

The Winning of the Liberty Bond

By Walter Moore*

All the thirty years that I have been a confirmed lover of harness racing, I have been denied the comforting heart throb that can be given in no other way but by a true-blue race horse. Always I have fallen short of the 22-carat article. I have owned more than a score, ranging from just fair to absolutely impossible, and neither am I solely to blame. True, I have personally selected many of them, but others have been wished on to me, still others selected by some of the infallible experts—these were usually the worst.

In that thirty years of trials and tribulations, my score sheet of steeds owned and stakes campaigned reveals the fact that almost every grade of "prospect" has passed through my hands, or by my patient eyes. First, I remember, came one with perfect legs, an appetite like a private from the trenches, enough breeding to race for big money, and—utterly without class. Following him up was a colt performer, with \$10,000 speed, and a ten-dollar head. He had a champion's lick and ought to have won right down the line, but he would jump, preferably before my friends, when their checks were down. That speed and that head were ultimately his undoing, for he ran away, and was distanced in life's race by a telephone pole. No. 3 was a pacer, with worlds of good qualities, speed, manners, a doer for your life; one of those big, sturdy ones, just the kind you would pick out as everything desirable. He was shipped away to win a string of races, to which I had paid a large chunk of perfectly good money in entrance fees, and when I came on to preside at the banquet after his first race, I found a leg on his near hind corner most resembling one of the Fat Lady's plump pins in the tent across from his stall. Scaring at a gasoline buggy was the given cause of the trouble which sent him into the discard, in exchange for a pair of mules, whose legs never get bad.

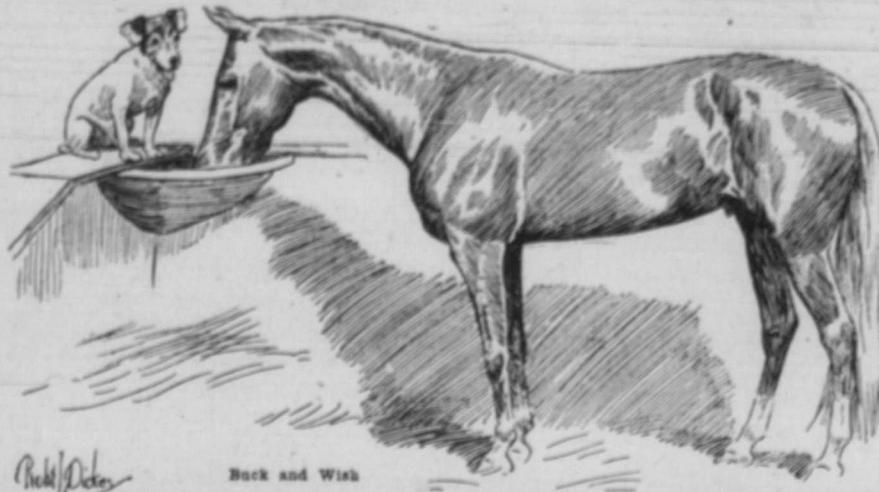
Then I bought one out of a catalogue, with the purest pedigree ever tabulated. If he could make good on that breeding—and he must!—the world would bow to me, and I knew it. Alas, I guess that beautiful ten-generation pedigree he had to lug around was too much handicap for trotting. At any rate he duly passed through one of the large and efficient dispersing auctions, and, I presume, has never gotten strong enough to carry his bloodlines faster than the 2:40 gait, which was his extreme limit for me. Then came divers others, some with stake speed and no legs, others with stake legs and no speed, and so on through a long and costly category. All the time I was trying for just one solace horse, one of which my neighbors and friends would say: "Blazer, he will do in any company." I neglected to say that the Ruler of the world, when he was fashioning me, decided to thatch my roof with a thick suit of hair of flaming red, and wherever I am known, or, in fact, two hours after I am introduced to a stranger, he involuntarily, or by some other unexplained method, gets my monicker and calls me "Blazer."

Meanwhile, how I craved just one good horse. Not to gamble with, nor to defeat and thus get even with some enemy, but merely to have the inexplicable feeling of peace and good will to all the world that wells up in a man from the ownership of a high-class race horse, more bubbling than in any other way. So I persevered. I bought futurity prospects, half-made stake horses, half-tried green horses, and in fact every variety I could consider as material whence I had a perfect and plausible right to develop a stake winner. But invariably it seemed that they were all counterfeits when it came their turn to try for me. My wife said: "Why don't you try something else, Jerry? Field dogs, trap shooting or polo. Go in for golf. Change your

sport ideas. Things seem bound to break against you with the horses. If I were you I would swear off on them."

But those consoling words only made me the more set for a horse that would produce that longed-for feeling, that if beaten in today's race, though defeated, he would try until the last step of the last heat. So I said: "Don't try to head me down another lane, please. There is no use. If I live until I can look upon Methuselah as an upstart, I will still be trying to get a true blue trotter."

Of course I kept on. I bred some on a small scale, but my colts turned out mostly to be "list trotters." If they could peep over into the Year Book it appeared to be the zenith of their glory. Once in a great while one of my own product would win a race at the county fair, but more often the natives would say, "Blazer, your horse can't trot very fast, can he?" All of which was sufficiently apparent to me without any tips. Secretly, at times I was ready to give up in despair, but, although grievously hurt, I tried on and on each year. In May and June I would have days of real pleasure over some fledgling product, and would watch it work with boyish thrills, but with the advance of the season my hopeful would fall by the wayside, and when the glor-



Red Dickey

Rock and Wish

ious colorings of fall were at hand, when the fittest only had survived, and the stars of the waning season shone with all the more brilliancy, my standard bearer was generally being fitted for the auctions, or, more likely, monarch of some grassy pasture, instead of the home stretch. On some I tried the effects of racing experience, taking them off on short campaigns. The others without ceremony were heaped upon my large and yearly increasing pile of discards.

In the spring and early summer of 1920 the stable that I had helped my trainer select for the annual spring elimination trials appeared even unusually unlikely, and when the hot days of July arrived, my interest in them, being almost negligible, I emitted a few perfunctory suggestions and departed from the shores of Lake Erie, with the firm resolution to forget my disappointments amid Grand Circuit scenes. The sport was wonderful that summer, causing me to linger on until the middle of September before I felt my bruised feelings sufficiently poulticed to be able to look once more at my own dogs of the trotting breed. Back home, I sauntered out to the track, ready to hear the usual story of leaky legs, sore mouths, epizootic, bad gait, and the slows, but soon noticed my trainer had more smiles than wails on tap. I asked the cause, and he sidled up a little closer, assuming one of those confidential attitudes, and then began his story.

"Do you remember," he said, "that four-year-old chestnut gelding by Noble Worthy out of Miss Futurity?"

"Yes, of course I remember that piece of rump-steak! What has happened to him?"

"Well, you had no more than reached Randall, until he seemed to find a new aim in life. He changed his gait over night and became one of the best going things that ever ruckled the earth."

"Soft pedal that stuff," I said. "Don't let that young buffalo joke you out of your wits!"

"It's no joke! He can do things—do 'em like a real trotter! Why, he swings his head and seats off a quarter in :30, looking over at passing autos. I tell you he will make a star!"

"All well and good," said I, "but where is the aperture in him?"

"There ain't any!"

"Come off! Out with it! My hide can't be punctured by the ravings of a trainer. I have worn a gas mask, for these many years. So, get down to the clean cloth. Tell me the truth, without any lace trimmings. I don't care for a cherry in my lemonade, just serve it plain."

"Well, as I told you, he began trotting like a streak about as soon as you left town, and I have kept still and worked him as carefully as I know how ever since. Last week I drove him in 2:08, last quarter in :29, but I was afraid to write you, for fear something

might happen to him before you got home. That's the truth and I can prove it to you!"

I discarded my skepticism, so earnest were his words, and sat in for the long story of just what had happened, weighing every detail closely up to date. My trainer's name was Rufus Paul. I knew he was honest as George Washington, a man of more than ordinary ability and good mental attainments, and I felt that I need discount his words but little. How good it listened! At last I said, "Do you think he is a stake horse?"

"If ever there was one!" came the swift reply. "If he has a fault in the world I haven't found it. Unless he invents an entirely new alibi, or meets with an accident, he will come to the post next year the best stake horse that ever closed his mouth on a snaffle."

"Well, Rufe, you are pretty strong on this fellow, aren't you?"

"Not nearly so strong as you'll be when you see him work," was his reply.

"When are you going to string him?"

"Today. I have been saving him for you," was the ear-tickling answer.

After the usual preliminary miles, Rufe set him down, and I had the extreme pleasure of piloting the runner. The first fast mile was in 2:07, last half in 1:02, last quarter in :30, and—would you believe it!—Rufe chaffed me all the way down the stretch, took the lines in one hand and said, "Boss, how do you like him?" Well, you can imagine how I felt, after paying the bills for years on droves of smelts, to have one flash like this bird! The next

mile was in 2:06, last half in 1:00, last quarter in :30, and still Rufe talked about the weather as we sailed through the stretch. I was breathless now, but made out to say: "Rufe, isn't that about enough for one day?"

"For ordinary trotters," says he, "it would be a plenty; but this isn't an ordinary trotter. We will go one more. I want you to see how he can get away."

By that time, trouble and me were strangers, not on the most remote speaking terms. I had wiped out twenty years of trouble in half a day.

The next mile we went away like hobbled pacers. The quarter was done in :30, the next in :29, making the half in 1:00. "Take back!" called Rufe, and the third was only in :35. Then he took a drive out of him coming home, and he did the last quarter in :29, finishing just as strong as any part of the three miles.

It seemed like a pipe-dream, but there was my watch. So I said: "Well, Rufe, if there isn't a missing link somewhere in this fellow, he is the best stake prospect I ever laid my eyes on."

"Now please," he answered, "bury the clouds. This fellow is true blue!"

"All right," I answered. "We will look for no loose screws until they begin to rattle, if they ever do," was my assurance. "To tell you the truth, he has given me more pleasure this morning than any other event of my life, aside from the joy of living in this great world of ours. But, by the way, what have you named him—if you have found a title for him?"

"Well, I haven't thought of a name; or, rather, have not assumed to select a name for your horse. But doesn't he come nearer being your life's wish in the horse line than all the others you have ever owned or been identified?" So, wouldn't the name "Wish" be appropriate?"

"Just the name—the name of all names!" I exclaimed. "Wish it will be!" and from that moment, for the next few days, my speed-hungry soul turned the name of Wish over and over again, each time with more pleasure than before.

Every day now found me at the track, for my accustomed look at Wish, and work-out days I invited all my friends out to share my equine tonic for

health and happiness. Two more sharp work-outs, one with three prompters, carefully driven with a view of testing Wish's conduct in a field of horses, satisfied me that he was endowed with every quality of the ideal trotter—then a careful letting-down for the winter and the long months of waiting and planning started. I wanted all the big stakes to be doubled in value, and new members to join the Grand Circuit, that I might have more places to race. Paying entrance money on Wish the next spring was a pleasure, and I was as methodical as a bill-collector in my attention to the stake installments. Finally the training season opened and my pleasure increased with each day of preparation. June's advent found my spirits bubbling over with joy, bringing as it did miles in 2:20, then in 2:15, then 2:10, and then the finishing work began to surge with interest. Two weeks before the opening of the Grand Circuit, I invoiced my list of stake entries and found that I had Wish named in over \$100,000 worth of stakes, from the first day of the inaugural meeting until the final chapters were to be written at Atlanta in the fall.

The dress rehearsal, before we were to depart for the field of conquest, was a regular celebration by the home folks. Wish was simply a dream trotter, every mile and every quarter of every mile just as I would have planned it to be, had I been devising it all to order. The climax was a mile in 2:04, last quarter in :29, done, apparently, "as easy as eating pie."

I decided that there would be no pre-

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I shall assume our farmers, like people, would goodly complaining uncomplainingly because of the company of those they are not mad as they would till they agree that while the whole that, if prosper by economic cond disgrace can onl most austere and devotion of eve come and every to the national

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