

From the Executive Office

Off to a Good Start



As you can see from this magazine's cover, on the 25th of this month the inaugural Sunshine Millions will take place. I have outlined the history and importance of this event throughout previous editions of the *California Thoroughbred*. This month, we will preview the races with the main emphasis on the strong California contingent. The Sunshine Millions will showcase two of the country's top breeding states and, as Magna Entertainment Corporation (MEC) Chairman Frank Stronach stated, "this should become one of the premier events on the annual racing calendar, one that all members of the horse racing community—fans, breeders, owners, trainers and jockeys—will look forward to each year."

I would like to once again stress the importance of MEC's support. It is through their purse contribution from track commissions, marketing efforts, and overall management of this event that its overall success appears to be assured.

In another racing event, the NTRA Great State Challenge held in early December, showcased horses from some of the top breeding states. Although hurt by a lack of depth, California-breds did make an impressive showing. In fact, we were represented in only three races, but won two of them. Thus, percentage-wise, California had better success than any other state.

Even though we had submitted up to five possible representatives for each of the six races, only a total of four California-breds chose to ship to Texas (two in the Juvenile, one in the Juvenile Fillies and one in the Classic). We found it to be a very difficult sell when it came to trying to secure ample representation by California in this first year of the event. The main obstacle, which thankfully is a good one, is the fact that our restricted racing opportunities within the state were almost as lucrative as those being offered in the Great State Challenge. With the day's purses ranging from \$225,000 to \$275,000, depending on Breeders' Cup eligibility, there were many other similar options available in the state of California that did not require shipping costs and where competitors weren't faced with a racing surface and horses with which they were not familiar.

The three sprint races (Juvenile at seven furlongs, Juvenile Fillies at seven furlongs, and Sprint for older horses at six furlongs) were extremely popular, as there are limited opportunities to run at those distances for such lucrative purses. The route races, however, need to be tweaked in order to make them more attractive to owners and/or breeders so that they can be convinced to participate with their horses.

Overall this is a great event, but if it is to continue in the future we do need to fine-tune it in order to maximize representation. Another issue we need to discuss is the placement of the Great State Challenge races on the racing calendar and the coordination of other stakes so we are not running head-to-head and competing for the same horses.

One thing is for certain, Sam Houston Race Park is a first class facility that did an excellent job hosting the event. President Bob Bork and his staff were extremely hospitable to all the connections from the various states and should be commended for their attention to detail and overall efforts. If this event is to be held at Sam Houston Race Park next year, it should be an easier sell, as the horseman that participated this year will most certainly recommend to others that shipping to this locale to represent the golden state would be a good decision.

On another note, the annual CTBA Stallion Season Auction was once again a huge success. This year's auction raised a record \$100,600 for the association's Political Action Committee (PAC). We are very fortunate in that we have extremely well-funded state, federal and local PACs. These funds will be utilized to protect existing legislation, as well as new legislation that is beneficial to the breeding and racing industry. With the outright ban on Internet gambling a priority in Congress for this year, the Federal PAC will be an important resource for the association.

In closing, I would like to thank all the stallion season contributors for their donations, as well as those other breeders who made bids on the various stallions. Your continued support is vital to the success of the CTBA's legislation endeavor.

— Doug Burge