



Pete Fer: In Love With the “Big Horse”

By Laura Grubb

He was talking to his “big horse” in its stall one morning, whispering sweet nothings in its ear. Sheepishly grinning when realizing he’d been caught, owner Pete Fer couldn’t help but brim with exuberance for his multiple-stakes winning “big horse” Uncaged Fury, winner of the “94” California Cup Sprint.

Pete’s a familiar fixture at the track, both in the mornings with his faithful wirehaired terrier, Rhonda, and in the afternoon in the box seats, surrounded by his friends and family. On race day can be seen in the paddock, legging the jockey up on the “Fury” - definitely a “hands-on” owner.

Why did you get involved in ownership?

I always enjoyed going to the track to see the horses. I used to watch the owners in the paddock, and dreamed of one day owning a horse. A grade-school teacher provided the encouragement to pursue my dream. I remember her telling me of her childhood dream of owning a black Cadillac and a mink coat. One day she walked me over to the window and points to a black Eldorado. “See that Pete,” she asked, “It’s mine. And you know what? I’ve got a mink coat too.” She showed me that it can be done - and now I’m living proof that dreams can come true.”

How did you get involved in ownership?

I had a picture of Swaps behind my desk at the office of my plumbing, heating, and air-conditioning business. One day a guy came into the office to see me, but he keeps looking past me at the picture on the wall. He finally asks me, “Do you like horses?” When I affirmed, he said, “See that horse on the wall, we own that horse.” Turns out the guy worked for Rex Ellsworth. He asked if I wanted to come out and see the horses, which I did. We went to the farm and he showed me all these racehorses. I’m going “Wow, wow, wow!” We ended up going in partnership on a couple of broodmares. The mares kept having foals, so by the time we got to the races, we had 12 horses!

The guy that worked for Ellsworth came to work for me as my office manager. He ended up embezzling about \$96,000 from me, and then left town. So, I had to get rid of the horses and work to recoup what I’d lost. Took about 10 months.

A couple of years later a friend of mine had a nice yearling that he wanted to sell. I knew my wife would be upset if I got back into the horse business. So I found a partner, had the bills sent to him, and got the horse.

Time goes by, the horse grows up and enters training at the track. Race day comes, and I tell my wife, “Come on, let’s go out to the races, our friends are going.” She agreed to go. The race comes up, and I tell her, “Come on, let’s go to the paddock.” And she says, “what do mean, ‘let’s go?’” I showed her the program that had our horse in it. Horse won by a nose, thank heavens!

You’re a “regular” at the track. Why are you so involved on a day-to-day basis?

I enjoy the horses, the people, and the camaraderie. I also want to make sure things are done right, as I expect results. I read a lot about the business, and keep up with the latest innovations and research that’s being done. Many times I’m the one that goes with information to my trainer on some of these findings. Louis Cenicola trains Uncaged Fury, he’s done a great job with the horse.

What’s your favorite aspect of ownership?

Breeding the horses, and watching the foals grow up. I enjoy selecting the stallions, planning the matings, and watching the horses develop. It’s a sense of accomplishment, a team effort to achieve a goal.

I’m also intrigued by the challenge of trying to win races, and the purse money involved. It’s a tough business, but one that I totally enjoy. Even though I treat it as a business, I find my time in it to be very relaxing.

Pete, you’ve owned horses for many years. When did you know that Uncaged Fury was special?

We knew he was special even before he reached the track. The farm manager Rick Taylor, knew we had a champion on our hands from early on, and he was right. I remember going up to the farm when Uncaged Fury was just a colt, and watching him run back and forth - back and forth - across the paddock. His action was so smooth, and he moved so close to the ground - he was just class. I even had a barbecue for him the day he left the farm for the track - a first of many celebrations.

How did Uncaged Fury get his name?

My brother was a prisoner of the Vietnam War. He spent 7 years over there in a prison camp, never knowing if and when he would get out. I own Uncaged Fury’s dam, and named her Hostage Lady after my brother. One day I was driving back from the farm trying to think of a name for this foal, and I kept thinking of my brother spending all that time over there, living in a cage. I kept thinking of what he must have been going through, and it came to me - “Uncaged Fury.” So that’s how he got his name, in honor of my brother, who’s now a retired colonel working as a headmaster at a Catholic school in South Carolina.

What’s your best memory in racing?

Winning the Cal Cup Sprint. I was all nerves, because that was a big race for me at the time. It was so exciting, to own a horse in a Cal Cup race. I wish I’d known before the race that I was going to win, because I would have enjoyed the experience more. But I guess it doesn’t work that way. 🐾

You’re right Pete, it doesn’t. But that’s what makes ownership so exciting!

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