25 starts, with eight wins, and has banked \$355,490 on the Woodbine Entertainment Group circuit.

A number of those checks have been picked up against the top male trotters on the circuit, given that the mare races have rarely filled. That's nothing to sneeze at -- but Gillis took a big leap when he decided to supplement the mare to the Breeders Crown.

"Yeah, she doesn't have any stakes company action on her record," said Gillis. "But she's been in with San Pail and the other boys and she's been coming in third or fourth pretty consistently. It was a last-minute decision to supplement her. I suggested it to David and he was hesitant, so I offered to pay one-third of the supplement for one-third of the purse."

The gamble paid off in spades. Frenchfrysvinegar, with Jamieson in the bike, was parked out most of the mile behind Action-Broadway ([Mark MacDonald](#)), but took command late in the stretch and snatched a half-length victory in 1:53.3.

"I'll tell you, it didn't look good when we saw it was an 11-horse field and we got post 10," said Gillis. "At that point we were just hoping to recover the supplement."

"We gave it a try, and I'm glad we did."

Frenchfrysvinegar arrived in Gillis's barn just shy of a year ago. Prior to that, she had been conditioned by her owner and breeder, with earnings of just shy of \$75,000 in 2010. Gillis says he's not even sure what prompted Smith to turn the mare over to him.

"I got a phone call saying Dave wanted to drop off the horse, and I said sure. I didn't know a lot about her, but I thought she'd be a useful sort."

With a Breeders Crown win having boosted her career earnings to nearly \$600,000, you could say that. And next year, Gillis is ensuring that Frenchfrysvinegar will be eligible to all those events she sat out in 2011.

"We'll pay her into the Armbr Flight, the Glorys Comet, and the Breeders Crown, and maybe we'll head to Kentucky as well, though I don't want to count our chickens too early," Gillis said.

"She's a sound mare. She wasn't used hard at two and three, so she doesn't have a lot of wear and tear on her. She kind of turned a corner last January and her groom, Sandi Lawrence, deserves a lot of credit for how hard she's worked on her."

"She'll have to continue going up against the boys at Woodbine -- that's just how it is in Ontario; there aren't enough older mares to fill the races. But she holds her own."

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