

PANAMA HAT IMPROVES AGAIN IN CREDITABLE 2ND IN AMER. ST. LEGER THE HAT BACK TO OLD SELF WITH GRITTY RUN FOR HIS BIGGEST PAYDAY HE RETURNS TO IRELAND WITH GROUP 1 IRISH ST. LEGER ON THE AGENDA

Panama Hat is a 6-time winner but his best performances have arguably come in 3 defeats, the latest case coming on Saturday in a stubborn second-place finish in the \$350,000 American St. Leger on Arlington Million Day.



The 4-year-old gelding fell victim to circumstances in the first two examples. In his season finale last year, he conceded 13 pounds to a Coolmore upstart who held him off by a neck in a \$195,000 handicap, stopping The Hat's meteoric win streak at 5. In June, Panama Hat came up short against another Coolmore colt, Kingfisher, after moving too soon in the Group 3 Saval Beg Stakes. Kingfisher went on to finish second in the Group 1 Gold Cup at Royal Ascot.

On Saturday, Panama Hat likely just ran into a better horse on the day in Lucky Speed, a Group 1 German Derby winner who shaved 3 seconds off the Arlington course record. Panama Hat, who again made the lead at the top of the stretch but could not hold on, followed three-quarters of a length back, with a further gap of 4 lengths to the favorite in third in a dominant performance from the two European horses in the field.

Most important for the connections of Panama Hat was a return to his typical form. Following the Saval Beg, he had thrown in an uncharacteristic clunker, finishing dead last in the Group 3 Curragh Cup after jockey Chris Hayes had to nudge him along early. He then got back on the winning track in the Listed Lenebane Stakes with the addition of blinkers, but it was anything but conventional, as Hayes had to ride him nearly every step of the way to avoid losing early contact, and Panama Hat finally kicked in at the top of the stretch to circle the field and get up for the victory.

With the blinkers off and cheekpieces back on at Arlington, Panama Hat was back to his old self. He made a bit of a scene in the paddock by thrusting out his back legs a few time, just letting out some pent-up enthusiasm. He was otherwise very well behaved in muggy conditions about a half hour before the skies opened up with a torrential downpour.

Panama Hat, at 6 1/2-to-1, broke well and showed good early interest this time, tracking in fourth along the inside. Approaching the final turn, Panama Hat advanced to the outside of Roman Approval in third. Roman Approval drifted out and bothered Panama Hat slightly and began to make his move. Panama Hat followed him and launched his own drive that soon carried him all the way to the front at the top of the stretch, but Lucky Speed was poised and even stronger, coming on from the outside to challenge inside the final furlong. Panama Hat fought back gamely but gave way late in a gutsy run that trainer Andy Oliver thought was his best race yet and makes him a candidate for the Group 1 Irish St. Leger next month.

TEAM VALOR AT THE ARLINGTON MILLION



Panama Hat earned \$67,900 for the biggest payday of his career, pushing his bankroll past \$200,000. Barry Irwin bought him as a yearling at Goffs in Ireland for \$71,000. He has 6 wins and 4 second-place finishes over his last 12 races.



Irwin said "He only really got good around this time last year, so he may have a lot more left in the tank this season. I think this was definitely a step up from him. The horse that beat him is also lightly raced and is also just coming into his own, so the form conceivably



could be a lot better than it looks. If he runs well in the Irish race, we know now that he can travel, and there are races for him internationally, and next year he could still be a Melbourne Cup horse if he turns out to like a long distance. There is still plenty of upside."

Lucky Speed, a German-bred for trainer Peter Schiergen, is a Melbourne Cup candidate himself and will likely proceed to the Grade 1 Northern Dancer at Woodbine, so he will not cross paths Panama Hat again, at least in the immediate future.

From Daily Racing Form comes the following:

Panama Hat One To Watch

THE PIZZA MAN, profiled in the August 20, 2014 edition of the blog, sent his many Chicago-based supporters home happy after capturing last Saturday's Arlington Million, but one horse on the undercard caught the eye and seems ready for the watch list.

PANAMA HAT didn't win the Grade 3 American St. Leger, but the 4-year-old gelding ran a corker to be second in the 1 11/16-mile test. Away slowly from the inside post in the nine-horse field, Panama

Hat settled in a nice stalking position under jockey Chris Hayes. Meanwhile, Illinois-bred outsider ALPHA KITAPHA set fractions of 24.15, 48.70 and 1:12.38 over the firm turf course.

Entering the third and final turn, Panama Hat attacked the leaders while four wide. He brushed to the front with a three-wide sweep entering the stretch and battled gamely when confronted from the outside by 2013 German Derby hero LUCKY SPEED.

Lucky Speed got the better of Panama Hat in the final sixteenth en route to a new course record of 2:46.50, but the latter's American St. Leger was the latest chapter of a Cinderella story that began with six consecutive losses by a combined 79 3/4 lengths.

Bred by Redland Bloodstock Limited, Panama Hat was foaled in England on March 8, 2011. His sire, Medicean, was a top-class performer in England for Sir Michael Stoute. Medicean's big wins came in the Group 1 Lockinge Stakes at a mile and the Group 1 Eclipse Stakes at 10 furlongs. At stud, Medicean is represented by Group 1 winners Dutch Art (England, France), Nannina (England), Siyouma (Canada, England), Bayrir (United States), Neatico (Germany), Mr. Medici (Hong Kong), Capponi (Dubai), Almerita (Germany), Chevron (Singapore) and Al Shemali (Dubai).

Medicean's dam, Street Style (by Rock of Gibraltar), was a winner on turf in Ireland at 1 3/16 miles and is a half-sister to Turkish Group 2 winner Lost in the Moment (12 furlongs) and American Grade 1 turf winner Luas Line (1 1/8 miles).

Panama Hat was purchased by Team Valor for \$71,055 at the Goffs Orby Sale. After showing some signs of life with a runner-up effort in his second start at three, Panama Hat went on a remarkable run. After cheek-pieces were re-introduced to his equipment, Panama Hat reeled off five consecutive victories over a 59-day span. He prevailed at distances ranging from 10 to 12 furlongs over turf and all-weather surfaces.

Panama Hat concluded his very successful campaign with a runner-up effort in a 12-furlong handicap at the Curragh and there were high hopes for stakes success in 2015. Unfortunately for Panama Hat, he's been a bit of an in-and-outer this year. A fifth-place finish off the layoff against Group 3 foes on May 17 was followed by a second-place performance in the listed Saval Beg Stakes 22 days later. Hiked back up into Group 3 company, Panama Hat was last of six in the Curragh Cup at 14 furlongs.

Hayes decided to shake things up by replacing the cheek-pieces with proper blinkers and the result was almost disastrous. A 5 to 1 chance in the listed Lenebane Stakes, Panama Hat, expected to be on the lead, was sluggish at the back. It appeared he was going nowhere fast, but the lightbulb turned on late and he mowed down the leaders to win in the final hundred yards.

Panama Hat wore his usual cheek pieces in the American St. Leger, earned a respectable 101 Beyer Speed Figure and finished ahead of such solid grass performers as Grade 3-placed ROMAN APPROVAL, Grade 3 winners CRUCERO and XTRA LUCK, multiple stakes-winner AZ RIDGE, Grade 2 winner Hyper and multiple Grade 3-placed HIGHBALL.

Panama Hat is a moody sort. He threw a bit of a fit in the paddock before the American St. Leger and his quirks often interfere with his zeal for training. He can run a little bit, though, and it appears that he'll be sent back to Europe for a tilt in the Irish St. Leger at The Curragh. He's an interesting contender in that spot.

Last year, The Pizza Man scored the American St. Leger. Perhaps we'll see Panama Hat in the 2016 edition of the Arlington Million.