



PRESS RELEASE

Smiles and cheers as Ajax Downs opens 2024 season



A RUSHN LILY bounds to victory in the first race of the 2024 Ajax Downs season under jockey Cassandra Jeschke. The winner is the first horse owned by a group of women called the Five Fillies Stable. New Image Media photo

AJAX DOWNS, MAY 8, 2024 - In front of a big crowd of enthusiastic racing fans, the fast filly **A RUSHN LILY** sped to victory in the first race of the **2024 Quarter Horse season at Ajax Downs** on Wednesday. Owned by the relatively new Five Fillies Stable including trainer Chantelle Bourgeois, A Rushn Lily sped away from heavily favoured General Skywalker, to win the curtain raiser by a length under jockey Cassandra Jeschke.

"This is exciting," said Bourgeois, who is from Enniskillen. "It's been a long winter but today, the kids got to play hooky from school and they got their picture taken with Lily. So it's been the best day ever."

There were plenty of new faces in the crowd and on the track on the first of 25 racing dates this year. **NICOLE CLARK** of Cameron, won her first race as a trainer with her husband's **BLUE EYED MERLIN**, a horse they purchased last fall. The 6-year-old gelding was ridden to victory by young jockey **CHRISTIAN BENITEZ**, winning for the first time at Ajax Downs and the second time after beginning his career last summer in Alberta.

"We originally bought Merlin for our daughter Shelby," said Clark. "She rode him in a western saddle all winter and did some barrel racing with him. We just decided to run him again this year and it worked out."

It was fitting that the last race on a breezy, occasionally rainy, afternoon was won by the Picov Cattle Company's **STORMINN NORMAN**, named for the late Norman Picov, who built the current Ajax Downs. Ridden by Rachael Isaacs for trainer Joe Tavares, Storminn Norman pulled off a big upset taking the maiden race at 17 to 1 and paying \$36.60 for a \$2 win bet.

"He had a great break from the gate and was just gone," said Isaacs, who invited a few jubilant racing fans into the winner's circle. "Norman was really good today."

The stakes race action at Ajax Downs gets underway next **Wednesday, May 15** with the running of the \$30,000 Norm Picov Maturity at 400 yards. The race is expected to attract two-time Horse of the Year Had to Be Ivory and first race post time is 1:30 p.m.

Follow **@AjaxDowns** on social media for event news or visit our website at www.ajaxdowns.com. For information on **owning a share in a Quarter Horse**, contact the Quarter Racing Owners of Ontario, Inc. at 905-426-7050 or email grooiheadoffice@gmail.com.

Photo below - Jockey Christian Benitez won his first race at Ajax Downs aboard Blue Eyed Merlin, the first winner for trainer Nicole Clark. Laurie Overton photo

