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## QUEEN'S CUP BRINGS BACK RACE CALLER JOHNSON, IMPORTS JOCKEYS AND TRIALS NEW FENCE

CHARLOTTE (April 15, 2009) –The 14th annual Queen's Cup Steeplechase on Saturday, April 25 showcases three unique aspects with the return of legendary race caller Dave Johnson, a visit by four steeplechase jockeys from the United Kingdom and the first American racing test of the new Fornells plastic fence.

Johnson, best known for his "And down the stretch they come" race calls during the Triple Crown campaign, has a long history with steeplechase racing. As the voice of the New York Racing Association, Johnson called races each year at Belmont and Saratoga. He's also called jump races at The Meadowlands, Fair Hill, Nashville (for the Royal Chase in the fall), Kentucky Downs (then Dueling Grounds), Colonial Downs and some television work for Callaway Gardens.

With steeplechase regular Tony Bentley at Atlanta during Queen's Cup weekend, Johnson gets to call the steeplechase action, which he did for the first time as an assistant to Fred Capossela at NYRA in 1971. Whether on the flat or over hurdles, Johnson doesn't hide his excitement.

"Any race, with a small or a large field, on the flat or over the fences, is a once in a lifetime event," he said. "so I approach each race I call wanting to know the story lines and the implications of victory or defeat."

- While Johnson returns to the jump game, a quartet of European jockeys will simply be plying their trade on foreign soil. David Crosse, Brian Harding, Jimmy McCarthy and Jodie Mogford will arrive April 22 to help alleviate an expected jockey shortage between the Maryland Hunt Cup, Foxfield, Atlanta and the Queen's Cup on the same day.

The Queen's Cup paid all expenses for the visit, which gives horsemen and racegoers a chance to connect with the far larger jump-racing industries in England and Ireland. The jockeys will be available in Camden, S.C. to school horses on Thursday and Friday prior to the Queen's Cup, and to a man are all looking forward to the experience.

"I've never been to America so I'm looking forward to it. It's a chance to do something different, to ride abroad and see how it's done there," Harding said. "I've looked it up on the computer and talked to (current American jockey) Willie Dowling. It's a challenge and a chance to see something different."

Though they may be new to American racing, the jockeys bring a wealth of talent and experience and between them own a total of 1,149 career victories; led by McCarthy's 441. They will, however, see something different should they line up for the \$20,000 open timber race, as British jump racing runs primarily over hurdles and chase fences.

The National Fence used in America could be considered a cross between the British obstacles; not as imposing or stiff as a chase fence but higher and more significant than a British hurdle. The Marlborough Cup, Britain's first and only timber race, stopped after just a few runnings.

"I've ridden the Marlborough Cup and the cross-country races at Cheltenham so I'm used to it," Harding said. "Having said that, I wouldn't say I'm an old hand at it."

Several European jockeys have ventured to the United States and enjoyed success, most notably Xavier Aizpuru, the two-time defending champion plus two-time champion David Bentley, Rob Massey and others. Active jockeys Aizpuru, Carl Rafter, Willie Dowling, Robbie Walsh, Paddy Young and others all began their careers abroad. This is the first visit by a group of foreign steeplechase jockeys since the Fair Hill Races (Md.) stage an international jockeys challenge in the 1980s.

- Finally, the Queen's Cup replaced its natural brush at the top of a timber fence with Fornells Plastic, a new material being tested for use in jump races in England and the United States. The brush has been raced over in France for over six years and has twice been used at England's famous Cheltenham Race Course and could someday be an alternative for birch (in England and Ireland) and a different type of plastic used in America's National Fences.

First post for the Queen's Cup, run at the Brooklandwood Race Course in Mineral Springs, is 1:30 p.m. and the card of six races kicks off with a \$15,000 maiden hurdle, followed by a \$10,000 maiden claiming hurdle. The featured Queen's Cup, a \$30,000 allowance hurdle, goes as the third race with the fourth the \$20,000 open timber. The card concludes with a pair of training flat races.

Proceeds from the day benefit Make-A-Wish, who for the second year in a row will be the beneficiary of the day's proceeds. To date, the Queen's Cup has raised over \$400,000 for local and regional charities.

For more information on the Queen's Cup Steeplechase go to [www.queenscup.org](http://www.queenscup.org).

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