

Shaman Ghost delivers Stronach third Queen's Plate victory

By Jake Courtepatte

Frank Stronach waited eighteen years for a repeat performance at Woodbine Racetrack's Queen's Plate, but the owner-breeder took back the \$1-million title in style on Sunday.

Stronach Stables' Shaman Ghost rallied for a come-from-behind victory on Sunday, finishing one-and-a-quarter lengths ahead of favourite Danish Dynaformer.

In his own traditional fashion, the founder of Magna International scoured the race paddock for signs of a four-leaf clover before Canada's oldest thoroughbred horse race, finding one just minutes before the race. He gave it to his granddaughter, who in turn passed it off to jockey Rafael Hernandez who won the Queen's Plate with it tucked securely in his boot.

"Just as I was walking in the grass near the saddling area I looked down and saw a four-leaf clover," Stronach told the media scrum following the race. "That's usually a good sign, but I had a good feeling all day long because the horse beat every horse in the race before in better times. I think this time, we got a real good horse and he was hardly breathing when he came over here (to the winner's circle)."

But with Stronach's equestrian history, it's clear that it takes much more than luck. With the victory, Shaman Ghost gave Stronach Stables its third Queen's Plate victory, and the first since 1997, when Awesome Again won the one-and-a-quarter mile race. Stronach's first win came in 1994 with the three-year old Basqueian.

The Stronach family and Adena Springs have bred and/or campaigned more than 200 stakes winners, including winners of both the Preakness and Belmont Stakes in the United States, as well as all three classics in Canada. Among these runners are 12 champions in two countries, including Horse of the Year & Hall of Famer Ghostzapper the sire to Shaman Ghost.

Shaman Ghost entered the day with the second-highest odds, having won his three previous races, including a half-length victory in May at Woodbine where Danish Dynaformer finished in third place.

The crew at Shaman Ghost's home of Adena Springs, including trainer Brian Lynch, were confident in the young horse leading up to the day, despite calling Shaman Ghost a "late bloomer".

"He was never a precocious 2-year-old," Lynch said. "He was a slow learner. He always showed he was talented, but it took him a few starts to get it together?when he first started to go to school, he had to sit at the back of the bus. He wasn't the smartest."

Lynch went on to call Shaman Ghost now "the ultimate professional".

The victory was the first Queen's Plate for both Lynch and Hernandez.

With the first leg of the Canadian Triple Crown under their belt, Stronach Stables now has their eye set on the Prince of Wales Stakes, held in three weeks at Fort Erie Racetrack. The final leg returns to Woodbine for the Breeders Stakes in August, as Stronach says he has already heard comparisons to Triple Crown winner American Pharoah.