



---

**PRESS RELEASE - AJAX DOWNS**

**COUNTRY BOY 123 named 2017 HORSE OF THE YEAR; Ontario's Top Quarter Horse is first ever back-to-back Horse of the Year**

**AJAX DOWNS, FEBRUARY 18, 2018-** The Quarter Racing Owners of Ontario, Inc. held its annual Racing Awards Banquet on Feb. 17 at the Ajax Downs Convention Centre and history was made as COUNTRY BOY 123 became the first two-time Horse of the Year in Ontario Quarter Horse Racing.

Ruth Barbour's big, bay coloured 4-year-old won five of seven races in 2017 including three stakes events and he also set a track record in the Picov Maturity, sizzling 350 yards in 15.100 for a whopping speed index rating of 112. The Michigan-bred was also named Champion Aged Male horse.

Country Boy 123, who will race in 2018, is trained by Bryn Robertson who also conditions the 2017 Champion Two-Year-Old Male, Had to Be Ivory.

Championships are determined by the number of QROOI points earned from top placings in races throughout the Ajax racing season.

Ramiro Castillo won his first Champion Jockey in his first full season riding at Ajax Downs. The personable Castillo, born in Mexico City, came to Canada in 2013 and rode in Alberta until moving to Ontario midway through the 2016 season.

Perennial leading horseman Joe Tavares won Champion Trainer while his wife Christine was Champion Owner and Breeder. Other winners included: Darlene Ballis-Hunderup, Champion Owner/Trainer; AJ Chick in 15 and Island Vodka, who tied for Champion Two-Year-Old Filly; Maryland Magic, Champion 3-Year-Old Male; Make Me Bodacious, Champion Three-Year-Old Filly and Ms. Dashin Corona, Champion Aged Mare.

**Ajax Mayor Steve Parrish and Rod Phillips, the PC candidate for Ajax, spoke to a full house before the awards began regarding the future of a Casino and the benefits that it has for the quarter horse industry being co located with the Ajax Downs racetrack. There had been a recent newspaper report that the Ajax casino operation could be pulled in favor of a location in Pickering,**

**Quarter Horse racing in Ontario began in 1968 at Picov Downs and the Ajax Casino has been at Ajax Downs since 2006. The sport employs some 1,700 people.**

**The 2018 Ajax Downs racing season gets underway on May 6.**

**(Photo below of COUNTRY BOY 123 and jockey Cory Spataro by New Image Media)**

