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## PRESS RELEASE - AJAX DOWNS

# Aquatica, Joe Checkers Take Trials for New Speed Index Stakes race at Ajax Downs



*The 3-year-old filly Aquatica (left) and 4-year-old Joe Checkers (right) were Trial winners for the 'Never Better than 79' Speed Index Stakes. -New Image Media photos*

**AJAX DOWNS, JUNE 7, 2023** - Three-year-old filly **AQUATICA** remained undefeated in 2023 with her third straight win on June 7 at Ajax Downs, winning the first Trial for the 'Never Better than 79' speed index stakes race. Owned and trained by Jason Pascoe of Pontypool, ON, the grey filly and jockey JB Botello held off a stubborn Krash On Okey to win the 330-yard dash in 17.439 by a head, earning an 80 speed index.

Aquatica, purchased by Pascoe for \$25,000 (US) at the 2021 Heritage Place yearling sale in Oklahoma, will head to the June 28 final, worth \$30,000-added as the probable favourite over nine other horses who qualified on June 7.

In the second Trial it was **JOE CHECKERS**, the first horse owned by Jennifer Zurowski of Vancouver, BC, who posted a mild upset at 9 to 2 odds in a time of 17.481 for a 79 speed index. Trained by Pascoe and ridden by Brian Bell, Joe Checkers edged James Bogar's Cheeko Malo for his first career win.

The 'Never Better than 79 speed index' stakes race was added to the Ajax Downs stakes schedule this year in an effort to reward horses who are not quite of major stakes race calibre. The top 10 time qualifiers from the two Trials will advance to the **June 28 final worth \$30,000-added.**

Botello, who does double-duty riding in Alberta and is currently the leading rider at Ajax Downs, said he was surprised when Krash On Okey and young rider Alexis Sanchez came close to defeating Aquatica. "She was so



good from the gate and at the 300 [yards mark] I didn't see anybody but then I saw number two and I thought I was in trouble. But she won the race."

Joe Checkers was making only his second start at Ajax Downs for new owner Zurowski after beginning his career south of the border. The gelding had to withstand a claim of foul as he drifted out late in the race.

"He was just moving out a bit to race with the company of other horses," said Bell. "I think he was shocked he was out in front."

\*Racing continues at Ajax Downs on Wednesday, June 14 with the final of the \$25,000 Bonus Futurity for 2-year-olds. Visit [www.ajaxdowns.com](http://www.ajaxdowns.com) for news on events and race dates and follow us on social media, @AjaxDowns.

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Wednesdays & One Sunday a Month &  
Thanksgiving Monday**

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