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2017 STEEPLCHASE OF CHARLESTON RESULTS

Hollywood, SC (April 8) - Gil Johnston's Fantastic Song, away from the races for more than 1 1/2 years, roared through the stretch under jockey Sean McDermott to win The Steeplechase of Charleston at Stono Ferry's featured \$30,000 optional allowance hurdle by three-quarters of a length on Saturday.

Trained by Fenneka Bentley, Fantastic Song powered past Rosbrian Farm's Swansea Mile, who always was well placed under Ross Geraghty and finished 4 1/4 lengths clear of Irv Naylor's newcomer El Monstro.

Fantastic Song, who had made his last previous start at Saratoga Race Course in August 2015, ran the optional allowance hurdle's 2 1/4 miles in 4:25.40 on turf rated as good. McDermott, last year's champion jockey by earnings, credited the efforts of trainer Bentley. "For a horse to be out for a year and a half and come back like that, it's fantastic work," he said.

Rather Be Racing's True to Form set the early pace under Willie McCarthy, with Swansea Mile positioned well in second and Welcome Here Farm's Second Amendment tucked inside with jockey Darren Nagle. On the second circuit of the course, Jack Doyle moved El Monstro into striking position.

Fantastic Song was unhurried under McDermott and found his best stride after jumping the last fence.

Swansea Mile assumed command briefly after True to Form faded, but he could not repel the winner's late move.

“He didn't have any problem and ran his race,” said Swansea Mile's trainer, Ricky Hendriks. “He just got beat.”

The optional allowance hurdle capped a spirited day of racing as the South Carolina Lowcountry welcomed horse racing to its spring schedule. Managed by the Bruno Event Group, the Steeplechase of Charleston attracted a festive crowd under mostly sunny skies with temperatures near 70.

In addition to providing Fantastic Song with his first win in nearly two years, since an optional allowance hurdle win at High Hope in Lexington, Ky., in May 2015, the day offered up several other firsts.

Gerard Galligan, making his first sanctioned start of the year, won the afternoon's opener, a maiden-claiming hurdle, with KMSN Stable's Fort Collins, who was making his first start over fences for Racing Hall of Fame trainer Jonathan Sheppard.

In the Steeplechase of Charleston's \$25,000 maiden hurdle, 10-pound apprentice Keith Dalton picked up the mount on Edition Farm's Zio Elio and narrowly prevailed over Moscato.

Virginia-based trainer Neil Morris claimed the exacta in the \$20,000 conditioned claiming hurdle when Buckshot Racing Stables' Longing to Travel prevailed over Pathfinder Racing's Congashene, Kieran Norris, last year's champion jockey by wins, picked up his first win of the year.

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Media Contact

Angel Lewis

Alewis@brunoeventteam.com

205.706.2616