

Walner Payton (Walner-Lonely Lady-Muscle Hill)

Walner Payton won the first of two Hambletonian Oaks eliminations on July 29 at the Meadowlands in lifetime-best-equaling 1:51.4. She took the lead past the opening quarter and remained in front to the wire, prevailing by half a length with a 27.2 final quarter.

Last year Walner Payton won the New Jersey Sire Stakes final and an International Stallion Series division at The Red Mile. She was also second in the Breeders Crown and Kentucky Championship Series finals. Overall she has a record of 6-9-3 from 20 starts and has earned \$641,518.

Quotes

“She really hadn’t been that good on the front, but they put a hood on her (in the elim) and she was a lot sharper. Once she got (to the front) she felt great. She had her ears forward and was loving her work. She’s just a classy filly. She turns up week after week and really never puts in a bad performance.

“I knew (Railee Something) was going to be a threat. She’s been racing really good. But my filly was still going super at the time (on the last turn) and she’s pretty quick. She can reel off a pretty good quarter. So, I was still confident enough that she would keep going, and she did.” - **driver Dexter Dunn**

“I knew she was going into (the elimination) as good as she’s ever been. She’s always been a little lean, but she started to put on a little weight the last two or three weeks. Dexter was thrilled with her (on July 22). He said she was really coming good. We finally put a hood on her, eye cups, which we probably should have done before. That helped a lot because before when she’s been up front she’s been wandering around. (In the elim) she had a lot more focus. She finished up strong with the ear plugs in. Dexter gave her a heck of a drive.

“She’s consistent. She’s just a little girl. I’m sure she was the smallest one in the race. We’re thrilled with her. She’s got a good gait, tries her heart out. She’s always been a handful at home and a handful warming up but just the last two or three weeks she’s started to settle down and is a lot easier to handle.” - **trainer Chris Ryder**

Breeding Notes

Sire Walner won last year’s Hambletonian Oaks with Fashion Schooner, his first victory in the event. The dam, the Muscle Hill mare Lonely Lady, is a full sister to Bar Hopping, who won his elimination and was fifth in the final of 2016 Hambletonian.

Bred by Steve H. Stewart and Douglass B. Hutchins, Walner Payton sold for \$510,000 as HIP 264 at the 2021 Lexington Selected Yearling Sale. She would be Hutchins and Stewart's first Hambletonian Oaks winner, though Stewart bred 2019 Hambletonian champion Forbidden Trade and was also part of the breeding partnership of 2014 champion Trixton.

Driver Bio

DEXTER DUNN

Born: 9/1/1989 – Birthplace: New Zealand – Resides: Millstone, NJ

Dan Patch Award Driver of the Year: 2022, 2021, 2020, 2019.

Hambletonian Oaks wins (1): Bella Bellini, 2021.

Dexter Dunn won the 2021 Hambletonian Oaks with Bella Bellini, trained by Richard "Nifty" Norman. Bella Bellini went on to be named the Dan Patch Award winner for best 3-year-old female trotter.

He has driven in four Hambletonian finals. Last year, he drove filly Jiggy Jog S, who won her elimination and finished fourth in the final. He was second with Fast As The Wind in the first of the event's two elims.

In his previous finals, Dunn was fourth with Soul Strong in 2019 and fourth with Amigo Volo in 2020. Both horses started from post 10. In 2021, he was ninth with Really Fast, who went off stride.

Dunn was the regular driver of 2022 Horse of the Year Bulldog Hanover, who last July won the William R. Haughton Memorial at the Meadowlands in 1:45.4 – the fastest mile in the history of harness racing. On the same night, Dunn won the Hambletonian Maturity for 4-year-old trotters with mare Bella Bellini.

A native of New Zealand, Dunn moved to the U.S. in the summer of 2018. Since arriving in the States, he has won more than 1,800 races and earned \$56 million in purses. He has been named the Dan Patch Award Driver of the Year each of the past four seasons.

Dunn led all drivers in North America in purses in 2022, 2021 and 2020. Dunn-driven horses banked \$15.19 million last year, \$12.93 million in 2021 and \$11.15 million in 2020.

In 2022, Dunn topped the purse standings despite ranking 30th in wins, with 308. He won 59 races with purses of at least \$100,000, equating to nearly 20 percent of his total victories. No other driver won more than 36 races worth six figures.

Prior to moving, Dunn led New Zealand's premiership in wins for 10 consecutive years

from 2008 through 2017. During that span, he won at least 200 races on six occasions and twice finished with 199. He was the first New Zealand driver to win at least 200 races in a season.

In 2015, Dunn won the World Driving Championship representing New Zealand.

Trainer Bio

CHRIS RYDER

Born: 10/2/1955 – Birthplace: Greymouth, New Zealand – Resides: Allentown, NJ

Chris Ryder is making his second appearance in the Hambletonian Oaks. His previous starter was Mystical Sunshine in 2004. She finished seventh. Three years later, she was the Dan Patch Award winner for best older female trotter.

Ryder saw his stable earn nearly \$4 million in purses in 2022, establishing a new high while extending the best stretch of his already successful three-decade career as a trainer. It was Ryder's fourth consecutive campaign with more than \$2 million in purses, bettering a three-year streak he enjoyed in the mid-2000s.

Last season's success also followed three years in which Ryder trained three different horses to runner-up finishes in U.S. Horse of the Year balloting: Bettor's Wish in 2019, Party Girl Hill in 2020, and Niki Hill in 2021.

Ryder has won nearly 1,800 races in his career and \$51 million in purses. He ranks 18th in purses since the inception of official trainer stats in 1991.

A native of New Zealand, Ryder began riding ponies at the age of 10. His father was a dairy farmer who later worked at a stable and trained horses. Ryder worked for his father and older brother, who had a stable, before a stint in Montreal as a groom.

Ryder came to the U.S. when his wife, Nicola, got a job in the New York area. He worked several odd jobs before turning to training on a fulltime basis.

His son Patrick assists with the stable.

Owner Bio

Kenneth E. Jacobs, Baldwinsville, New York

Mr. Jacobs is in search of his first Hambletonian Oaks champion. He was the owner of Walner during that horse's successful 2-year-old and early 3-year-old campaign and has watched him blossom into one of harness racing's top stallions.