

John Kopas and Keystone Horatio

Time flies, especially as time passes. The last time this column featured John Kopas was in the fall of 2003. The topic at that time was yearling selection, and Kopas shared his thoughts and approach to choosing “next year’s champions” from the 4,000 plus yearlings that pass through the auction ring each year.

Back then, Kopas and I traded personal (unpublished) observations on a variety of topics. It was early in the stallion career of Rustler Hanover, and Kopas had thoughts about Rustler Hanover that differed from many others. “Personally, I like the Rustler Hanover’s.”

Since then, Kopas has had Style (p, 3, 1:51.3, \$574,140) in 2005-06 (an \$18,000 yearling); and the homebred Keystone Horatio (p, 4, 1:49.3, \$1,344,549), a two-year-old of 2006. Style and Keystone Horatio are the richest filly and colt sired by Rustler Hanover thus far. We caught up with Kopas recently, to update our files.

“I have to admit,” Kopas says, laughing, upon reflection, “it’s easier liking Rustler Hanover after Style and Keystone Horatio. They were both top young performers, and Horatio is racing against the toughest horses around.”

Tell us about Keystone Horatio’s career.

“Keystone Horatio’s first win as a two-year-old was in an elimination

of the Battle of Waterloo (1:55.4h),” recalls Kopas. “But that same day, I was standing with dad and George Hempt when Somebeachsomewhere blew away the field in his elimination. It was his first lifetime start, and he won it easily in 1:54.2h. Dad turned to us and said, ‘You know what fellows? I think we just saw the best horse that ever looked through a bridle.’ I felt sick, knowing Keystone Horatio would have to race against him.”

As (good) luck would have it, Keystone Horatio only raced once against Somebeachsomewhere as a two-year-old — and earned over \$450,000 that year.

“If you look at Keystone Horatio’s lines, you’ll see that Randy (Waples) has driven him in every race but one (Jack Moiseyev). Four drivers I like



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to use our Randy, Jack, Steve (Condren) when he’s here and Sylvain (Filion). For an operation like mine (mainly two and three-year-olds), it’s important for a horse to be raced properly. Those four guys fit just about any horse, and they also fit my approach to racing them.

“You can ruin a horse’s career in those first three or four starts. It’s not about how fast; it’s about how well they go. And it’s very important for a trainer of young horses to get reliable and knowledgeable feedback from the driver(s). Randy, Jack, Steve and Sylvain are all horsemen; they worked their way up like I did. They all like horses, and they do the right thing.”

Like so many of his ilk over the years, Keystone Horatio has been relatively devoid of illness and ailments. But every horse will develop an issue at some point in his/her career.

“Just before Keystone Horatio’s first start as a four-year-old (the Willowdale in Jan. 2009), he developed a check ligament in the right front. It can be a tough injury to pinpoint if you’re not thorough. It is

problem has never returned. Keystone Horatio has been solid all the way through.”

Keystone Horatio made his first four-year-old start in late May, 2009, and has raced 33 times and earned over \$300,000 since.

KOPAS ON DMSO

“Over the years I have been very, very fortunate to have had my dad (Hall of Famer Jack Kopas) to consult with. Any time I run into a problem, he will give suggestions and solutions developed during his career. A prime example was an issue I had with Keystone Raptor (p, 2, 1:53.3, \$190,555) in January last year.

“Keystone Raptor developed a bog and thoroughpin on his outside left hock.”



Kopas describes the appearance of a bog and thoroughpin. “It’s like a bubble, soft and filled with fluid — Raptor’s was about the size of the end of your thumb. We had a veterinarian examine him, and were advised to have chips removed — which would have meant a lot of downtime. I asked dad what he thought.

“Years ago my dad would treat those kind of issues with DMSO (Dimethyl Sulfoxide); sometimes in conjunction with a medicated ointment. DMSO is like a conduit, and helps ointments penetrate much deeper and faster than they normally would. It speeds up healing.

“Of course, you should wear rubber gloves when you’re using DMSO,” Kopas warns. “DMSO is relatively harmless, but it penetrates human skin and gets into the bloodstream almost immediately. Within seconds, most people get a taste in their mouth — like oysters, or garlic.”

very painful, and you can break a horse down if you don’t treat it right away. And if a horse breaks down, it’ll be a long road to recovery.

“A horse with a check ligament will be off when jogging or training. Some lameness issues will improve as horses jog — but not a check ligament. Upon examination, you’ll find heat and swelling in the area — in Keystone Horatio’s case, at the bottom of the right knee, and in behind. We took him to Dr. Don McMaster’s clinic and he confirmed the diagnosis with a fluoroscope.

“Keystone Horatio was given complete stall rest for two months. We treated them with a combination of Balls Solution and DMSO. Balls Solution causes a light blister, which increases the blood flow to promote healing; DMSO assists in that process. We have continued to use the Balls/DMSO application and bandage the area to this day, and the



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