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Smuggler Comes To Maine

By

Clark P. Thompson

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On September 7, 1876, the Lewiston Evening Journal reported that Col. Henry S. Russell of Milton, Ma. was bringing Smuggler to Maine being "desirous of showing his famous stallion to the people and breeders of Maine." Col. Russell and his trainer, Charles Marvin, had decided to exhibit Smuggler at three locations in Maine.

Smuggler first burst on the national trotting scene in 1874 when he won, in record time for a stallion - 2.20, the "Great Stallion Race" for a purse of \$10,000 at the Mystic Park track in Boston. More recently, Smuggler had just completed a series of races on trotting's "Grand Circuit" with stops in Cleveland, Buffalo, Rochester and Hartford. The article in the Journal pointed out that Smuggler had humble beginnings as he was bred in Ohio and taken to Kansas when two years old. He was used for farm work until he was six. Smuggler's trainer, Charles Marvin, was struggling along in Kansas "with a small and not very formidable string" in the winter of 1874-75, as he recalled in his book Training The Trotting Horse (1890). In June of 1875 he received a telegram from Col. Russell requesting him to come east and take over the training and driving of Smuggler. The season ahead "was not of very great consequence" according to Marvin because Smuggler was unable to lower his stallion record (2.20) which he shared with Mambrino Gift.

The season of 1876 began for Smuggler in July at Belmont Park in Philadelphia where he defeated Judge Fullerton lowering the stallion record to 2.17. Only Goldsmith Maid (2.14) had trotted faster. On July 27, Smuggler and Goldsmith Maid met for the first time in Cleveland. What followed was one of the most memorable races in trotting history. As Marvin later recalled in his book, the field of trotters assembled "comprised the cream of the trotting turf of that day." After a mighty struggle, Smuggler won the last three heats and the race after the "Maid" had won the first two heats. His best time was 2.16 ¼. The "Queen of the Turf" had been defeated. From Cleveland the circuit continued on, and Smuggler was able to lower the stallion record to 2.15 ¼ at Hartford's Charter Oak Park.

After a stop in Springfield, Smuggler was loaded on a train for Portland. Several Maine newspapers announced that "the Champion Stallion and King of the Turf" was on his way down east. The scheduled called for trials of speed in Portland on September 12, in Gardiner on the 16th, at Bangor on the 22nd, and St. John on the 27th. His first stop was at Presumpscot Park. This trotting park was a new half mile oval first opened in the fall of 1871. On September 16 The Maine Farmer reported that Smuggler accompanied by the running mare "Achievement" trotted three trials. His best time was 2.21, "best time ever made in this State" according to the Farmer. The Farmer noted that Flora Temple had once made a time of 2.26 at Portland's old Forest City Park. Next up, the Oakland Trotting Park in Gardner. Another new half mile track, the Gardner track was first

opened to the public in the fall of 1873. By this time Maine had nearly 50 organized trotting tracks scattered from one end of the State to the other. The Oakland Trotting Park was considered one of the better tracks with its wide homestretch. However, the track was "heavy" when Smuggler and Achievement took to the track. The stallion made three attempts to break his record. His best time in the second heat was 2.24 ¼ according to the Farmer. It was not reported as a track record, but it most surely was as no Maine horse had trotted at such a clip except on out of State tracks.

On Tuesday, September 19, the Bangor Daily Commercial and the Whig both reported that "the famous stallion Smuggler arrived in Bangor yesterday afternoon at four o'clock, in good condition." The Commercial also reported that Col. Russell had found accommodations at the Bangor House. Smuggler was driven from the train station to the trotting park which was located out Union Street (between Union Street and today's airport). The Bangor Trotting Park was operated by Foster S. Palmer, a long time horseman that brought out Gen. Knox and other fast ones. Smuggler was described by one account as "a dark bay in color, with a white blaze on his face ending wide on his nose and standing 15 hands and three inches in height."

The schedule of races for Saturday called for Smuggler to time trial following the afternoon races. The weather was good, but it was a small crowd, estimated at 500, that turned out to see how Smuggler would do on Bangor's larger mile oval. While not viewed as especially fast, Bangor's track was the oldest in the State, dating from 1851 according to George H. Bailey, a noted trotting horseman and authority on such matters. As before, Smuggler appeared on the track accompanied by his prompter Achievement. Marvin would team the stallion and Bailey the running mare. Unfortunately, the track was "slippery and greasy" from rain earlier in the week. Nevertheless, Smuggler made four attempts at his record. His action was described as "superb, steady, strong and powerful" by one account. His best time was 2.22 ½. It was decided to hold him over and try again on Monday. This may have been a factor in the cancellation of his trip to St. John.

The Monday edition of the Whig reported that Smuggler made only one attempt at speed between heats of the 2.38 Class which had also carried over from Saturday's races. After making a trial in 2.23 ¼, Smuggler was taken back to City Point and loaded on the "Boston boat" for the return trip home. Thus ended Smuggler's visit down east. Later, in his book, Marvin mentioned his trip to Bangor with Smuggler without going into detail. However, for all in attendance that day it must have been memorable to see such a famous stallion make such time. (The best horses in Maine at that time were trotting near the 2.30 mark.) One such person in attendance that day was Orrin Shaw who timed Smuggler's mile from the Judge's stand with his one time rival Foster S. Palmer. Do you suppose they might have reminisced about old times? Like the time in 1863 when Shaw teamed his stallion Hiram Drew against Gen. Knox before a throng of 5000 at the Waterville Driving Park. They were lucky to have been a part of trotting history in Maine during its heyday!