

Awesome Gem Favored For Longacres Mile

by Jason Shandler (Bloodhorse)

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West Point Thoroughbreds' [Awesome Gem](#), graded stakes-placed eight times in his career but with only a single blacktype victory, will look to shed his bridesmaid status when he takes on 11 rivals in the Emerald Downs' signature race—the \$300,000 Longacres Mile (gr. III) on Aug. 16.

Installed as the 2-1 morning-line favorite in the main track event, Awesome Gem was second-best for the 10th time in his 27-start career last out in the July 25 Eddie Read (gr. IT) on Del Mar's turf course. It was his fifth time as runner-up in a graded stakes race. The 6-year-old son of Awesome Again—Piano, by Pentelicus, posted his lone victory in five starts this year June 27 in an allowance contest on the Hollywood Park turf.

This will be just the eighth start on natural dirt for Awesome Gem, but he does have a win in the 2007 San Fernando (gr. II) at Santa Anita and a third-place finish in that year's Breeders' Cup Classic (gr. I) on Monmouth Park's slop, both over natural going.

Craig Dollase trains the chestnut gelding, who was bred in Kentucky by Runnymede Farm, Catesby Clay, and Peter Callahan. An earner of more than \$1.3 million, Awesome Gem will break from post 7 with Russell Baze aboard.

The top local horse in this year's Mile, which will earn the winner a berth in the Nov. 7 Breeders' Cup Dirt Mile at Santa Anita, is Tice Ranch's Assessment, but the 5-year-old gelded son of Jump Start will be parked out in post 12, a position which has produced just one winner in the 73-year history of the race. Assessment (6-1) has won three times and finished runner-up three more times in six starts in 2009. His most recent start was a 2 1/2-length score in the Mt. Rainier Handicap on July 26 in Washington.

Gallyn Mitchell will have the mount for trainer Howard Belvoir, who is still optimistic despite the post position. "The three horses directly to his outside all have speed and will go," Belvoir said. "Gallyn might be able to tuck in right behind them into the first turn. It could work out well for us."

Belvoir will also send out last year's Mile winner, 7-year old Wasserman, a gelded son of Cahill Road that he also bred and owns. Wasserman (10-1) posted a 10-1 upset win in the 2008 Mile. He has won just once in seven starts since then and is 0-for-6 this season. Regular rider Jennifer Whitaker will have the mount. Another local contender is Governor's Handicap winner Atta Boy Roy, who drew post 9 and is 8-1 on the morning line. In his two races at the Emerald Downs meet, Atta Boy Roy has run the fastest six furlongs (1:07 2/5) and 6 1/2 furlongs (1:14 1/5). Ricky Frazier, the meet's leading rider with 116 wins, takes over the mount for trainer Valorie Lund.

"We've been thinking about this race for more than a year," Lund said. "(Owner) Roy Schaefer has been dreaming about it. The Longacres Mile is the holy grail of racing for the Northwest."

In total, the 12-horse field is composed of five runners from Emerald Downs (Gallon, Wasserman, Kruger Park, Atta Boy Roy, Assessment), five from California (Trumpet Player Jay, Awesome Gem, [Autism Awareness](#), Crafty Power, Sierra Sunset), and two from Canada (Bank Emblem, Teide).

The second choice on the morning-line is Sierra Sunset (7-2), best known for winning the Rebel (gr. II) at Oaklawn last year. The 4-year-old son of Bertrando returned from injury this season and has won one of two starts for trainer Jeff Bonde, that victory coming by five lengths in the Alamedan Handicap at July 5 at Pleasanton.

Also on the Aug. 16 card is the \$100,000 Emerald Distaff, which drew a field of seven.



Awesome Gem ships in for shot at Longacres Mile

Awesome Gem, winner of the San Fernando Breeders Cup Stakes in 2007, has entered the Longacres Mile and will run at this Sunday's feature race at Emerald Downs in Auburn.

The 6-year-old Kentucky-bred has won more than \$1.3 million in its racing career and is fresh off a runner-up finish in the Grade 1 Eddie Read Handicap at Del Mar.

This year's Longacres Mile is a Breeders' Cup Challenge race and the winner earns an automatic bid into the Breeders' Cup Dirt Mile at Santa Anita.

Russell Baze, the winningest jockey in North America, will ride Awesome Gem in Emerald Downs' biggest race of the year, a \$300,000 Grade 3 event.

Awesome Gem is owned by West Point Thoroughbreds out of New Jersey.

"Awesome Gem can run on any surface at almost any distance," West Point president Terry Finley said in a release. "He hasn't been on the dirt since the 2007 Breeders' Cup Classic, but he ran well on the surface early in his career. This looks like a very good spot for him.

"On paper it appears that there will be plenty of pace to run at, and Awesome Gem loves to have targets in front of him. The Longacres Mile has always been one of the best races on the West Coast, and it's even more attractive now because it is a Breeders' Cup Challenge race."

Among the other out-of-town challengers will be Autism Awareness and Sierra Sunset, a pair of Bay Area horses.

Autism Awareness is a two-time Grade 3 winner who just struggled in a last-place finish in the Grade 1 Hollywood Gold Cup on July 11.

Sierra Sunset won the Alameda Handicap by five lengths in his last race at the Alameda County Fair on July 5.

Assessment figures to be the leading contender among the horses stabled at Emerald Downs.

74th Longacres Mile Could Be Awesome

By: Grant Clark - Seattle News Tribune

West Point Thoroughbreds' Awesome Gem likely will go off as the favorite in today's \$300,000 Longacres Mile at Emerald Downs.

It is easy to understand why the 6-year-old son of Awesome Again – the 2-1 morning line favorite – would draw so much positive attention from the bettors.

Although the gelding only has one win in five starts this year – that coming in a \$58,000 allowance race six weeks ago at Hollywood Park – Awesome Gem brings an impressive résumé into the race as he will be the first Longacres Mile entrant to previously race in the Breeders' Cup Classic and is the second richest horse in the race's 74-year history with earnings of \$1,353,682.

Throw in the fact that Russell Baze, racing's all-time leading rider with more than 10,500 trips to the winner's circle and a three-time Mile winner, will be in the irons when Awesome Gem breaks seventh from post position No. 7, and it's hard not to like the gelding in the 12-horse field.

According to trainer Craig Dollase, Awesome Gem is being pointed toward another Breeders' Cup appearance after finishing third to horse of the year Curlin in the \$5 million Breeders' Cup Classic in 2007 and sixth in last year's Breeders' Cup Turf Mile.

A victory today automatically qualifies the winner for the Breeders' Cup Dirt Mile on Nov. 7 at Santa Anita.

"The Breeders' Cup is the ultimate goal," said Dollase, who saddled Awesome Gem to a second-place finish in the Grade 1 Eddie Read at Del Mar in his last start. "The Longacres Mile was one of several races we considered. In the end, we liked the timing, the way he came out of his last race and the win-and-your're-in (the Breeders' Cup)."

However, being the favorite in the Longacres Mile hasn't led to victories in recent years.

The betting choice is 1-for-10 in the grade 3 race over the last decade, with Sky Jack's record-setting romp in 2003 being the only winning favorite during that stretch.

A strong field of runners, including the defending champion and a pair of former Triple Crown hopefuls in Autism Awareness and Sierra Sunset will make it even tougher.

Howard Belvoir's Wasserman, the track's all-time money earner with \$ 454,912, attempts to become just the fourth multiple winner of the Mile and the first back-to-back winner since Simply Majestic in 1989.

Belvoir also will saddle Budweiser and Mount Rainier Handicap winner Assessment. Gallyn Mitchell, who guided long shot Edneator to a victory in the 2000 Mile, receives the mount.

Additional local runners include Governor's Handicap winner Atta Boy Roy, Seattle and FSN Handicap winner Kruger Park and the Jim Penney-trained Gallon.

Penney is seeking his sixth Mile victory, having already won the race with Silver Mallet (1973), Theologist (1977), Edneator (2000), Sabertooth (2002) and Flamethrowintexan (2006).

Rounding out the field is multiple graded stakes winner Autism Awareness, Bank Emblem, a winner of 18 career races from Canada, Hastings Park stakes winner Teide, Alamedan Handicap winner Siera Sunset, Crafty Power and Trumpet Player Jay, who will be ridden by Michael C. Baze – the second member of the Baze family to receive a Longacres Mile mount.

The Longacres Mile will go off as the eighth race at approximately 5:57 p.m. The 10-race card begins at 2:15 p.m. and also features the \$100,000 Emerald Distaff.

