



Winter Home of Champions since 1915

Husband and Wife Trainers Break the Mold

By Sue Smithson: Equestrian Correspondent

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Gates Brunet is from Eastern Canada. Debbie Brunet is a California girl.

Horse training is a competitive, risky, and stressful business, yet the husband and wife team of Gates and Debbie Brunet have enjoyed tremendous success training harness horses, posting wins in eight states and a Hambletonian entry last year.

“Harness racing has been our life,” Gates said. “At this stage in our careers, we have been blessed with the best owners we have ever had, and we own a share of almost all the horses.”

The couple has harnessed over 700 winners, accounting for over \$2.5 million in purses. Gates has driven more than 500 winners, earning over \$1.5 million in his career.

The Brunets are training out of barn 8 at the Pinehurst Harness Track in their second winter here.

“We used to go to Florida,” Gates said. “But it’s hot, crowded, and a long drive. This winter has been hard here, though. The weather has made it difficult to stick to a training schedule ... We heard that winter was over here Feb. 15,” he added with a grimace, as he headed outside with Muscle King in last Thursday’s show storm.

Muscle King is the star of the Brunet’s 18-horse stable here. The big, rangy black gelding trotted the mile in a record breaking 1:54:4 and has earned over a half-million dollars in his short career. As a 2-year-old Muscle King was a National Season’s Leader on the mile track.

In 2003, he won three New Jersey Sires Stakes elimination races and placed third in the final. He won the Matron and the Bluegrass Stakes, placed second in the \$1.3 million Canadian Trotting Classic, and third in elimination races for the Hambletonian and the Breeder’s Crown.

Gates bought the talented colt for a mere \$9,500 just after the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attack, when the market was low. The Brunets, Mr. and Mrs. Ted Gewirtz of New York and Mr. and Mrs. Milton Frank of New Jersey co-own the horse. Muscle Car was reputed to be distracted and aggressive as a stud, and was gelded in March of his 2-year-old season after developing a twisted testicle.

After Funny Cide’s Triple Crown bid, the press gushed over Muscle King as the next champion gelding, but the Hambletonian final was a disappointment (as was Funny Cide’s Belmont effort).

How does this teamwork thing really work for the Brunets?

“Well, at home we have two separate TVs,” Debbie said with a smile. “And here, we don’t train together.” (train in this sense meaning speed work)

“He tells me I’m not going fast enough, and I’ll get mad about it, so we just go out separately.”

Small compromises for a talented team like Gates and Debbie Brunet.

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