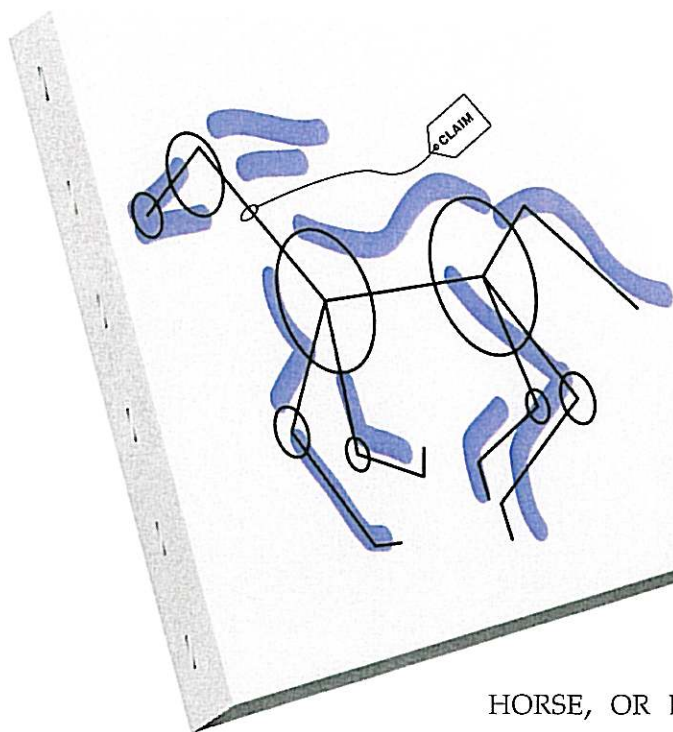


"HORSE SENSE" PRACTICAL INFORMATION FOR EVERY OWNER

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THE art of Claiming

by Jerry Hollendorfer

EVERYONE HOPES TO OWN A STAKES HORSE, OR BETTER YET, A GRADED STAKES HORSE.

HOWEVER, THE REALITY IS THAT MOST OF US OWN CLAIMING STOCK. DESPITE THAT FACT, IT SEEMS THAT IN TERMS OF PERSONAL SATISFACTION, WE JUMP JUST AS HIGH AND SMILE JUST AS BROADLY WHEN ONE OF OUR CLAIMERS WINS A RACE AS THOSE OWNERS LUCKY ENOUGH TO OWN A STAKES WINNER.

While some owners are consumed by the desire to find and race only stakes horses, there is a significant number of horsemen who prefer to devote their time and energies to developing a powerful and lucrative stable of claiming horses. Sometimes this "preference" is driven by a personal desire to compete as often as possible, but in most instances it is purely a question of economics, *i.e.*, what is most affordable to the particular owner.

In addition to financial considerations, and given the predominance of claiming races and the relative "abun-

dance" of claiming stock, a prudent owner should always consider the inherent advantages and disadvantages of any claim. These considerations apply equally to both individual claims and to the claiming process in general.

General Advantages

It is widely accepted that claiming horses have established values. In other words, their performance on the track and the levels at which they are competitive are clear objective indications of a horse's value.

Purely from an investment standpoint, this makes the claiming horse a

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"less risky" investment; the speculative nature of assessing and establishing a horse's value is significantly reduced.

General Disadvantages

It is commonly recognized in the industry that there is a shortage of quality racing stock. In the claiming business this fact translates into more and more competition at the claiming box. Consequently, "getting outshook" is a fact of life.

Owners must also keep in mind that, as the competition for quality horses becomes keener and the available horse inventory more heavily scrutinized, it is in this environment that more "bad claims" are likely to occur. The heightened competition for good horses coupled with better purses makes all of us more willing to make riskier claims.

Opportunity to Invest

In comparison to equine purchases made at auction sales, in the claiming game there is a ready supply of horses available for purchase everyday. Accordingly, an owner can essentially change his/her stable's inventory on any given day.

Likewise, there are so many varied claiming levels that the average owner enjoys a diverse "menu" from which to select. If one is willing to look for horses to claim at racetracks other than the closest track, you opportunity to find a useful horse could be improved.

Points to Keep in Mind

A. Common mistakes to avoid

Don't make desperation claims. Each horse must be fairly and reasonably evaluated as to performance, available conditions, pedigree, and demonstrated earnings. Spend only as much as the evaluation indicates the horse is worth. Try to claim only horses at or near that price, and, above all, make

certain they are as sound as possible.

B. Relying on "gut instincts"

To some extent, every claim represents some level of intuition or "gut instinct." However, that does not imply that the decision is in reality nothing more than a guess. To the contrary, in this context, intuition represents experience and innate skill.

No claim should be made unless the basic questions regarding value, condition, pedigree, etc. have been addressed. However, from that point forward, intuition is about as valuable as any other factor.

C. Building your stable through claiming

Only you and you alone should decide if this is your preferred method of operation. However, many horsemen, owner and trainer alike, have built successful stables on the athletic prowess and ability of the claiming horse. It is the most affordable means of developing or expanding one's stable.

Conclusion

Luck and skill are essential to the success of just about every business. However, the success of any claim relies primarily on the skill of the individual making the claim.

There is no simple means to teach one how to become adept in the claiming game. What must be taught is that there is no substitute for study and learned evaluation of a horse's potential and actual performance. As with any science or art, those who experience success and recognition are generally the hardest workers. 🐾

Conditioner Jerry Hollendorfer has practically rewritten the training record book in Northern California. In 1995, he visited the winner's circle 205 times, ranking him the second in the nation in wins.

FACTORS TO CONSIDER WHEN CLAIMING A HORSE

by Gary Burke

Even though most of the news in horse racing is about the high-profile horses, most of the races are for claiming stock. I have been claiming horses for more than fifteen years and find it to be a preferred strategy for many owners and trainers.

While claiming is sometimes called a lesser way to participate, it helps owners because the value of the horse has been more clearly established. Additionally, the majority of these horses are ready to race within three weeks after they are claimed.

Following is a partial list of factors to consider when claiming a horse:

1. Can an equipment change improve the horse?
2. How about a surface change (i.e., dirt to turf)?
3. Will a different distance work?
4. How about different training techniques?
5. Are there any obvious physical problems?
6. What is the age of the horse?
7. Does the horse appear to be in good condition?
8. Do you like the way he or she walks?
9. What race conditions is the horse eligible for?

As you can readily conclude, it is very important to have a professional point of view to help make these decisions. Hence, the quality of the owner-trainer relationship will insure long-term involvement and success.

There is nothing more exciting and gratifying than claiming a horse, moving it up in class, and winning a race. For one brief moment the thought goes through your mind, "YOU CLEVER DEVIL."

Gary Burke is President of Burke Engineering, on the TOC Board of Directors, and an owner who is active at the claim box.