

'Dr.' lives up to billing Horse can breathe easy about heritage

By ED GRAY

MASSCAP

Dr. Pleasure had produced a far higher level of frustration than the immediate gratification expected from an enticing mating between a Kentucky Derby hero and an Eclipse Award-winning mare.

The first foal of Beautiful Pleasure, the multiple Grade 1 stakes-winning mare whose brilliant speed was only matched by her durability, was far from a complete dud. It's just the Thunder Gulch-sired horse rarely won and never lived up to his imposing heritage.

Perhaps Dr. Pleasure never took anyone's breath away because he had trouble catching his own breath.

At least, that's the hope of trainer John Ward and owner/breeder John Oxley, who are pinning such hope on Dr. Pleasure's most recent performance and first since undergoing throat surgery to repair an entrapped epiglottis. Dr. Pleasure, who had won only one of his previous 14 starts, broke through last month at Saratoga with a thoroughly decisive triumph, surging away from his allowance competition by more than eight lengths.

"He seems to have found a new level to compete," said Ward, whose resurgent horse will take on odds-on morning-line favorite Commentator in tomorrow's

MASS HANDICAP LINES

The 66th running of the Massachusetts Handicap; Purse: \$500,000, Distance: 1½ miles, 3 YO's & Up.

PP HORSE	WGT	JOCKEY	ODDS
2 Commentator	122	Velazquez	3-5
6 Dr. Pleasure	112	Velazquez	7-2
4 Cuba	112	Cotto	6-1
3 Won Awesme Dude	112	Lambert	8-1
7 Riverrunrylee	112	Gonzalez	15-1
1 Beck and Call	110	Piermarini	20-1
5 Volcanic Force	110	Dooley	20-1

\$500,000 Massachusetts Handicap at Suffolk Downs.

The dominating victory at Saratoga was a dramatic improvement over his previous start, a distant seventh-place finish in the Skip Away Stakes at Gulfstream Park on March 19. Although Ward estimates that Dr. Pleasure had been scoped at least 50 times without a problem being detected, a postrace examination at Gulfstream found the epiglottal condition that wasn't allowing air to enter the lungs.

"It was really odd to find this in a horse that's 5 years old, so I think there was probably something that was causing it to not function properly right from the get-go, from all through his career," said the Kentucky-based trainer, whose trainee underwent endoscopic surgery in May.

Despite failing to find the winner's circle since his maiden vic-

tory, Oxley's homebred had performed pretty well in major stakes on more than one occasion, including a third-place finish in last year's MassCap, in which he finished less than two lengths behind winner Brass Hat. Although Commentator, who captured the Grade 1 Whitney Handicap at Saratoga in a dominating front-running performance, figures to be tough to beat as the 3-5 morning-line favorite, Ward expects Dr. Pleasure to be a more prominent contender than he was during last year's running of Suffolk Downs' signature race.

"My wife and Mr. Oxley kind of thought that we gave some bad instructions to the rider last year. We tried to come too far off the pace," said Ward, whose wife and assistant trainer, Donna, will saddle Dr. Pleasure for the MassCap.

Foaled by the fleet-of-hoof Beautiful Pleasure, Dr. Pleasure would seem suited to racing on or near the pace. Sired by Thunder Gulch, he would be expected to develop a little later than most horses.

"We do see a little Beautiful Pleasure in this horse, so that's the reason we said we probably were getting in this horse's way by making him want to come from off the pace. He's got some natural speed to him," Ward said. "Gulches always get better when they get older, so this horse, genetically, should improve as he gets older."