

PANAMA HAT TOO GOOD IN 3-HORSE DIAMOND, MAKES THE GRADE TODAY IRISH GELDING MEASURED WINNER OF TACTICAL GROUP 3 AT DUNDALK BRILLIANT RIDE FROM JOCK CHRIS HAYES AS 4YO CLOSES BOOK ON 2015

Panama Hat capped his 4-year-old season in fine fashion tonight in Ireland by nailing down his first Group or Graded triumph in the Diamond Stakes at Dundalk. Jockey Chris Hayes gave him a perfect ride in a tricky predicament facing just two other horses.



A \$72,000 yearling purchase by Barry Irwin, Panama Hat picked up his seventh win in 20 career starts and pushed his earnings past \$275,000 in the Group 3 over 10 furlongs and 150 yards. The first half mile looked like a leisurely gallop as Panama Hat tracked Carla Bianca, a filly who beat males in a Group 3 over the summer, through an unbelievably slow pace. Hayes bided his time and did not turn Panama Hat loose until they approached the stretch.

Favored at 8 to 11, Panama Hat wore down the filly to his inside and was content to get up by a measured length while traveling with his ears up the entire length of the stretch. He was so content, in fact, that trainer Andy Oliver joked that he would like to have been able to kick his charge in the butt to convince him to go clear by a couple of lengths.

"He's cheeky now," Oliver said. "He enjoys the game but he doesn't want to put out too much effort."

Panama Hat is the 86th Group or Graded winner for a public partnership managed by Barry Irwin, from a total of 538 runners (16 percent).

Irwin said "I thought it could not have gone any better. This was not an easy race in terms of tactics since it was more or less a match race. History tells us that the horse on the lead usually has the advantage in a match race. The jockey on the filly, Pat Smullen, did everything he could. He hit her righthanded in our face, he packed us out on both turns, she even came out in his direction out of the gate, everything you are supposed to do in a situation like that, but he still couldn't win. Chris Hayes gave Panama Hat a perfect ride, and the horse is just remarkably consistent. This was a nice way to finish his season."

The light bulb came on for Panama Hat last June after he never had a sniff of success in his first five races. Since then he has finished in the top two in 13 of 15, including a previous Listed stakes win at Roscommon in July and second-place finishes in the Grade 3 American St. Leger and Enterprise Stakes. He also won a premier handicap over the same synthetic oval at Dundalk last year.

Along the way he has built up a loyal following, with several Irishmen regularly gushing that he is their favorite Flat horse in training. He has earned a nice winter vacation and Irwin expects he can keep on improving as he strengthens and matures as a 5-year-old. Perhaps even next year at this time he will have the Melbourne Cup in his sights.

Team Valor also prevailed in Dundalk's signature race with Gitano Hernando in 2010. Both he and Panama Hat received Timeform marks of 113 in the Diamond. Video replay of the latter performance is [here](#).

From IrishRacing.com comes the following:



Hat Tops in 3-Runner Diamond

"I'm delighted with him. I was nervous about the race going into to it, more so than his last few Group runs, as I knew it would be a tactical affair," said trainer Andy Oliver after the Team Valour-owned Panama Hat (8/11) came out best in the three runner Group 3 Diamond Stakes.

"He was odds-on but none of these things are that simple. It almost makes it like a match race and you can never be sure. I was afraid tactics might get him beat. He got a lead but it was steadier than I would

have liked," Andy Oliver.

Chris Hayes' mount Panama Hat tracked Carla Bianca and he put it to the pace-setter from before the straight.

The big chestnut got down to work in the final quarter mile and after hitting the front a furlong out he went on to defeat Carla Bianca and Unsinkable by a length and a length and a quarter.

"He's so relaxed now in his races and was happy to go the pace. Chris had to take a hold of him and make him challenge," further reflected Oliver.

"I had a slight butterfly moment half way up the straight but he got the job done and ran a great race.

"He's a pleasure of a horse to train and I have to thank Team Valor for the support. They've been very easy to train for and very supportive.

"I spoke to the owners before tonight, and said I'd be happy to finish here for the year, as he's had plenty of racing, but we'll discuss it as he's still in good heart."