

July 6, 2015

PANAMA HAT POUNCES AT RIGHT TIME TO LAND FIRST STAKES WIN DESPITE ANOTHER UNCHARACTERISTIC TRIP, 4YO PREVAILS IN LENEBA NE AFTER LAZY START, JOCKEY HAYES SUMMONS GELDING'S BEST IN LANE



Jockey Chris Hayes saved the day on Monday when Panama Hat had little interest in the proceedings at Roscommon racecourse in Ireland. For the first 10 furlongs of the Listed Lenebane Stakes, it was everything Hayes could do to keep Panama Hat from losing contact with the rest of the field, as he repeatedly shook the reins and sat down in the saddle to urge the horse along while bringing up the rear.

Just minutes earlier, trainer Andy Oliver had advised Hayes to go straight to the front on the 4-year-old gelding, but that plan went out the window as soon as Panama Hat lazily broke from the starting gate and immediately fell 5 lengths off a slow pace. Turning for home, Panama Hat was still dead last with Hayes pumping his arms in desperation until the chestnut finally flipped the switch and responded. When Hayes crossed his arms and cracked Panama Hat with the whip lefthanded just inside the quarter pole, the lolly-gagging was over. Panama Hat ignited to the outside and reeled in his opponents in quick succession. He was at least 7 paths wide with a furlong remaining when he devoured the leader, Drifting Mist, and he kept on going to score by a widening length for one of the most bizarre wins ever from a Team Valor horse. The video is [here](#) of a horse that looked most of the way like he was more likely be pulled up than to make any kind of impact. His prospects were so dismal that Betfair offered him at 49 to 1 odds during the race.



Panama Hat is the 139th stakes winner from 534 horses (26 percent) to race for a partnership managed by Barry Irwin.

Team Valor CEO Barry Irwin said "In the 28-year history of our stable, there has never been a crazier or more unexpected win in terms of racing style than this one. I am still shaking my head."

Irwin was on the Emerald Isle when he picked out Panama Hat as a yearling at the 2012 Goffs Orby sale and paid \$71,055 for him. The chestnut is the 139th stakes winner from 534 horses (26 percent) in the partnerships Irwin has managed.

Panama Hat was nothing but generous last year in his meteoric rise over 7 races, including 5 wins. He deserved a mulligan for his start of 2015 when he tired off an 8-month layoff, and then Hayes blew it in the Saval Beg by striking the front too soon in a second-place finish to Kingfisher, who went on to finish second in the Group 1 Gold Cup at Royal Ascot.

With that form, Panama Hat looked like he could be mentioned among Europe's top stayers, but his last two races have been baffling. In the Group 3 Curragh Cup on June 28, he had to be ridden along early and then faded meekly in the stretch to finish last of 6.

With no clear explanation for Panama Hat's worst performance in a year, Oliver decided to equip him with blinkers to hone his focus while dialing back to 12 furlongs in the Lenebane, for which he was let go as the 5 to 1 fourth choice. Hayes and Oliver settled on their tactics 40 minutes beforehand, but instead of showing speed, "The Hat" was even more lethargic, and Hayes had to resort to one of the busiest rides you will ever see.



Panama Hat prior to the Lenebane, the most prestigious Flat race on the schedule at Roscommon. He scored in a handicap on the same card last year for the third of his five straight wins. Richard Keogh photo

Leopardstown.

From *IrishRacing.com* comes the following:

Hayes Shines Aboard Panama Hat in Lenebane

Panama Hat came from last to first under an inspired Chris Hayes ride as he landed the Listed Lenebane Stakes in the colours of Team Valour for trainer Andy Oliver.

Ninth in the early stages he dropped to rear and was pushed along when he raced wide off the bend past the stands.

The son of Medicean, who was fitted with blinkers for the first time, was continually pushed along in rear down the back straight and was still last turning in. He made progress on the outer from two furlongs out and swept to the front inside the final 150 yards, keeping on dourly to score by a length.

Altesse finished second at 4/1 under Kevin Manning for Jim Bolger while Toe The Line was two lengths back in third at 16/1 under Fran Berry for John Kiely.

The winner opened on-course at 7/1 but was well-supported and went off a 5/1 chance. Bantry Bay was sent off the 7/4 favourite and he finished a disappointing seventh under Seamie Heffernan for Aidan O'Brien.

Andy Oliver said afterwards: "He disappointed at the Curragh and there was no reason for it so we decided to put the blinkers on. But, even though he's won, it seems the blinkers didn't work as Chris was hard at work as soon as they jumped out. Fair play to Chris as he knows the horse and didn't panic, and he really started to roll after they turned in. At least the ability is still there, we just may have to reconfigure the tactics."

Oliver, a veterinarian, is going over Panama Hat from tip to toe this week to make sure a physical issue is not to blame, although Irwin has trouble believing an injured or uncomfortable horse could dismantle a stakes field the way he did in the stretch on Monday.

"This sucker has all the ability in the world, but he is reluctant to show it right now," Irwin said. "I suspect it is behavioral rather than a physical problem, but we will see if Andy comes up with anything definitive."

Timeform raised Panama Hat's rating to 116, the same mark Kingfisher had leading up to the Gold Cup. Oliver will tentatively look to the Group 3 Ballyroan Stakes for him next month at