

PRESS RELEASE

Had to Be Ivory Rolls and Summer Retreat Makes History



The remarkable gelding Had to Be Ivory bounds his way to victory in the Norman Picov Maturity while Josh Scott smiles for the camera - New Image Media

AJAX DOWNS, MAY 15, 2024 - Champion **HAD TO BE IVORY** proved that age is just a number as the 9-year-old returned from a seven-month vacation and rolled to an easy win in the **11th Norman Picov Maturity** at Ajax Downs on Wednesday. The \$30,915 Maturity wrapped up a spectacular day of Quarter Horse racing that kicked off with **SUMMER RETREAT** becoming the **first Thoroughbred** to win at Ajax Downs as the Fort Erie-based gelding won the popular **Battle of the Breeds** race.

Had to Be Ivory, trained by Bryn Robertson for his wife Carol and daughter-in-law Jaime, was welcomed back with open arms by fans who bet the Ontario bred down to 3 to 5 favoritism in the field of eight. With regular rider Josh Scott aboard, Had to Be Ivory broke well from post position seven and in a few strides, was in front of a top field and on his way to a one-length win in the 300-yard dash under a hand ride. Classy stakes winner Spy for the Senate, owned by Milena Kwiecien, finished second at 5 to 1 with 19 to 1 longshot Quick Asa Hiccup grabbing third.

Had to Be Ivory was winning the Picov Maturity for the fifth time and it was the big bay gelding's 26th career win from 34 races. He sped the distance in 15.266 for a sharp 103 speed index.

"As soon as I got on him today he told me, 'It's game time son,'" said Scott. "He just took me from there, I never even had to ask him."

A two-time Ajax Downs' Horse of the Year, Had to Be Ivory is the richest Ontario-bred Quarter Horse in history with earnings over \$430,000. The Robertson family bred him at their Hillerin Farm in Hillsburgh.

****Alysha Robillard's Summer Retreat** broke sharply from the gate at the outset of the 770-yard Battle of the Breeds, turned away a strong challenge from Quarter Horse mare Jess a Deal, and romped to a five-length win under jockey Ismael Mosquiera. Trained by Fort Erie racetrack's leading trainer Julie Mathes, Summer Retreat, a Thoroughbred, entered the history books by winning the second edition of the Battle of the Breeds, a unique, one-turn race.

Photos - Into the stretch, Summer Retreat is in front. The Thoroughbred won by 5 lengths.

(JM/New Image Media photos)



Bred in Ontario, Summer Retreat was making his first start since September of 2023 and his Ajax Downs victory was the 12th of his career. The handsome dark bay raced the distance in 41.444, **a track record**. Jess a Deal finished second for Marie Broadstock and the Picov Cattle Company with Tdz Barton Grand, a Quarter Horse, getting third over another Thoroughbred, Seattle Point. Azures Royalty, who won the first Battle of the Breeds, was scratched.

The mother and daughter team of Mathes and Robillard brought Summer Retreat to Ajax Downs following plenty of fast workout times at their home track.

"I couldn't believe he outbroke the Quarter Horses from the gate," said Mathes. "Then when I saw his ears pricked forward I was pretty confident."

It was a poignant moment for Robillard, who has developed a strong bond with Summer Retreat over the past three years. When he was claimed by another owner from a race late in 2021, she raised the money to claim the horse back late in 2022.

"He's always been special to me," said Robillard who recently graduated from Georgian College as an assistant veterinarian. "For him to come here, to a different track, and make history is really special."

****BRIAN BELL**, last year's leading jockey, won two races on the afternoon as did the newest addition to the Ajax Downs jockey colony, **CHRISTIAN BENITEZ**. Bell won on the filly Ivy League Sugarbaby in race two for owner Jennifer Zurowski. Ivy League Sugarbaby, making just her second career start, is the **first winner for new Ontario breeders** Kassidy Brown, Kim and Kyla Traviss. Bell's second winner, A Shades of Cold, won in a dead heat with Hanover Hill Theresa, ridden by Benitez for owner James Bogar. Benitez also won on Bogar's Lady Alice in race four.

****Racing continues at Ajax Downs next Wednesday, May 22 with the running of the OPEN DERBY** for 3-year-olds. First race post time is 1:30 p.m. Follow us on social media, @AjaxDowns, for more information on upcoming events and news and plan your next trip to the track!

Videos - Battle of the

Breeds: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LtVkUwLzJhU&t=495s>

Norman Picov Maturity: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r8yJL1szT6c&t=482s>