



A Special e-Report
by D. L. Christopher

2008 Travers: The Key Horse

Introduction

The 2008 *Travers Stakes* at Saratoga on August 23, 2008 offered a good return for those who handicapped it properly. This short report outlines how experienced WATT users would have identified the proper key horse in the Travers. This e-Report also assumes that the general concepts outlined in our prior handicap of the *Haskell Invitational* have been reviewed.

The *Winning at the Track* program offers serious handicappers a substantial head start when it comes to identifying a key horse in any contest. The term "key horse" refers to one that is expected to finish first or second with a high degree of probability.

The program lists the "Best-4 PM Ratings" for each race, and the key horse is often found among the top two – and almost always among the top three.

Here is what the WATT Summary screen showed before the race:

Best 4 (P/M Ratings)				
8	- HARLEM ROCKER	80/94	4:1	3817
2	- COLNL JOHN	75/88	8:1	3779
1	- TALE OF EKATI	76/78	20:1	3728
3	- DA' TARA	86/57	8:1	3689

In other words, according to the WATT program, the key horse would most likely be **Harlem Rocker** (#8), **Colonel John** (#2), or **Tale of Ekati** (#1). However, due to the fact that **Da' Tara** (#3) easily defeated **Tale of Ekati** in The Belmont two months earlier, this colt would also be considered.

WATT Definitions

For those who are not familiar with the *Winning at the Track* program, here are a few important terms and definitions.

Pole Speed: A numerical rating that measures how fast a horse runs from the gate to the second call point of the race. The Pole Speed is established by a comparison with a "Basis Time Table." For example, the Basis Time for 6 furlongs is 1:07 and is assigned a Pole Speed rating of 100. A running time of 1:07.2, which is two-fifths of a second slower, is given a 98. A running time of 1:08.1, six-fifths slower, is established at 94, and so on.

Pacesetters: Two horses identified as those likely to run the fastest Pole Speeds and be leading the field at the second call point (typically, 4 furlongs in a sprint, and 6 furlongs in a route).

Last Quarter: A numerical rating that measures how fast a horse runs between the second call point and the finish line of any race. In this case, all the input data is adjusted by what is known as a "parallel speed table."

The Pace: The speed at which the leading pacesetter runs to the second call point is referred to as the "Pace" of the race. This can be expressed either by *Time* or by *Pole Speed* rating.

Sprint: Any race at a distance of one mile or less. Generally, the distances range from 4 1/2 furlongs to 1 mile (6 furlongs is the most widely used).

Route: Any race at a distance greater than one mile. For most North American tracks, the most popular distances are: 1 mile 70 yards, 1 1/16 miles, 1 1/8 miles, 1 3/16 miles, 1 1/4 miles, and 1 1/2 miles.

The Travers Stakes

There were 12 horses entered in the 2008 Travers. Here is the field and the Morning Line figures for that Saturday:

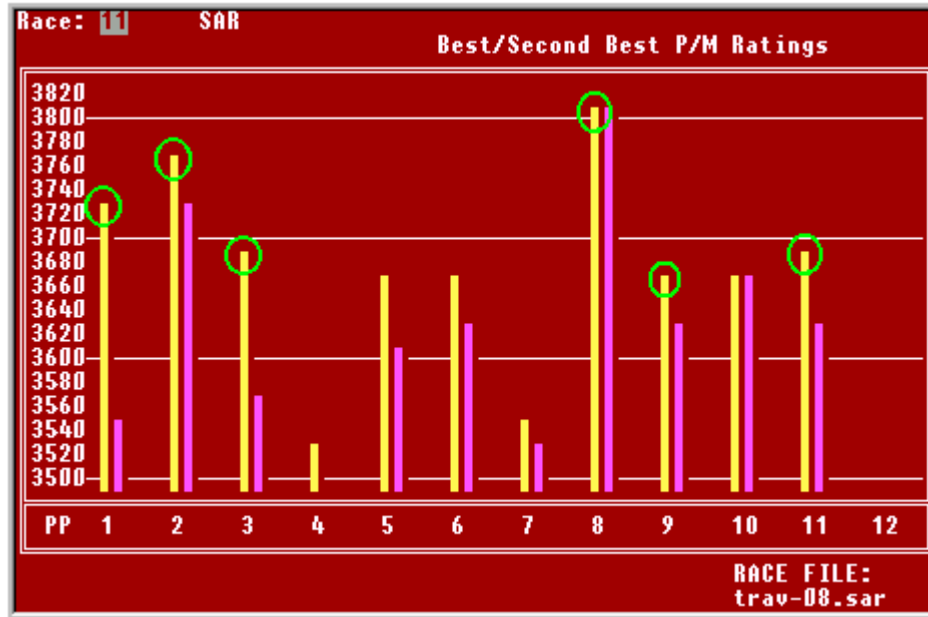
- | | |
|--------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| 1. Tale of Ekati (20:1) | 7. Amped (30:1) |
| 2. Colonel John (8:1) | 8. Harlem Rocker (4:1) |
| 3. Da' Tara (8:1) | 9. Mambo in Seattle (5:1) |
| 4. Tizbig (30:1) | 10. Tres Borrachos (15:1) |
| 5. Macho Again (6:1) | 11. Pyro (7:2) |
| 6. Cool Coal Man (15:1) | 12. Court Vision (12:1) |

Handicapping the 2008 Travers (1 1/4 miles) at Saratoga is very much like the Kentucky Derby at Churchill Downs on the first Saturday in May. The distance is the same, the quality of horses is comparable (in fact, a few of the same horses often appear), and many handicapping criteria are identical.

One such observation: It is quite unusual for any horse to win a race at this distance without first running well at 1 1/8 miles or longer. Although nearly every horse in this field qualifies, only three colts have run the program's "Race Minimum" at 1 1/8 miles or longer: **Harlem Rocker**, **Colonel John**, and **Mambo in Seattle**.

By reviewing screen #4 of the Graphics segment of the program, it would seem that **Harlem Rocker** would be the key horse in this race. However, it must first be determined whether this colt is in form and ready to run today. In addition, we must determine whether the expected pace will be suitable.

Judging by the fact that he had the program's highest "Pure Speed" rating last time out, his "form" is probably not a big concern. The 94 Pure Speed rating was awarded for his gate-to-wire performance in that winning effort.



The six most likely contenders are noted on the chart above. Remember, however, that our prime key horse candidates are **Harlem Rocker** (#8), **Colonel John** (#2), and **Tale of Ekati** (#1) – representing the Top 3 PM Ratings.

Successes at various distances can be important in the handicap, especially at 1-1/4 miles. In this contest, as the Late Speed screens will show later, the best race for each horse was:

#1: 7 furlongs
 #2: 1-1/8 miles
 #3: 1-1/16 miles


#8: 1 mile
 #9: 1-1/8 miles
 #11: 1-1/16 miles

By paging up and down the program's Late Speed screens, we can see the pace (Pole Speed) and closing (Last Quarter) capabilities of each contender. Many users consider the Late Speed screen to be among the most valuable capabilities offered by the *Winning at the Track* program – and indeed it is.

The expected pace of the 1-1/4 Travers was shown by the program to be a 75 Pole Speed (1:37 after a mile). Which horses can run within 5 or 6 lengths of this pace?

Here is the Late Speed screen of **Harlem Rocker**. Note that he has never run a pace of 70-75 in a route, although he has done it when running a sprint.

649 Late Speed HARLEM ROCKER 80/94							RACE MINIMUM: 630 (3)			
	TRACK	DIST.	Time	OUT	Time	OUT	TU	Pole Speed	Last Qtr.	LATE SPEED
1	FE	1 3/16	1:12.0	2	1:56.2	0	15	61	165	> 632 *
2	WO	1 1/8	1:13.0	3	1:49.4	6	5	52	165	> 604
3	AQU	1 Mile	1:09.3	3	1:34.3	0	18	80	157	> 649
4	GP	1 Mile	1:10.2	4	1:35.1	0	17	72	162	647
5	GP	7 f	0:44.2	6	1:23.1	0	15	72	156	627
6								-		
7								-		
8								-		

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Judging by the prior graphic, this colt needs a pace substantially slower than 75 to run well in a route when he is being rated. We cannot be sure, of course, because the 80 Pole Speed at Aqueduct was fast enough to make him a possible contender. But, to date, he has not shown any inclination to run faster than necessary.

On the other hand, **Colonel John** has demonstrated a consistent ability to run with a 70-75 pace of in a route. He has done it three times while being rated.

648 Late Speed COLNL JOHN 75/88							RACE MINIMUM: 630 (4)			
	TRACK	DIST.	Time	OUT	Time	OUT	TU	Pole Speed	Last Qtr.	LATE SPEED
1	HOL	1 1/8	1:11.0	1	1:49.1	2	10	72	154	> 616
2	CD	1 1/4	1:36.3	2	2:01.4	14	9	75	148	> 603
3	SA	1 1/8	1:11.3	6	1:48.1	0	10	58	174	> 648 *
4	SA	1 1/8	1:14.2	0	1:50.1	0	9	47	171	616
5	HOL	1 1/16	1:10.2	5	1:40.4	1	-3	70	168	641
6	HOL	1 1/16	1:12.1	4	1:43.0	0	11	56	170	633
7	OSA	7 f	0:46.0	1	1:21.2	0	0	65	168	634
8	DMR	6 f	0:47.4	3	1:13.2	1	0	44	146	526

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Next, compare **Colonel John** with **Tale of Ekati** shown on the next page. Notice what happens when he is asked to run a 70-75 pace in a route. Clearly, **Colonel John** is better suited for a 1:37 pace in a 1 1/4 mile contest.

652 Late Speed TALE OF EKATI 76/78							RACE MINIMUM: 630 (1)			
	TRACK	DIST.	Time	OUT	Time	OUT	TU	Pole Speed	Last Qtr.	LATE SPEED
1	SAR	1 1/8	1:11.4	2	1:51.1	6	21	63	149	> 594
2	BEL	1 1/2	2:03.1	6	2:29.3	18	7	72	140	> 571
3	CD	1 1/4	1:36.3	1	2:01.4	11	9	76	150	> 611
4	AQU	1 1/8	1:11.3	3	1:52.2	0	25	63	148	595
5	FG	1 1/16	1:13.4	4	1:44.2	7	8	46	162	586
6	MTH	1 1/16	1:09.3	7	1:42.4	18	7	74	137	566
7	BEL	7 f	0:46.2	2	1:22.2	0	11	58	175	652
8	SAR	6 f	0:45.2	2	1:10.0	4	10	69	156	616

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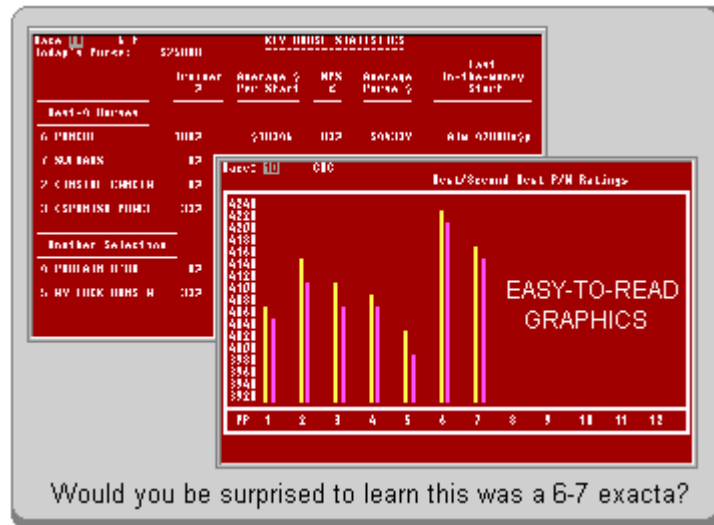
In addition, the only time **Tale of Ekati** ran faster than the WATT race minimum was in a 7-furlong sprint.

So, among our top three, **Colonel John** appears to be our key horse in this contest with **Harlem Rocker** as no more than a potential threat.

The next illustration is referred to as the "Variables Page" of the Graphics segment. It is interactive. The response depends on the input. Here, the user enters the expected pace of 75 (1:37) as suggested by the software, and the program displays any horse(s) capable of running with that pace. In this case, the program is being asked to display every horse capable of running within 5 lengths of a 75 Pole Speed.

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ADDENDUM

632 Late Speed DA' TARA 86/57							RACE MINIMUM: 630 (1)			
	TRACK	DIST.	Time	OUT	Time	OUT	TU	Pole Speed	Last Qtr.	LATE SPEED
1	SAR	1 1/8	1:11.4	2	1:51.1	24	21	63	128	> 531
2	BEL	1 1/2	2:03.1	0	2:29.3	0	7	77	151	> 614
3	PIM	1 1/16	1:10.4	0	1:42.1	1	2	75	160	> 632
4	GP	1 1/8	1:10.0	9	1:48.1	24	11	67	142	571
5	GP	1 Mile	1:09.3	0	1:36.3	4	23	86	138	609
6	GP	1 1/8	1:12.3	0	1:52.2	0	23	60	151	596
7	CRC	Mile 70	1:13.4	2	1:45.1	2	10	49	153	567
8								-		

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630 Late Speed MAMBO IN STL 65/86

	TRACK	DIST.	Time	OUT	Time	OUT	TU
1	SAR	1 1/8	1:12.3	1	1:51.0	0	21
2	CD	1 1/16	1:13.4	2	1:44.0	0	13
3	CD	1 1/8	1:15.3	0	1:51.2	0	27
4	CD	1 1/16	1:12.0	5	1:44.1	1	9
5	KEE	1 1/16	1:13.3	4	1:43.4	6	10
6	CD	1 Mile	1:12.2	1	1:37.4	0	17
7	KEE	6 1/2 f	0:45.3	3	1:16.1	4	6
8							

RACE MINIMUM: 630 (2)		
Pole Speed	Last Qtr.	LATE SPEED
58 -	161	> 620
49 -	173	> 630
39 -	175	> 630 *
56 -	164	613
47 -	163	593
60 -	154	599
65 -	155	601
-		

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637 Late Speed		PYRO		70/84		RACE MINIMUM: 630 (1)		
	TRACK	DIST.	Time	OUT	Time	OUT	TU	
1	SAR	1 1/8	1:11.4	5	1:51.1	1	21	Pole Speed
2	CD	1 1/16	1:13.0	2	1:43.3	0	13	Last Qtr.
3	CD	1 1/4	1:36.3	11	2:01.4	15	9	LATE SPEED
4	KEE	1 1/8	1:13.1	8	1:49.4	12	10	58 - 159
5	FG	1 1/16	1:13.4	1	1:44.2	0	8	> 614
6	FG	1 1/16	1:14.3	9	1:44.3	0	8	54 - 172
7	MTH	1 1/16	1:09.3	9	1:42.4	5	7	66 - 154
8	BEL	1 Mile	1:10.1	8	1:36.1	2	21	> 603
								44 - 161
								50 - 166
								34 - 178
								70 - 154
								67 - 157
								> 606
								610
								609
								626

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