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EARLY BREEDERS’ CUP CLASSIC FAVORITE GUN RUNNER FIRES FIVE-FURLONG BREEZE IN :59.80 AT CHURCHILL DOWNS

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (Sunday, Sept. 24, 2017) – Winchell Thoroughbreds and Three Chimney Farm's Gun Runner, the current early favorite for the $6 million Breeders' Cup Classic (Grade I) on Nov. 4 at Del Mar, put in his final workout at Churchill Downs on Sunday before shipping to California by recording a bullet five-furlong move in :59.80 with regular jockey Florent Geroux aboard.

Geroux started two lengths back of workmate Gettysburg (1:00.20) and worked in splits of :24.40 and :35.60 before finishing even at the wire and galloping out six furlongs in 1:13 and seven furlongs in 1:27.80, according to Churchill Downs' clocker John Nichols.

“He felt great,” Geroux said. “He worked with a nice horse and did everything perfectly. He typically doesn’t do anything fancy in his works and today was no different. He did everything on his own and I just wanted to keep him happy. He’s really turned into a faster and stronger horse this year. I think back last year and he acted like a teenager and this year he’s grown into a man. When I’m on his back I feel like I don’t have to help him as much because he does everything so well on his own.”

Gun Runner, conditioned by Hall of Fame trainer Steve Asmussen, began his 2017 campaign with a front-running 5 ¾-length score in the Feb. 20 Razorback Handicap (GIII) at Oaklawn Park, which was used as a prep for his next start in the March 25, $10 million Dubai World Cup (GI) which resulted in a hard-fought runner-up finish to Arrogate. The duo is scheduled for a rematch in the Breeders’ Cup Classic.

“Forecasting in the horse business is like dreaming so you end up taking it one race at a time,” Three Chimney Farm's Chief Operating Officer Chris Baker said. “We’ve always believed the potential was there but he’s really stepped up this year.”

Following the Dubai World Cup, Gun Runner returned victorious with a seven-length romp in the June 17 $500,000 Stephen Foster Handicap (GII) at Churchill Downs. The chestnut colt continued his winning ways at Saratoga with a 5 ¼-length triumph in the Aug. 6 $1.2 million Whitney (GI), which was followed by a 10 ¼-length landslide in the Sept. 2 $750,000 Woodward (GI).

“There’s a fine line of being prepared and over prepared,” Baker said. “Steve and his team have done a masterful job at keeping him in the right spot his entire career, especially this year.”

Joining Baker on Sunday morning to watch Gun Runner’s breeze was Winchell Thoroughbreds’ Racing Manager David Fiske.

“I've told Steve before you can put a green screen behind Gun Runner and he'd work the same on any racetrack in the country,” Fiske said. “He has his workmate Gettysburg and they seem to be a well-matched pair. Everything went according to plan and we’ll see how he comes out of the workout. He’s scheduled to fly to Santa Anita (Monday). Steve’s had a fair amount of success flying out to California early. So, it's pretty much standard. He’ll train up to the Breeders’ Cup.

“I thought it was partly the schedule that all of the races fall into and partly that he runs well fresh. He’s a good workhorse and puts a lot into his works. So, from that standpoint he’s pretty easy to nudge into fitness. I think working him up to the race gives Steve a bit more control than putting him into another race.”

Asmussen was at Churchill Downs for Gun Runner’s breeze but was unable to be reached for comment before he had to catch a flight to Remington Park for Sunday’s Oklahoma Derby (GIII) card.

ROMANS BREEZES FREE DROP BILLY FOR PROBABLE START IN GRADE I BREEDERS’ FUTURITY – Albaugh Family Stable’s Free Drop Billy, a narrow runner-up to Sporting Chance in the Sept. 4 Hopeful (Grade I) at Saratoga, breezed five furlongs in 1:00.80 Sunday morning at Churchill Downs in preparation for a probable start in the Oct. 7 $500,000 Breeders’ Futurity (G1) at Keeneland, according to trainer Dale Romans.

“He looked really good this morning,” said Romans, who was perched in his normal clocker’s stand just past the half-mile pole. “As of right now we’re thinking the Breeders’ Futurity for him.”

Free Drop Billy was the 3-1 betting favorite in the Hopeful and closed ground late but could not get by the green Sporting Chance in the stretch.

“I thought he ran a winning race that day,” Romans said. “The Alboughs are loaded with potential 2-year-old talent so hopefully we can get some luck to end their year and continue as 3-year-olds.”

The Breeders’ Futurity is part of the “Prep Season” on the “Road to the Kentucky Derby” with points being awarded to the top four finishers on a 10-4-2-1 scale.

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“The ultimate goal is to obviously win the Kentucky Derby,” Romans said. “We’re a long way out but like I always say, ’every horse in my barn is a Derby horse until they prove me otherwise.”

Free Drop Billy was a $200,000 purchase at the 2016 Keeneland September Yearling Sale. The colt is a son of Union Rags out of the Giant’s Causeway mare Trensa. The Albaugh Family recently purchased Free Drop Billy’s half-brother, by Curlin, at the 2017 Keeneland September Yearling Sale for $800,000. Romans is expected to train.

STAKES PROBABILITIES – A stakes trio is on tap for the final Saturday of the September Meet with the $100,000 Jefferson Cup (Listed), $100,000 Ack Ack (Grade III), and $200,000 Lukas Classic (GIII).

Below are known early probable entrants, according to Stakes Coordinator and Assistant Racing Secretary Dan Bork:

- The 41st running of the Jefferson Cup for 3-year-olds at one mile on the turf: Adonis Creed, Bronson, Dawn Raider, Guest Suite, My Bariley and Your Way.
- The 25th running of the Ack Ack for 3-year-olds and upward at one mile: Awesome Slew, Conquest Big E, Etruscan, The Player and Warrior’s Club.
- The 5th running of the Lukas Classic for 3-year-olds and upward at 1 1/8 miles: Eagle, Fear the Cowboy, Flashy Jewel, Honorable Duty and Money Flows.

Entries will be drawn for Saturday’s 11-race card Wednesday.

ROMANS VS. MOTT – South Louisville native Dale Romans remains one win behind Hall of Fame trainer Bill Mott for the all-time leading trainer at Churchill Downs (701-700 wins) heading into closing week of the September Meet.

Romans three horses entered Sunday and one Thursday.

Romans: Finished (Sunday, Race 2); Wolf Gourmet (Sunday, Race 9); Northeast Bound (Sunday, Race 10); and Jan One (Thursday, Race 8).

Mott does not have any entrants on Sunday or Thursday.

MILESTONE WATCH – Along with the heated-battle between Dale Romans and Bill Mott for the all-time leading trainer honors at Churchill Downs (701-700 wins), trainer Greg Foley (398) is approaching 400 career-victories beneath the historic Twin Spires while trainer Ian Wilkes is targeting 200 career victories at Churchill Downs (194 wins). … Trainer Mike Tomlinson is just one win away from 500 career victories. The Oklahoma native has 499 victories so far in his 28-year career.

DOWN THE STRETCH – After Sunday’s card, racing at Churchill Downs will resume Thursday for the last Twilight Thursday of 2017. The eight-race card features $1 beers in the Plaza, music by Otis Junior and The Jesse Lees, delicious food truck fare and a Racing 101 area where guests can learn more about horse racing and how to make winning wagers. Gates open at 4 p.m. (all times Eastern) and the first race is scheduled at 5 p.m. … Sunday will close out the September Meet with Family Adventure Day Presented by Kroger. The day features more than 20 activities including bounce houses, a petting zoo, pony rides and face painting. Gates open at 11:30 a.m. with the first race scheduled at 12:45 p.m. To purchase tickets visit www.churchilldowns.com/familyadventureday. … The “Who’s the Champ? Handicapping Contest” will be held on Sunday. Interested participants can enter for $35 ($30 for TSC Elite members) for a chance to win the $1,000 cash voucher first prize by placing mythical $2 win and place bets on Races 3-8. Second place receives a $500 voucher and third place is worth a $200 voucher. Registration takes place those days between 11:30 a.m. and 1:30 p.m. on the Clubhouse second floor at the top of the Gate 17 escalators. … The 50/50 charitable gaming raffle returns for the September Meet at Churchill Downs. Proceeds from the raffle will go towards charitable organizations that benefit from the Churchill Downs Incorporated Foundation, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit corporation that helps support the critical work of nonprofits in our industry, make a difference in important public health programs and provide meaningful opportunities in art and education. Visit www.derbygives.com to purchase tickets.

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