

INTERNATIONAL NEWS

Mufhasa back in top form in Group 1 victory at Otaki

Mufhasa controlled the pace and rolled to a dominant victory on Sunday at Otaki in the \$139,660 Fully Fledged @ Fairdale Otaki-Maori WFA (NZ-G1), ending a nine-race winless stretch.

The five-year-old Pentire gelding went right to the front under Sam Spratt in the 1,600-meter (7.95-furlong) weight-for-age race, and entering the straight Mufhasa accelerated clear to a commanding advantage. Runner-up Hold It Harvey, Daffodil, and Vosne Romanee closed late but never seriously threatened the victor, who completed the distance in a swift 1:32.89 on turf rated as good.

Trained by Stephen McKee for a partnership, Mufhasa improved to 12 wins in 31 career starts and earned his third Group 1 win. New Zealand's 2008-'09 Horse of the Year won for the first time since the Waikato Draught Sprint (NZ-G1) in February '09.

Hold It Harvey edged Daffodil by a neck for second.

Mufhasa showed he was rounding back into form in his previous start when he finished third, beaten by 1½ lengths, in the 2010 Waikato Draught Sprint. On Sunday, Mufhasa rediscovered his Group 1-winning form with a powerful display of speed and class that co-owner David Archer said was absent when he returned from a pair of unplaced finishes in Australia—a ninth-place effort in the David Jones Toorak Handicap (Aus-G1) in October at Caulfield and a 12th-place finish, beaten by more than nine lengths, in the Emirates Stakes (Aus-G1) at Flemington on November 7.

"I believe very strongly, it's like human beings, a lot of it is confidence, and I don't think there is any doubt that the losses he had in Australia and the hard runs had knocked his confidence," Archer said in an interview on Tracksides television. "When we saw him run third last start, I said then he'd be a length and a half, two lengths, better horse this week just because of sheer confidence, and I think he showed it today.

"He was just a confident horse. In the stables beforehand, at the tie-ups, he was the old Mufhasa today. He wanted to get out there, he wanted to be there, and I just think he ran a confident horse today."

Archer said a fall campaign in Australia will be considered for Mufhasa, a New Zealand-bred produced by the Mi Preferido mare Sheila Cheval.—*Mike Curry*

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