

Bad trips lead to good bets

Watch for subtle trouble – not obvious traffic problems – to pick up on future winners

By **STEVE DAVIDOWITZ**

When Siphonizer won the Del Mar Futurity on Del Mar's closing day, Sept. 10, he rewarded faithful "trip handicappers" with one of the best overlays of the entire summer.

Siphonizer paid \$12.20 in a five-horse field despite a highly rated and much lauded debut win over Cooperation on Aug. 2. Following that race, Siphonizer had a subtle but very bad trip when he finished fifth behind Perfect Moon in the Best Pal Stakes on Aug. 17.

In the Del Mar Futurity, run at seven furlongs, both Cooperation and Perfect Moon went to the post at much shorter odds than Siphonizer. But there were strong reasons to believe that neither of those juveniles held any advantage over the son of Siphon, who would beat them both, along with Siphonizer's stablemate Minister Eric, in the closing-day feature.

While launching his best move on the turn in the Best Pal, Siphonizer was pinned inside and behind horses for at least three-sixteenths of a mile, which forced Julie Krone to apply some restraint without choking him down for much of the stretch run. Krone was essentially stuck behind a trio of horses moving at a moderate pace, and she was unable to ask Siphonizer to accelerate as Perfect Moon moved on by to win.

Siphonizer is just one recent example of a horse who was able to reverse a weak performance with a better trip. His Del Mar Futurity score was living proof of why it pays to seek subtle explanations for superior, or subpar, performances.

Although horses who get into serious traffic trouble may be too obvious to promote juicy payoffs, money certainly can be made by finding horses who endured subtle pace or bias issues.

Typically, the most productive "subtle bad trip" horses come from three categories:

★ Horses that race evenly or make up some ground while the pace is moderate and/or the track favors front-running speed. While most experienced players will recognize the impact of a severely biased track on horse performance, the same is not true when a moderate pace may be inhibiting the way horses in the middle or rear of the pack can perform. Fact is, a moderate pace can create a "single-race pace bias" that makes it exceedingly difficult for the stretch runners to fire an effective rally. In other words, it pays to upgrade the performances of horses who finish with interest or race evenly in races that lack a spirited pace.

★ Conversely, horses that make sharp moves into a wicked pace also provide subtle but important clues of hidden ability. While some of these horses may only have the ability to accelerate for a very brief portion of a race, those capable of pushing their way into contention with a sustained burst of speed while the pace is still hot or heating up will improve dramatically



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Siphonizer was stuck behind horses in an Aug. 17 loss, but won the Del Mar Futurity when able to accelerate properly.

when asked to face less demanding foes through the early and/or middle fractions.

In many cases, the key to victory with such horses may simply be a more favorable distance or slight drop in class, and some may be telegraphing significant improvement in their next outings.

★ Horses that race against a severe track bias without expending a lot of energy in the process also are worth serious consideration when they get into a more favorable pace- or track-bias situation. Specifically, when a horse is stuck outside on an inside-favoring track and runs evenly, there is considerable room for improvement, often at higher odds than a comparable horse who may have caught the crowd's eye with a good finish against a speed-biased track.

Some horses that run strongly against a severe bias may be given too much credit because the performance was too taxing. Indeed, when such a horse with a hard race against the bias comes back to run, I tend to prefer some time between races and/or a steady series of respectable workouts to validate the horse's current condition. More often, I expect such a horse to give its best effort in its second or third start after its strenuous trip.

Given these guidelines, here are six of the horses I saw at Saratoga and Del Mar this summer who endured difficult pace- or bias-related trips that did not really involve traffic problems.

Del Mar

★ **STAR PARADE**, finished second in seventh race, Aug. 22, at one mile: Although this one did encounter traffic problems, duly noted in the result charts,

that was incidental to what really was impressive about this performance. Once clear, this filly moved outside to make a run against a strong inside speed bias and galloped out strongly after the finish. Fits well in NW2X allowance route for fillies and mares.

★ **BONNIE BRIGHTON**, finished sixth in third race, Aug. 23, at one mile on turf: Made steady, subtle move against moderate pace while deep in the pack to reach contention entering the stretch before racing evenly late. Had much more energy than the running line would suggest. Fits with allowance-type 3-year-old fillies on grass up to 1 1/16 miles.

★ **GARDEN IN THE RAIN**, finished third in sixth race, Sept. 7 – the Palomar Handicap, a Grade 2 turf race at 1 1/16 miles: Broke well inside, but inexplicably was restrained back to fourth by Krone in one of the few questionable rides she has engineered during an outstanding Del Mar meet. Taken out of her best game on a course that was favoring front-running speed, Garden in the Rain could not find running room for her rally until way too late. Galloped out quickly past front-running winner Spring Star, who benefited from a very moderate pace throughout.

Saratoga

★ **GREAT NOTION**, second in 10th race, Aug. 23 – the King's Bishop, a Grade 1 sprint for 3-year-olds at seven furlongs: Broke slowly and rushed up with an amazing burst of speed to lead this fast field in blistering splits of 21.76 seconds for the quarter-mile and 43.79 for the half. He was still in front by daylight after six furlongs in 1:08.67. Just failed to hold off winner

Valid Video at the wire in a smart 1:22.14.

Many horses in this race, including the winner and several that were part of the pace or made a move on the far turn (During, Christine's Outlaw, Posse, Private City), will deserve careful attention when they are entered back under less stressful conditions. Nevertheless, Great Notion's performance suggests a big win on the horizon in a high-class sprint, once he fully recovers.

★ **PEACE RULES**, second in 11th race, Aug. 23 – the Travers, a Grade 1 at 1 1/4 miles for 3-year-olds: Hard-hitting multiple Grade 1 performer was stretched beyond his physical limitations to run a gritty race on the pace, under pressure throughout. He did extremely well to hold second while Ten Most Wanted went on to win by daylight. Peace Rules took a lot of beating here under adverse conditions and could be a force to be reckoned with if pointed for the Breeders' Cup Mile on the Santa Anita turf.

★ **CHICK JOY**, won third race, Aug. 25, for maidens at 1 3/16 miles on the turf: Rallied from deep in the pack with a wide run while getting only mild encouragement into a moderate pace to win going away, galloping out many lengths in front of the field but earning a moderate 80 Beyer Speed Figure. Chance to develop into a stakes type.

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