

# CASTELLANO'S CROWN

GULFSTREAM'S LEADING RIDER CAPS A BIG CLAIMING CROWN DAY WITH A WIN ON ROYAL POSSE IN THE JEWEL

By Denis Blake // Photos by Coglianese Photos/Kenny Martin, Leslie Martin, Lauren King



The one constant over the 16-year history of the Claiming Crown has been change. Put on jointly by the National Horsemen's Benevolent and Protective Association and Thoroughbred Owners and Breeders Association, the event debuted in 1999 at Canterbury Park with six races for the sport's blue-collar claiming horses. Over the years the

total purse money has doubled to \$1.1 million spread over nine races, and on December 5 Gulfstream Park and the Florida HBPA hosted a successful renewal for the fourth consecutive year.

A total of 116 horses (plus also-eligibles) were entered in the nine races, for an average of 12.9 entries per race. Even more impressively, the entrants had combined to win nearly 900 total races, with three of the Claiming Crown races featuring a field with more than 100 total wins in their past performances.

Despite rain showers that resulted in three of the four turf races being moved to an eventually sloppy (sealed) main track, bettors responded in force with total handle of \$10.12 million, a tick up from last year's \$10.06 million.

"We're extremely pleased with the success of this year's Claiming Crown," said P.J. Campo, general manager of Gulfstream Park and vice president of racing for Gulfstream parent company The Stronach Group. "We had big fields and tremendous participation from horsemen throughout North America. We're confident the numbers would have been even more impressive with a fast track and firm turf course."

This year's edition featured a ninth race for the first time, the Claiming Crown Canterbury named in honor of the Minnesota oval that held the event 10 times, with one year stops at Philadelphia Park (now Parx Racing), Ellis Park and Fair Grounds. Also new this year was a Claiming Crown Preview Day at Laurel Park, which offered nine "Win and You're In" races providing an automatic berth and free shipping to Gulfstream.

All Claiming Crown races were run under starter allowance conditions requiring eligible horses to have started at least once for the specified claiming price since January 1, 2014.



Javier Castellano, here on Rapid Transit winner Stallwalkin' Dude, had four wins on the day.

On the track, jockey Javier Castellano took an early lead in the riders' standings when he bagged four Claiming Crown wins, including the \$200,000 Jewel with Royal Posse, on the South Florida track's opening day.

"I'm very lucky, very blessed," said Castellano, who topped last year's standings during Gulfstream Park's Championship Meet. "I feel at home here. Gulfstream has been very good to me. The fans, the people, the trainers, the owners always support my career. This is where I started riding horses in the States, in Florida. The people have been very good to me. They give me fast horses to ride, and I feel very blessed."







## \$125,000 TIARA QUIET KITTEN

The name Quiet Kitten is not exactly the most threatening moniker for a racehorse, but the Kentucky-bred daughter of Kitten's Joy roared to a decisive victory in the \$125,000 Claiming Crown Tiara at 1 <sup>1</sup>/<sub>16</sub> miles on the turf for fillies and mares who had started for \$25,000 or less. With Matthew Rispoli riding for trainer Marcus Vitali and owner Crossed Sabres Farm, the 7-2 second choice went from being a good claim to a great claim when she hit the wire two lengths in front with a time of 1:48.51 over a good course.

The victory was worth \$68,750 for Quiet Kitten, nearly three times the price paid when she was taken out of a \$25,000 claiming event at Gulfstream exactly nine months earlier. Since that race, she has scored two grassy wins at Monmouth Park and a third victory at Gulfstream. She prepped for the Claiming Crown with a second-place effort in the \$75,000 Cellars Shiraz Stakes at Gulfstream Park West (formerly Calder Race Course) on Halloween. Her Claiming Crown win pushed her bankroll to \$194,680 with seven wins from 17 starts. The 3-year-old was bred by all-time leading Claiming Crown owners Ken and Sarah Ramsey.

"So far it's been a good claim for us," Vitali quipped. "We gave her a little breather after shipping down and everything has gone well. The race really set up well for her with a little speed in front. We let her lay off just a little bit, and I told Matt that when it was time to make his own decision. He made the right decision today."

Texas-bred Seneca Destiny, a filly by Seneca Jones shipping in from Churchill Downs for trainer Brad Cox and owner Double Dip Stables LLC, closed well to take second. Favored Wild Swava, an Indiana-bred stakes winner and third-place finisher in the Tiara last year, took that same spot again for conditioner Charles Dickey and owner Naveed Chowhan.



## \$110,000 IRON HORSE RUNS WITH BULLS

Barely a year ago the Flashy Bull gelding Runs With Bulls could have been claimed for just \$7,500—and he was—but he's unlikely to see a claiming price that low anytime soon after a game win in the \$110,000 Claiming Crown Iron Horse at 1 <sup>1</sup>/<sub>16</sub> miles on the good main track. Piloted by Javier Castellano in the race for horses who had started for \$7,500 or less, the Florida-bred trained by Peter Walder and owned by Ron Paolucci's Looch Racing Stables prevailed by three-parts of a length in 1:43.63 as the 9-2 third choice in the betting.

"I was right where I wanted to be," Castellano said about the first of his four Claiming Crown winners. "The way I handicapped the race, there was a lot of speed and it set up for my horse. I never rode the horse, but I followed the direction of the trainer. He gave me the key to win the race. He was on the outside down the backside and cut the corner turning for home."

Runs With Bulls had shown bursts of good form during his career but really did not develop into a consistent performer until he competed at ThistleDown in Ohio this year, where he scored three wins and two seconds in five starts before making his first start at Gulfstream. All told, he has won nine of 36 career races with earnings of \$200,619.

Twocubanbrothersu, a winner of eight races this year and the 6-5 favorite, held second for trainer John Rigattieri, who co-owns the gelding with Stephen Derany. Golden Age Stable's Roll On the Navajo, making his 19th start of the year, took third for trainer David Rakoff.





## **\$110,000 DISTAFF DASH**

### **SILVER SASHAY**

Rain pushed the \$110,000 Claiming Crown Distaff Dash from the turf to the main track, but that made no difference to Acclaimed Racing Stable's Silver Sashay. Although the Florida-bred mare by Eurosilver had made her last seven starts on the turf, including a win in the \$60,000 Bougainvillea Stakes going five furlongs at Gulfstream, she entered with six career dirt wins and added another when she scored by a half-length over a good (sealed) surface. With Edgard Zayas up for trainer Alfred McIntosh, the 5-year-old came off a layoff of nearly five months to defeat a field of nine other fillies and mares who had started for \$25,000 or less in :57.90 at 9-2 odds.

Acclaimed Racing Stable claimed Silver Sashay for just \$12,500 in July 2014 at Gulfstream and has since banked more than \$170,000 of her \$303,265 career earnings. This marked the fourth straight win for the mare and gave her a total of 11 wins in 30 lifetime starts.

Dennis Drazin's homebred Sunrise Kitty, who came in off a \$32,000 claiming victory on the turf at Belmont Park, got up to take second for conditioner Jason Servis. Churchill Downs shipper Katie O., owned by William Butler and trained by all-time leading Claiming Crown conditioner Mike Maker, finished third.



## **\$110,000 RAPID TRANSIT**

### **STALLWALKIN' DUDE**

The \$110,000 Claiming Crown Rapid Transit, a seven-furlong contest for horses who had started for \$16,000 or less, featured two of the most accomplished horses on the entire card with Grade 3 winner Trouble Kid and Grade 1-placed Stallwalkin' Dude both going off at 2-1. The two heavyweights did not disappoint as they battled in deep stretch with Stallwalkin' Dude and Javier Castellano prevailing by a neck over Trouble Kid and Jose Lezcano, who were slightly favored.

"I thought Trouble Kid was going to be on the pace," Castellano said. "I don't know for what reason he didn't break. My horse beat the gate and he put me in good position. I rode with a lot of confidence because I think he likes the sloppy track. It set up perfect the way he did it. My horse is a game horse. When he saw the other horse, he went back to running again. He never gave up."

Owned and trained by David Jacobson, Stallwalkin' Dude raced around the \$16,000 claiming level last year at Gulfstream and then caught fire this spring in New York with four straight wins. He then jumped up to become a proven graded stakes runner with placings in the Grade 2 True North and Grade 1 Vosburgh Stakes before finishing eighth in the Grade 1 Breeders' Cup Sprint. From 17 starts in 2015, he has recorded seven wins and banked more than \$564,000 with a lifetime total of nearly \$690,000.

Barbara Hopkins' Trouble Kid, trained by Ramon Preciado, was a clear second and added to his already impressive résumé this year. Claimed for \$15,000 in July, the Harlan's Holiday gelding won four straight races after that and hit the wire first in the \$350,000 Frank J. DeFrancis Memorial Dash at Laurel Park before being disqualified and placed second for interference.

Stephen Ferguson's Rockinn On Bye, trained by Joseph Citanese III, was no threat to the top two but finished a clear third after shipping in from Maryland.





## \$110,000 GLASS SLIPPER MOONSHINE PROMISE

Trainer Peter Walder and owner Looch Racing Stables picked up their second win on the Claiming Crown card while jockey Javier Castellano earned one of his four wins aboard Moonshine Promise in the \$110,000 Glass Slipper for fillies and mares who have started for a tag of \$12,500 or less. Becoming the second shipper from ThistleDown to find the winner's circle, the 6-year-old mare by Will He Shine drew clear to a five-length score at 5-1 odds and stopped the timer at 1:37.67 for one mile.

A consistent performer throughout her career, Moonshine Promise came into this race with a record of 11-6-3-2 on the year after ending her 2014 campaign at the \$8,000 level at Tampa Bay Downs. Even though she climbed up in class in 2015, she was still eligible for a non-winners other than maiden, claiming or starter upon entering the gates at Gulfstream. This win improved her lifetime record to 52-14-12-7 with earnings of \$225,104.

"I've had her about a month," said Walder after also taking the Iron Horse with Runs With Bulls. "She and [Runs With Bulls] came down at the same time. She's been training all right. She's not as smooth a mover as the other horse, but she runs and she's got heart. Looch [owner Ron Paolucci] was telling me that ThistleDown was tougher than it used to be. These horses have been running good and they know how to win. It's nice to win for Looch—he puts a lot of money into the game and guys like him deserve to win."

Amaty Racing Stables Inc.'s My House, a four-time winner on the year, held on for second for trainer Sandino Hernandez Jr. Roll It Gal, an 84-1 longshot running for owner Bersalu Farm Inc. and trainer Bernardo Campos, got up for third.



## \$110,000 CANTERBURY SUCCESSFUL NATIVE

The newest addition to the Claiming Crown card, the \$110,000 Claiming Crown Canterbury for horses that ran for \$25,000 or less, was shifted from the turf to the main track at five furlongs and resulted in a mild upset with 11-1 shot Successful Native getting up to win by three-parts of a length with Juan Leyva up for trainer Aubrey Maragh. The Successful Appeal colt dashed the distance in :57.09.

The Kentucky-bred seemingly had a better shot on the turf, as the one-time \$25,000 claimer had three wins over the Gulfstream grass, including the \$75,000 Bob Umphrey Turf Sprint Stakes in July. But he proved to be fleet-footed on the main track as well, despite it being his first start on the dirt after having all eight of his previous outs on the grass. This win was worth \$60,500 and improved his earnings to \$154,450 with four wins in nine starts.

Monster Racing Stables' Delta Bluesman, a versatile runner with dirt and turf wins over the summer at Monmouth Park for trainer Jorge Navarro, gave a valiant effort to be second as the 9-5 favorite. Robert Persons and Earl Conrad Sanderson Jr.'s Officer Griffin, who came in off a runner-up effort against stakes foes at Fair Grounds for trainer Joe Sharp, closed for third.





## \$110,000 EXPRESS DODDSPRIVATELABEL

Despite having hit the board in 11 of 13 starts in 2015 with competitive speed figures, Texas-bred Doddsprivatelabel broke from the gate in the \$110,000 Claiming Crown Express at odds of 12-1. In the six-furlong race for horses who had started for \$7,500 or less, the Marcos Zulueta trainee overcame a wide trip from post 14 to score by a neck under jockey Jorge Vargas Jr. The 4-year-old gelding by Suave completed the race in 1:10.77 for his biggest career win.

The well-traveled gelding shipped in from Laurel Park after a campaign that also included stints in Pennsylvania and Delaware. His earlier record included action in Oklahoma, Louisiana, Texas and Kentucky, so he appeared unfazed by his first trip to Florida. His effort boosted his career bankroll to \$245,429 with eight wins from 28 starts. Although he had a solid year in 2014 with two wins and nearly \$40,000 in earnings, he stepped up his game this year with five victories and just short of \$200,000 in the bank.

Ken and Sarah Ramsey's Slan Abhaile, the mild 3-1 favorite off an October win at Keeneland Race Course for trainer Mike Maker, just missed at the wire and had to settle for second. Steven Simonovic's Big Legacy, who had faced Slan Abhaile in his last two starts at Keeneland, crossed the wire just a head back in third for trainer Dale Bennett.



## \$125,000 EMERALD KEY TO POWER

When the \$125,000 Claiming Crown Emerald was transferred from the turf to the sloppy main track, it seemed to hurt the chances of Key to Power. The 6-year-old had earned more than \$300,000 on the turf with 11 wins from 31 starts, but had never had his picture taken after racing four times on dirt. However, in the 1 1/16-mile event for horses who had started for \$25,000 or less, the regally-bred runner seemed to relish the off track and rolled to a half-length win under Corey Lanerie in 1:44.61 at nearly 10-1.

"He'd been training super," said Brendan Walsh, who trains the Kentucky-bred for Premier Stables Unlimited. "The last six months have been built around this race, so it was obviously disappointing when you're expecting a good turf course. But we had talked last year about putting him on dirt, not necessarily a sloppy track. He is bred to run on dirt. It's nice that it worked out. I thought he was very impressive."

Also impressive is the pedigree of Key to Power, who is a son of A.P. Indy out of three-time Grade 1 winner Exotic Wood. This win was his 12th in 36 starts and put his lifetime earnings over the \$400,000 mark. Key to Power earned his first two stakes wins in September with consecutive grass victories in \$50,000 events at Ellis Park and Arlington Park.

Three Diamonds Farm's Roman Approval, a two-time Grade 3-placed runner this year for conditioner Mike Maker, finished second with 5-2 favorite Ghost Hunter, owned by Jagger Inc. and trained by Jamie Ness, taking third.





## \$200,000 JEWEL ROYAL POSSE

In the richest race of the day, the \$200,000 Claiming Crown Jewel for horses who had raced for \$35,000 or less, trainer Rudy Rodriguez hit the exacta as he saddled the first two horses across the line with favored Royal Posse winning over 21-1 longshot Mr Palmer. The New York-bred Royal Posse capped off a huge day for jockey Javier Castellano and proved he had no problem competing against open company. The son of Posse, who beat New York-bred stakes horses at Saratoga and finished second in the \$300,000 Empire Classic Handicap at Belmont Park, also against state-breds, took command at the three-eighths pole and splashed home by 2 ½ lengths in 1:50.77 for 1 ⅛ miles.

"He's been an amazing claim since day one," said Rodriguez about the horse claimed for \$20,000 in May who races for Michael Dubb, Bethlehem Stables LLC and Gary Aisquith. "He's very, very sound. I tell all my owners we got very, very lucky to get him that day. I just have to thank Mr. Dubb for giving me the opportunity to claim horses for him."

Royal Posse is now an earner of \$442,245 with six wins and six seconds from 25 trips to the post, with \$292,400 in earnings coming in his five starts since being claimed.

Runner-up Mr Palmer is also a \$20,000 claim who runs for Carl Lizza Racing Stables LLC and Michael Imperio. The Pulpit gelding made his last start at Laurel Park, where he lost by a head to Indycott on Claiming Crown Preview Day. Sumaya U.S. Stable's African Fighter, a daylight winner of his last two starts for trainer Todd Pletcher, finished third, a head in front of Indycott. *lh*

