

Chasing

NATIONAL STEEPLECHASE ASSOCIATION | 400 FAIR HILL DRIVE, ELKTON, MD 21921

Steeplechasing adds participants in 2017, looks to set spring mark

One of the principal goals of the National Steeplechase Association's Promotion and Growth Committee is to bring new owners into jump racing, and progress was made toward that goal in 2017.

The sport also added new trainers and jockeys while purses remained close to \$6-million for the year.

As noted in the NSA's advertising through the summer and fall, spring purses were a record \$2,780,400, up 7% from 2016 and highlighted by the Iroquois Steeplechase's purses breaking the half-million-dollar mark for the first time.

The spring program also benefited from the beefed-up Tryon Block House meet, which featured a new location, a new date on the calendar, and purses of \$169,600, more than \$96,000 higher than the previous season.

In all likelihood, spring purses will establish a record in 2018 with the Marion duPont Scott Colonial Cup (Gr. 1) moving to the Carolina Cup program on March 31. Also, the new Georgia Steeplechase moves to the weekend after the Carolina Cup and succeeds the Atlanta Steeplechase at Kingston Downs north of Atlanta.

"The 2017 season had its challenges, with the cancellations of the Colonial Cup meet and the Tryon fall meet, but steeplechasing capitalized on its popularity and resilience to meet those challenges," NSA President Guy J. Torsilieri said.

"While purses declined from record levels in 2016, the decline was very modest, approximately 2%. Given the loss of the two fall meets, that has to be considered a win for the sport."



Owner Gil Johnston, jockey Danny Mullins, and trainer Jack Fisher raised aloft the Grand National trophy after Mr. Hot Stuff's thrilling victory at Far Hills on Oct. 21. With the win, Fisher broke his nine-year-old record for annual purse winnings.

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The 2017 roster of owners increased to 266 from 263, and the number of trainers grew from 86 to 93. The count of jockeys increased to 86 from 80.

Despite the loss of the two fall meets, the number of races declined by only three, to 180.

The season was marked by a milestone edition of the Far Hills Races, which featured \$800,000 in total purses and a record running of the Grand National (Gr. 1) worth \$400,000. Gil Johnston's Mr. Hot Stuff won the Grand National to lock up

the year's Lonesome Glory Award as top earner.

The Far Hills meet continued the growth of overseas participation in American jump racing. The Grand National had three overseas runners, and the \$125,000 Foxbrook Champion Hurdle was won by Zanjabeel, who shipped over for the novice stakes.

Purchased by Rosbrian Farm and Ben and Wendy Griswold, four-year-old Zanjabeel won his next start, the Steeplechase at Callaway's Aflac Supreme Hurdle, for trainer Ricky Hendriks.



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Doc Cebu surges to 2017 timber title with International Gold Cup victory

Charles C. Fenwick Jr. knows a thing or two about a timber horse. He has ridden them, as the premier timber jockey of his generation in the 1970s and into the 1980s. He rode Ben Nevis II to victory in the 1980 Grand National at Aintree and a plaque in American racing's Hall of Fame.

Charlie Fenwick has trained timber horses, and now he is the owner of a timber champion, Doc Cebu, who sealed his title in his first year of racing over post-and-rail fences with a commanding victory in the International Gold Cup on Oct. 28.

A thoroughly experienced flat horse (29 starts, four wins), the Hard Spun gelding had descended into the lower ranks of claimers in Maryland and West Virginia before Fenwick's brother Bruce spotted Doc Cebu and suggested that he deserved a look. Charlie Fenwick liked what he saw and, ever the clever trader, bought Doc Cebu and another horse for \$12,000.

Ever the clever horsemen, Fenwick and trainer Jack Fisher slipped Doc Cebu into a \$15,000 maiden claimer for hurdlers at the 2016 Virginia Fall meet, which he won, and he also won a ratings handicap at Montpelier. Doc Cebu, undefeated over hurdles, appeared to have promise as a novice hurdler in 2017.

But his owner had other ideas. While Doc Cebu almost certainly would have been a good hurdler, "I decided to have a good timber horse," Fenwick said. And good he has been. He has had five starts over timber, and he has won four of those starts, with one second-place finish.

His wins have been by open lengths, and he waltzed away from a quality field in the \$75,000 International Gold Cup to win by 11 3/4 lengths under regular jockey Hadden Frost.



Charles C. Fenwick Jr.'s Doc Cebu jumped a fence in the International Gold Cup before drawing away to an 11 3/4-length victory under Hadden Frost. TOD MARKS PHOTO

That victory, following an 11 1/4-length win in the Genesee Valley Hunt Cup two weeks earlier, raised his timber purse earnings for the year to \$96,600 and assured him the 2017 timber title. "He's so consistent," Fenwick said.

Indeed, Doc Cebu has been a paragon of

consistency since beginning his jumping career in Fisher's care. After winning a My Lady's Manor timber maiden in April, he sustained his only jumping defeat at the Queen's Cup. He came back to win the Willowdale Steeplechase by nine lengths.

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