

VIP Stable bargain purchases to take on Sheppard Pace

by Brandon Valvo, for the SOA of NY

Yonkers, NY --- "We try to zig when everybody else is zagging," VIP Stable's Ed O'Connor said as he reflected on the partnership's unconventional path to success with Keystone Velocity. Purchased for a hefty price as an 8-year-old who had missed years on the track, the 2017 George Morton Levy Series winner captured the Ben Franklin Pace last Saturday (July 1) at The Down at Mohegan Sun Pocono.

When VIP Stable starts a pair of 2-year-olds in Saturday's Lawrence B. Sheppard Pace eliminations at Yonkers Raceway, it will put its zig-zagging tactics to the test again. Phat Blue Chip and Paprike Blue Chip cost just \$9,000 and \$7,000 at auction last year, respectively, but are already proving to be valuable additions to VIP's roster.

Trained and co-owned by Tom Fanning, Phat Blue Chip was the first yearling sold at public auction in North America last year and will make his debut in one of the first open stakes races for 2-year-olds this season when he starts against the pylons in the second of three Sheppard eliminations.

"Tom liked him and he bought him for himself and approached us after the fact. We bought in. At the price he was, he fit a lot of the things that we look for," O'Connor explained. "We buy well-bred horses, but we don't buy six-figure type horses. They individually look the part, they look nice."

A gelding by [American Ideal](#), Phat Blue Chip is the second foal out of the Camluck mare Warm Waffles and will be the first to race. Although he isn't flashy, Phat Blue Chip does his work and has shown some promise.

"He always showed ability, but was never one that Tom was talking about as being a superstar. There's no indication yet that he's going to be, but he does well," O'Connor said. "He's shown some ability and he looks like he might be worth the money we paid for him."

In his first qualifier June 19, Phat Blue Chip raced near the back of the field before finishing with a :27.3 final quarter. He returned June 27 at Harrah's Philadelphia and starting from post eight, cleared the lead before sitting the pocket. Posting a :29.3 final panel, Phat Blue Chip ranged up to win by three-quarters of a length in 1:56.

"We've got our fingers crossed. So far so good. He's never had a problem, he trained well down the whole way," O'Connor explained. "He qualified kind of easy the first time and came home really nicely. He won his next qualifier and it looks like he might be a nice one."

While Phat Blue Chip is a 3-1 chance in his \$25,000 trial, trailing the 7-5 morning line choice Kwik Hanover, a winner in both of his two pari-mutuel starts thus far at Rideau Carleton, Paprike Blue Chip is the 2-1 favorite in his split, set to go as race six on the 12-race program.

Paprike Blue Chip was hammered down at the Goshen Sale just 10 horses after Phat Blue Chip. Trainer John Butenschoen found the son of [Roll With Joe](#), a half-brother to then 17-time winner Buddha Blue Chip and New York Excelsior Series winner Oh Sugar.

"My partner Tom (Janes) was there with him, so we were kind of in from the ground floor on this one," O'Connor said. "Paprike Blue Chip really fit the M.O. for the stuff we end up buying with John. He's a [Roll With Joe](#), who's a good commercial sire. We look at the individual and John does a fabulous job picking out ones that just look nice."

While Phat Blue Chip doesn't attract attention in the mornings, Paprike Blue Chip makes his presence known.

"He's been a little flashier the whole time," O'Connor said. "He has always looked like he's going to do OK. Paprike Blue Chip has been toward the better ones in John's barn the whole time and we had some pretty big expectations for him for the last couple months."

Those expectations came closer to fruition when Paprike Blue Chip made his debut June 27 at Pocono. Fresh off a third place finish to \$450,000 buy Pro Beach in a June 17 qualifier at The Meadowlands where he was beaten just 1-1/2 lengths and posted a final quarter of :26.1, Paprike Blue Chip tracked winging leader Real Rayenbow before settling in the pocket up the backstretch. On the final turn, Paprike Blue Chip edged to the outside, glided to the lead, and bested the pacesetter by 1-3/4 lengths to stop the clock in 1:54.2.

"John goes down to Florida every year with 35 or 45. They train three, four, five at a time. They're used to passing, they're used to sitting in holes. I can't say enough good stuff about how he gets them ready," O'Connor praised. "This is a good example of him having the horse ready to do what he needed to do from day one."

Like Phat Blue Chip, Paprike Blue Chip will start from post one in his Sheppard elimination. To return for next week's \$110,500 final, the freshmen must finish first or second in their eliminations or be among the fastest two third place finishers.

"There's no telling how good the rest of the fields are. They look like talented bunches in there," O'Connor observed. "We're just hoping we can get a clean trip and try to come away with some money. If we get lucky, maybe one or both of them proceed onto next week, but starting from the rail is a huge advantage."

First post time Saturday at Yonkers is 7:10 p.m. For entries for Saturday's races, click [here](#).