

Double talk

Austin Brown, the horse, leaves his human namesake shocked following latest equine honor

By TOM DIDATO

C-1 (Camden, S.C.) sports editor

Let's see Austin Brown try and put this honor on his mantle.

Brown, a former, Camden resident and Chairman Emeritus of the Carolina Cup Racing Association, has earned about every award that can



Photo courtesy of Dogwood Stable, Inc. **AUSTIN BROWN DISPLAYS the form which caught the eye of Dogwood Stable president Cot Campbell, who purchased the 2-year-old at last month's sales in Ocala, Fla.**

be won in the sport of kings, including the prestigious and most recent presentation of the F. Ambrose Clark Award in 2007. All those trophies and plaques were ones which he was able to carry out to his car at the end of the awards program.

As for this most recent one, well, let's just say that the now-Hilton Head resident would be more comfortable petting it than perching it atop his fireplace. In fact, this is a present which Brown hopes he can share with the world. And, this one has an easy name to remember.

A few weeks back, Dogwood Stable president, Cot Campbell, called to ask Brown for his permission to name a colt after his longtime friend. Brown said he was taken aback by the request.

"Cot and I are old friends and talk to each other quite often," Brown said in re-telling the particulars regarding the call from Campbell, whose operation headquartered in Aiken.

"He said, 'Listen, I've got a nice Fusaichi Pegasus colt, a good-looking, 2-year-old colt, and I wonder if you would give me permission to name him for you? I'd like to name him 'Austin Brown.'"

"I said, 'Oh, my Lord, Cot, yes, of course. It would be an honor to have a horse named after you. I don't know what to say.' It really took my breath away. Obviously, it made me feel really good."

Naming a horse after a human being and/or a friend is nothing new for Campbell. Presently, he has a 3-year-old colt, named after South Carolina native and honored military veteran and former Major League Baseball player Lou Brissie, who runs for trainer Neil Howard. Campbell also had a runner, Trippi, named in honor of former University of Georgia running back, Charley Trippi.

Brown was more than happy to add his name to the list of those who Campbell has hon-

ored with a horse bearing their name. He said he wasted no time in writing a letter of permission, agreeing to let Dogwood use his name for that of a horse. The letter was then attached with the paperwork for the equine Austin Brown, which was sent to the Jockey Club of America for approval.

Brown's relationship with Campbell goes back some 47 years when Campbell, then an advertising executive in Atlanta, was part of a group which wanted to bring steeplechasing to the area near the Georgia capital. At the time, Brown served as chairman of the then-National Steeplechase and Hunt Association's (now, National Steeplechase Association) Hunts Committee.

"I'd gone down there to look at the land where they wanted to put the course to decide whether or not it should be sanctioned to have the race meet there," Brown said of his initial contact with Campbell. "He and John Waite and a couple other guys were very enthusiastic about having a hunt meet there. I pushed for them to get sanctioned and they did."

Several years after the Atlanta meeting, Brown was working as the executive vice-president/general manager at Delaware Park. One day, he picked up his phone and on the other end was Campbell, who was looking for help with his fledgling stable of horses.

"Cot said he bought a couple horses and that he wanted to send them to a young trainer. And, he thought that I might know someone to send them to," Brown said of that conversation.

"I recommended (current Camden resident) Charlie Cushman to Cot, who ended up sending a couple horses to Charlie. I'm not sure those were the first horses that he bought, but I believe that it was sort of the beginning of Dogwood Stable. Since then, Cot and I have been really good friends."

Once Dogwood Stable became more established, Campbell sent a string of horses Brown's way again, after Brown had moved



Photo courtesy of Mary Jane Howell/Dogwood Stable, Inc.

FORMER CAMDEN RESIDENT Austin Brown caught up with the horse named after him during a visit to Dogwood Stable in Aiken last week. The 2-year-old colt is the son of 2000 Kentucky Derby winner, Fusaichi Pegasus.

from Camden to become president of the Birmingham Turf Club in the mid 1980s.

Friendship is one thing, but naming a horse after him? Brown was over the moon when he was offered that chance by Campbell.

"It really came out of the blue," Brown said of this first-time development in his equine career. "I really don't think that I've had anything more exciting happen to me in my life or more thrilling; to think that my namesake is going to be out there running."

"I'm just awfully flattered and it's so nice of Cot to do it. He never mentioned naming a horse for me. I don't know why he would do it or, for whatever reason, but it makes me feel good."

For his part, Campbell said he could not have named the newest addition to his barn after a more-deserving colleague.

"Austin has been a close friend for many, many years and I'm thrilled to name our new Fusaichi Pegasus colt for him," explained Campbell in a press release soon after the colt was purchased and named in June.

"We purchased three two-year-olds at the (Ocala 2-year-old) sale. This colt exuded elegance and quality in spades at the sale. He's a big, rangy colt and I just love him."

Austin Brown is by 2000 Kentucky Derby winner Fusaichi Pegasus out of Glistler Girl. Before the colt was named, Brown

said he remembered reading about his now namesake in a story which appeared in the BloodHorse magazine in regard to the Ocala (Fla.) sales.

"Cot just told me that he's really a handsome colt," Brown said. "His daddy won the Derby, but he hasn't produced a lot since."

"It makes me laugh to think that if this colt turned out to be something which was eligible for the Derby or Lord, who knows ... But if something like that were to happen, it would be funny to hear something like, 'Austin Brown is the third choice for the Derby.' I can hear the people saying, 'Oh, my God, who the heck is that?'"

But in the fickle and sometimes agonizing world of horse racing, not everything goes according to the script.

As Austin Brown was being prepared to be sent to Eclipse Award-winning trainer Todd Pletcher, to begin training for his first start at Saratoga later this summer, his Aiken handlers noticed that he had bucked his shin.

The injury came after the colt's final tune-up, in which he ran his first half-mile in a tidy 21 seconds and change, according to Brown, who was sitting on go in order to fly to Saratoga in order to take in Austin Brown's debut race at the Spa.

"They were getting ready to put him on the van and then, they noticed that he had bucked

his shin. So, Cot called me right away and said, 'Our colt bucked his shin, so we're not going to ship him up there, yet. He'll make his first run at Keeneland in the fall,'" said Brown of the temporary delay.

"I said to Cot, 'Well, then, I'll call my tailor and put the Derby suit he was making for me on hold,'" said a chuckling Brown.

By staying in Aiken for a few more days, it allowed the two-legged Austin Brown to meet the four-legged Austin Brown at Dogwood Stable as he and his wife, Sallie, made the drive to Aiken to check up on a horse which will give them even more reason to follow the sport.

"It's really exciting. It's something that never occurred to me that would happen in my life," he said. "I got to thinking about horses named for people. John Henry, I suppose, was named after someone. Lawyer Ron (winner of the 2006 Arkansas Derby and Rebel Stakes) was named after the lawyer of the man who owned the horse. Usually, they're named for pretty important people."

"It certainly is flattering and gives me something to look forward to and something to be excited about. It's a funny sensation. I've owned a lot of horses myself and my family did, but to go out and look at one and pet him and be able to say, 'There's Austin Brown' ... it will be a funny sensation."

For a sportsman and a gen-

tleman such as Austin Brown --- who attended his first steeplechase race in Camden when he was two years old in 1929 to watch his father ride in the event was known as the New Year's Day Races and, who has missed just one of the 79 runnings of the Carolina Cup steeplechase --- this latest honor proves that he is hardly forgotten by those in the horse racing industry. He admitted this is a new experience for him and is one which, "I just don't quite know how to handle it."

"It's terribly exciting, particularly at my age," he said with a feeling of humbleness which could be detected in his voice. "When you get older, you kind of feel like you're out of the loop a little bit; not much is going on and you're not in the game as much as you were. Now, to have a horse named after you that you can follow and get excited about, it's pretty terrific."

"It's all going to be very exciting for me because it's all going to be a new experience. Who thinks that at 84-years-old that you're going to have a new experience like this?"

Should the four-hooved Austin Brown be as nearly as successful in racing as his namesake has been in his life around the sport, it may just be time for that aforementioned tailor to begin putting the finishing touches on Austin Brown's Kentucky Derby suit.

He may need it after all.