

August 17, 2014

PANAMA HAT ASTOUNDS AGAIN IN 5TH STRAIGHT VICTORY IN IRELAND NEW SURFACE, DIFFERENT STYLE WITH WIDE TRIP, SAME RESULT FOR 3YO CONTINUES TO PROGRESS ‘BY LEAPS AND BOUNDS,’ NOW AT STAKES LEVEL

Panama Hat’s meteoric rise has featured some shrewd management, as trainer Andy Oliver steered him up Ireland’s handicap ranks with a few clever moves, including wheeling him back in 2 days to avoid the full brunt of the weight penalties that come with success at each stage. The 3-year-old gelding responded by threading the needle over a 20-day span with 4 wins between June 19 and July 9.



The assignment on August 17 at Dundalk took the challenge to a new level, one that put the onus directly on the horse himself, with the added elements of a switch in surface, a full field of 14 with higher caliber opponents and an unfavorable post position for a horse who had gone to the front and played catch me if you can in each of his previous wins.

Another wrinkle came on race day when regular jockey Chris Hayes had to bow out of the Dundalk card because of an injury he suffered in a spill on Saturday.

This all added up to Panama Hat’s stiffest challenge to date, and he rose to the occasion with his most impressive performance, pouncing from just off the pace and a wide position throughout to win by daylight again, this time for a \$69,000 pot on Polytrack under fill-in jock Fran Berry. He spotted 12 pounds to the runner-up.

Reflective of the true test, Oliver admitted he was nervous beforehand, and he seemed quite proud afterward with the growing consensus that he is dealing with a genuine talent.

The handicappers’ assessments are staggering, as Panama Hat has now improved his Timeform by more than 50 points in less than two months, from a lowly 60 to a new master rating of 112, including a rise of 13 for the latest performance that now has him pegged as stakes quality.

Timeform elaborated that he is “improving in leaps and bounds and produced a smart performance to come out on top for the fifth time in succession, proving himself relatively versatile in terms of tactics in the process; chased leaders, travelled fluently, produced to lead entering straight, kept going well; will remain of interest and looks ready for a higher grade.”

That next step up will likely come on October 3 over the same 11-furlong trip at Dundalk in the Group 3 Diamond Stakes, a race that Team Valor won in 2009 with Gitano Hernando.

“Panama Hat impressed me this time,” said Team Valor CEO Barry Irwin, who bought the son of Medicean in Ireland as a yearling at the 2012 Goffs Orby sale. “He had a lot going against him, yet he still won fairly easily, and his action looked a lot better to me on the synthetic. That makes me think the Diamond would be a good spot to try him in a Group 3.”

Oliver has been dynamite for Team Valor this year, winning 6 of 8 starts between Panama Hat and Grandma’s Hands, another 3-year-old whom Irwin mined out of the Goffs sale.

From *Irish Racing.com* comes the following:

Panama Hat Completes Five-Timer in Feature

Panama Hat completed an amazing five-timer this season when taking the valuable Irish Stallion Farms EBF ‘Red God’ Handicap at Dundalk.

The Andy Oliver-trained gelding was actually beaten off a mark of 60 at Leopardstown only two months ago but such has been the level of improvement he’s found since adopting more forceful tactics that this €50,000 event was captured off a rating of 96.

Fran Berry took over from regular partner Chris Hayes, who was stiff and sore following a fall at Tramore yesterday evening, and he was unable to get to the front early from an outside draw. However the Medicean gelding was never far from the pace, and led over two furlongs out. The 5/1 favourite stayed on strongly inside the final furlong to beat Hes Our Music by two and a half lengths, with Ned’s Indian in third.

Oliver said: "That was a fantastic performance, and he's a horse that has surpassed himself. Consolation to Chris who missed the ride, and he has done all the work in previous races.

“I had a couple of concerns of which the draw was one as he's a horse that likes a strong pace. Fran was a very able substitute and gave him a great ride. When he got to the front he did it well.

“There are a couple of big handicaps at Leopardstown on Champions weekend, although even with the three-year-old allowance he would still probably have top weight. You are stepping into a different class of race. I'll look at where he'll go in consultation with Team Valor. He wasn't the easiest horse at the start of the year. He was gelded and he likes his own routine and loves his day out. I was nervous enough coming here today.”

From *Racing Post* comes the following:

Oliver Ecstatic Over Panama Hat’s Fifth Straight Win

The list of horses to have won five handicaps in a row is a short one, but Panama Hat can be added to it after winning yesterday’s featured Irish Stallion Farms EBF Red God Handicap.

This horse’s journey began a mere eight weeks ago when he won off a mark of 60 at Leopardstown. Yesterday’s comfortable victory under Fran Berry came off a mark of 96 and might spell the end of him running in handicaps.

It was bad luck on regular rider Chris Hayes who had to miss out after his fall at Tramore on Saturday, but it rounded off a fine weekend for owners Team Valor after Euro Charline’s win in the Beverly D. Stakes at Arlington.