



E-NEWS AND E-NOTES FOR FRIDAY MARCH 7th, 2025



Nero (Joe O'Brien) winning the Scarlet & Gray 1975

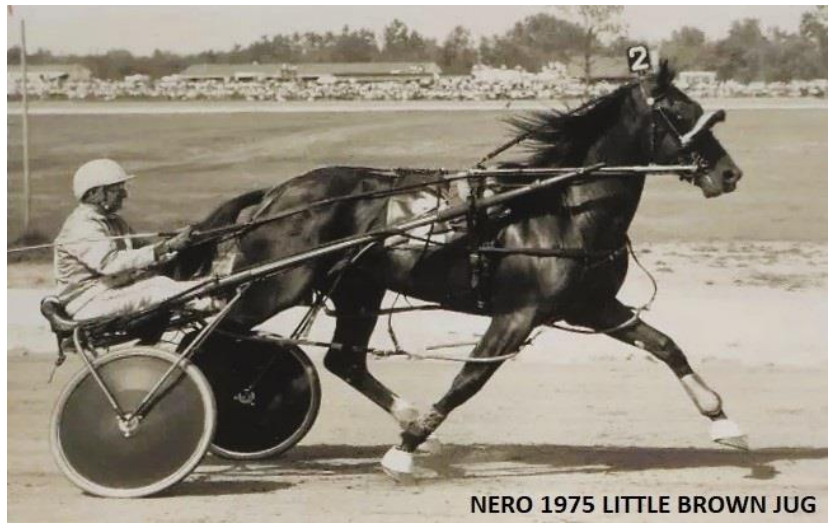
## Hidden Treasures

Usually I tend to ignore those pop up ads/news bits that infiltrate the computer screens unless they grab my interest. This past week or so there have been a set appearing that really caught my eye. They were for a group of older harness horse publicity photos being sold mainly from the 1970s of quite a few animals that I knew and a lot from my old stompin' grounds. Many were unidentified and it really got my search engine up and running. Numerous photos, and there are many, were labeled "Nero horse 1974" and only a couple had a photographer's name. Ontario Dave drew a blank but thanks to another one of my assistant sleuths, Bay State Linda, was found to be Fred Droddy of Galena, Ohio. It was then I reached out to the "Ohio Sure Shot," Brad Conrad, on site photographer at the three major Ohio tracks as well as 30 of Ohio

Fairs. It was recognition as his father Barry had started with Fred Droddy in the late 1960's at Scioto Downs before beginning his own Conrad Photos. I sent Brad the link and the search words and he is perusing the content as I type. And there are lots to be identified. We might need volunteers.

Nero was a foal of 1972 and definitely a Hidden Treasure as he was purchased for \$20,000 by a group as their first horse. Trained by a 50-year-old Jim Crane, Nero would be his calling card as he stepped into Harness racing's elite as he dominated the ranks. He was by Meadow Skipper out of La Byrd Abbe by Gene Abbe and he was notorious for his distinctive headwear. Lots of headgear. With a tendency to "see things" Crane had his charge equipped with a huge brush shadowroll that became Nero's trademark. And after his success on the track as he went on to win 25 out of 43 races and over \$528,000 just about everybody wanted to try one for their problem horse. My first reaction when I saw the rigging was WTH is this? And they weren't cheap either so there was quite a bit of borrowing as everyone said "let me try that on..."

His sire Meadow Skipper had popularized leather hopples as he, along with a few of his progeny, had a tendency to have weak stifles. When you sat behind one of them it literally looked like a bag of bones being rolled as you went along. Soren Nordin would test his trotters by leaning all his body weight on their hind end to see if they had the strength to carry them the mile. Tar Heels usually had a large lug head that put too much imbalance on the front end and they were always predisposed to splints.



At the Farm in New Egypt, under the care of yearling manager Bert Harper - who had worked for Earl Avery during the Meadow Skipper days - the colts grew up together as they played, ran, and fought amongst themselves. Stanley would stop by the paddocks every so often and study them intently as they interacted.

"What are you looking at?" I once asked as the youngsters by Meadow Skipper, Most Happy Fella, Super Bowl, Neville Pride, and Albatross cavorted in the sun.

"I'm seeing who the dominant one is," he said. "It translates to the racetrack too."

Looking for a Hidden Treasure.

Meadow Skipper had a few up until his passing in January of 1982, both the good, the bad, and the ugly.

The story from Ontario recalls a Meadow Skipper offspring that same month at the Meadowlands who had the gait and the looks but lacked the talent as he just won a maiden "on his hands and knees." There was a glimmer of hope though because a few people expressed interest in the colt and were thinking about buying him... after his next race ...if he raced good. George decided to keep him covered up and not show his true worth which wasn't too much. He'd put him in a traffic jam with the intention of hugging the rail and say "if I only could have gotten out I win for fun." *Yes, I'll take a check but cash would be better.*

The gate opens and he gets away fifth and the field is double tiered past the 3/4s. Then, as fate would have it, the horse outside of him stops like an eight-day clock and George loses his "excuse." He stays put along the rail though, he'll maybe say he got a leg out of the hopple or the right line come undone but he does finish the mile admirably and the sale is still hopeful.

As soon as he got off the bike though there was the ominous announcement "...please call the Judges."



George picks up the phone and the Presiding Judge begins "...about that drive."

Before he says another word: "I shouldn't have raced this colt tonight," George blurts out, "his father died this morning!"

The Judge pauses, shakes his head, laughs, and hangs up the phone.

Not a Hidden Treasure but definitely Solid Gold.