

Jesse's Messenger



Reluctant Mother

Trotting mare just won't quit racing **by Kimberly A. Rinker**

The prolific trotting mare Jesse's Messenger has been an owner's dream, a trainer's delight, and a breeder's nightmare.

The "queen" of trainer Kent Sherman's barn has earned \$363,990 in her six-year career, and was a two-time Ohio divisional champion and 2009 Ohio Horse of the Year as a freshman, winning all eight of her 2-year-old starts for her owner, Daryl Sherman.

However, when her connections decided to retire her midway through her 4-year-old season and breed her, the daughter of Jailhouse Jesse had other plans.

"She raced a few times early that year and came up sore," Kent said. "There

wasn't one issue, but she had a few nagging problems and I think a lot of little things just built up."

The Shermans waited until spring 2012 to secure a proper partner for Jesse's Messenger, and eventually decided upon Muscles Yankee. But after being bred numerous times from April through

LOUD AND CLEAR: Jesse's Messenger proved a consistent and durable performer from the start, coming in eight for eight her freshman year in 2009 with performances such as this 10¼-length Ohio Sire Stakes victory at Scioto Downs, and going on to snag that year's Ohio Horse of the Year honors.

early July 2012, the "queen" had not become pregnant.

"It was frustrating that she didn't get in foal and we decided rather than let her stand around, we'd bring her back," Kent said. "She was super sound by the time we started back with her. I think partly the reason she came back as strong as she has was due to Mother Nature taking over, and partly because she's a special horse that can overcome things other horses could not. Actually, she's sounder now than when she was at 2."

Jesse's Messenger earned \$121,717 for her connections in 2009, a solid return on the \$4,500 Daryl had plunked down for the yearling filly at the 2008 Ohio Selected Jug Sale.

"Kent picked her out," Daryl recalled. "He liked her and thought she'd make a good filly, and I give him all the credit for that."

"I was looking for horses with certain body types and she fit my criteria and had some good siblings," Kent noted.

Bred by the Hatfield Stables and foaled March 26, 2007, at Charm, Ohio, Jesse's Messenger is the third of eight foals out of the Carry The Message mare Laser Message 4,2:02.4h (\$50,533), and is a full sister to Oh So So 3,2:00.2h (\$9,918) and a half-sister to the Master Lavec gelding Diesel Fuel 7,1:57f, a 19-race winner of \$124,103.

"I liked her even more once she came home," Kent said. "She's a medium-sized filly, proportioned really well and has a nice hind end, which is important in a trotter, and stands solid. She hit every mark training down, but didn't show a lot until she got to the races. When it was time to go for the money, she really responded. She was always very nice and did what we wanted her to do, and has been the barn queen ever since her 2-year-old season."

Kent, 51, maintains a stable of 32 horses at Northfield Park, while Daryl and his wife, Betty Jo, own a 130-acre farm in Elmore, Ohio.

"My parents used to have broodmares and babies on their farm, but they've cut back now," Kent said. "They got involved with Standardbreds in the early '70s, through my dad's friendship with Walter J. Michael, the former president of the USTA (1958-1969), who owned Northfield Park and Pickwick Farms in Bucyrus."

Jesse's Messenger captured her pari-mutuel debut in 2:01.2, a \$22,300 Ohio Sire Stakes at Northfield on July 3, 2009, drawing off by 9¼ lengths for driver Ryan Stahl. She followed that up with a 2:01.1 clocking in a \$22,600 OSS at Scioto Downs on July 17, winning by 4½ lengths, and then took a \$30,000 Ohio State Fair test on July 30 in 1:59.4 by 6¾ lengths.

"When she started racing, she really came to life," Daryl said. "She kept

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getting better and more confident as the season progressed. Ryan [Stahl] did a great job with her, too. He was conservative and taught her how to be a racehorse during that first season."

The hardy filly next captured an \$18,000 Ohio Breeders Stakes at Scioto Downs in 2:00.4 by 5¾ lengths on Aug. 6, then won a \$22,800 OSS at Raceway Park in 2:01 by 13 lengths on Aug. 16. Twelve days later, she took her freshman record of 1:57.3, en route to a 10¼-length victory in a \$21,800 OSS at Scioto.

"We had a few minor health issues with her that first summer, such as tying up, and at times had a little trouble keeping her red count the way we would have liked, but for the most part she stayed pretty healthy," Kent said.

That was evident, especially when Jesse's Messenger won the \$80,000 OSS

“She’s 100 percent, the consummate professional. Kids can play around her and anyone could jog and train her. She’s has just been very special for our whole family.”

Kent Sherman

Championship final at Northfield Park on Sept. 5 in 1:58.3 by 5½ lengths.

"Every win is great, but capping off that first season with an Ohio Sire Stakes championship was the best," Daryl said.

The filly still had one final start—the \$28,817 Ohio Breeders Championship at Delaware on Sept. 21—and she didn't disappoint her connections, winning in 2:01.4.

"She wasn't at her physical best that day, but still went out and got the job done," Kent said.

In 2010, Jesse's Messenger added another \$158,593 to her career coffers, pushing her total earnings to \$280,310 for the Sherman team, and earning the 3-Year-Old Ohio Trotting Filly of the Year crown.

In her sophomore debut, she won a \$25,844 Simpson division by 10½ lengths in 1:55.4 at Vernon Downs with

Mike Simons in the bike. Three weeks later, she scored a 1:55 victory by nearly seven lengths for Ryan Stahl in a \$40,000 Currier and Ives filly division at The Meadows.

She made a break at the start of the \$70,500 Casual Breeze division at Mohawk, but rebounded a week later to finish third in an Eleganimage elimination, timed in 1:54.4 and beaten only 1¾ lengths for Jody Jamieson. She finished fifth in the \$540,290 final on June 26, parked the mile and timed in 1:54.2, but one week later at Northfield won a \$15,000 OSS wire-to-wire by nearly 15 lengths for Stahl in 1:56.3.

After a disappointing sixth-place effort in a \$146,250 Del Miller Memorial division at the Meadowlands, Jesse's Messenger returned to Scioto Downs, where she posted a 1:57.1 winning effort in a \$20,000 OSS on July 31.

Her last six starts of 2010 saw her score a trio of victories: at Scioto Downs on Aug. 5 in a \$24,250 Ohio State Fair division in 1:56.1; at Delaware in the \$35,173 OBC on Sept. 19 in 1:58.2; and at Lebanon on Oct. 9, when she captured

the \$75,000 OSS Championship impressively in 1:58.2.

"We had a lot of fun racing her outside of Ohio that year, and we didn't over-race her," Daryl said.

Kent gave his charge nearly five months off over that winter, and she returned at 4 by winning a pair of \$22,500 Filly and Mare Preferred Handicaps at The Meadows in April 2011—both in 1:55.3. However, she started only four times that season, earning \$25,200 before Kent quit with her.

"We weren't able to put our finger on anything specific in terms of what was bothering her, so we decided to retire her and make her a broodmare," Kent said.

When this plan did not come to fruition, the mare returned to Kent's Northfield stable.

Jesse's Messenger returned to her winning ways Dec. 1, 2012, making her first start in nearly 19 months a winning one as she posted a 1:57 clocking for Stahl in a Northfield overnight. That set the stage for a very successful 2013 season, when she added another \$51,230 to her bank

account. She racked up five wins, one second and nine thirds in 24 starts, lowering her lifetime record to 1:54.1f via a victory at The Meadows on Sept. 27.

"She's 100 percent, the consummate professional," Kent said. "Kids can play around her and anyone could jog and train her. She's a total sweetheart. She's just been very special for our whole family."

Now 7, Jesse's Messenger has compiled 24 wins, two seconds and 11 thirds in 59 career starts, and has garnered checks in 48 of those events.

"It's been terrific to see her come back this strong," Daryl said. "She put together some tremendous efforts in 2013, and it's been a great ride owning a filly like her. Having Kent training her adds a whole other beautiful dimension to the situation, and certainly no one knows the mare better than he does."

"We're hopeful that she'll continue to be just as strong this season, too."

Kimberly A. Rinker is a freelance writer living in Illinois. To comment on this story, e-mail us at readerforum@ustrotting.com.

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