

## **SOA of NY optimistic about French import program**

by Brandon Valvo, for the SOA of NY

**Yonkers, NY** --- Two weeks after announcing an ambitious program that would see 24 French-bred trotters flown to North America to compete at Yonkers Raceway, Standardbred Owners Association of New York Executive Director Alex Dadoyan's initial nerves have transformed to cautious optimism. With several of the spaces already filled, the program is attracting significant interest from local horsepeople.

"We did bounce the idea off some people, but it was a big unknown how it was going to be received," Dadoyan admitted. "Right away when we announced it, there was a lot of positive interest, which is really rare in this game. The owners, trainers, and horsepeople who called looking for more information all seemed genuinely interested in it, intrigued by it, and wanting to learn more about it.

"The reception has been very positive. We have a bunch of people who are already lined up and have made their deposits and we have a bunch of people who say they are going to participate and we hope to fill the number that we're looking for."

The SOA of NY's pioneering program to import two-dozen French trotters was formed with several goals in mind. It serves to strengthen the relationship between Yonkers and the French trotting association LeTrot, entice French bettors to increase their handle on Yonkers' races simulcast to France, and address a shortage of trotters competing at the track. The program will also give local horsepeople a chance to buy a horse at a relatively low price point who will be eligible to race in a rich series restricted to French-bred trotters.

"There's multiple things going on. We simulcast the races over to France and if people are betting on races from Yonkers, obviously races that have French horses that they know are going to be more attractive, more interesting to their bettors than horses they've never heard of," Dadoyan explained.

"If we were going to do this, we wanted to be able to card races that we could then send back over there. Those races are normally larger fields that we send over, so we weren't going to do it and just bring back eight horses; that wasn't going to achieve all of the goals, so we said, we'll try to see if 24 people are going to be interested and ideally come back and card two full fields of races to send back there in the series for these horses that we bring over."

Organizing the sale of a large number of trotters to a foreign country isn't a new endeavor for LeTrot. The organization routinely offers sales of promising high-steppers to developing trotting countries, such as Ireland. In this case, LeTrot will prepare a group of geldings 4-years-old and up who compete at a similar level for inspection by highly-experienced Yonkers horsemen. The team who selects the horses will be independent from those participating in the program and the horses selected will be randomly distributed to the 24 owners and trainers who commit to the program.

"The thing that excites me, gives me a level of confidence is we're taking over several trainers with us. The French are accustomed to holding these sales for other countries. They organize a bunch of horses and then people can come out and look at the horses," Dadoyan said. "We're going to get to go training trips with all of the horses and we're going to have experienced trotting guys with us to make an educated assessment as to which of the bunch might have the best chance of having some success back home."

Each trotter selected will sell for \$25,000 with an additional \$3,000 shipping charge, meaning the total expenditure to buy into the program is \$28,000. The trotters who make the cut will be eligible to race in a multi-leg series with a final to be held at Yonkers a few months after the horses arrive stateside. In addition to the purse money contributed by the track and the SOA, LeTrot will also add to the purses for these races. Specific details and purse-levels for the series will be announced in the coming weeks.

"This gives the participants a chance to recoup their investment before they move to the local competition at whatever level they might end up racing at," Dadoyan said. "We thought it was important to give an opportunity for these horses to just be in against themselves and it gives everyone a fair chance to make back some or all of their investment immediately.

"When we card races exclusively for French-bred horses, the French Trotting Association will contribute money for the purses for those races, so we would have an amount of money contributed from over there for these races that are exclusively for French-bred trotters. It's not a small amount of money. We're going to make the races meaningful enough anyway, but it's just a little something extra that we can offer everyone."

To participate in the program, a non-refundable deposit of \$10,000 is required by March 26. The balance of \$18,000 will be due by April 26. If the program is not fully subscribed by March 26, those making an initial deposit will be refunded. The selection of horses is scheduled in France during the period of the Yonkers shutdown at the end of May.

If you are interested in participating in this program, please contact the SOA of NY at 914.968.3599 or via email at [soaofny@optonline.net](mailto:soaofny@optonline.net). All monies paid after the initial deposit will then be held in escrow in an interest-bearing account to the credit of the person depositing the funds. Space in the program is limited to the first 24 owners that reserve a slot by making a deposit. For more information, click [here](#).