

DEL MAR FEATURED RACE OF THE DAY

By Frank R. Scatoni
On Twitter [@ScatoniSureShot](#)

Date: 12/3/22

Race 8: \$40K optional-claiming/N1X contested at 8-furlongs on dirt

Post: approx. post 4:00 p.m. PST

OVERVIEW

We've got two contest races on this fine 9-race Saturday card. Before we get into it, here's a reminder: if you're on track, come say hi to me and Peter Thomas Fornatale from In the Money Media, as we'll go over the entire 9-race program outside the Hacienda Room at 11:35 a.m. PST. You won't want to miss it. Okay, on to today's first contest race, a tough \$40K optional-claiming/N1X contested at 8-furlongs on the main track. I thought there was plenty of pace in here to make this a fairly run race, despite how the main track played speed-crazy last week.

#1 MASTERING (5/1) was on a roll early last year, but then the wheels fell off and he hit the shelf. He hasn't been able to string together races, and now Baffert drops him in for the \$40K tag, since he already cleared this level (and beyond) ages ago. I think the presence of Hernandez means this guy is live, but I wouldn't trust him, especially if he goes hard from the rail with other speed in the race. GRADE: B.

#2 STREET RUCKUS (5/2), the first Cerin entrant, gets the reluctant nod in this tough race, only because I think he'll get a great stalking trip—and even though he's been stuck at this level forever, he's been very unlucky with the post draws. He's been stuck inside in all of his Del Mar races and then he's been outside at Santa Anita. If you flip-flop any of those races, then this guy would probably have already cleared this hurdle. But the biggest endorsement is some dude named Prat takes the call. GRADE: A.

#3 AJAAWEED (15/1), the second Cerin runner, couldn't win at this N1X level back East for Todd Pletcher, and his SoCal races haven't really moved the needle for me. That said, he does make the second start of his form cycle, and he should be grinding along late, so maybe he can vie for a slice—but I'm skeptical. GRADE: X.

#4 SPIRIT OF MAKENA (3/1) is a lightly raced 4-year-old who looked very good over the summer when he broke his maiden here at 41/1 and then followed that up with a game second at this level and distance in his first try versus winners. He has good early speed, and I have to think that Papaprodromou laid this guy up at the end of the summer so that he could be fresh for this spot. GRADE: B.

#5 TRAEGAR (5/1) is a 3-year-old who has run some quick races, but they have come sprinting, so we'll see if he can stretch out for the first time. Glatt has success with that move, and this guy is fast enough to win, but I'm guessing this one will be part of a fairly quick early pace, thus compromising his chances late. GRADE: C.

#6 DIRECT LINE (12/1) is a horse-for-course, since he's run some really fast races here at Del Mar, while his races everywhere else are really slow. That said, those big figs all came against much weaker company, so we'll see if this guy can replicate those good races today against a much tougher field. I'm doubtful. GRADE: X.

#7 FINNEUS (15/1) is a 3-year-old who still has some upside, but he's been plying his trade as a closing sprinter mostly, while his two turn races have just kind of been grinding efforts. On the plus side, he makes his third start for Miller and his first around two turns for that trainer, so perhaps this guy will run a career best. On the down side, he loses Prat. GRADE: X.

#8 ATOMIC DROP (4/1) is a Cal-bred who took forever to clear his statebred entry-level allowance hurdle, but when he did win, he did it in impressive fashion, showing a nice move to win going away. Granted, that was a really weak group, so I'll take it with a grain of salt as he now has to step up and face proper open allowance foes. GRADE: X.

#9 CODE RUNNER (20/1) was 20/1 at this level last time, and he was no good. In his defense, however, he was coming off a very long layoff, so I'm sure he needed the race. The good news is: Yakteen claimed him for \$32K in October 2021, laid him up, brought him back protected, and now runs him for \$40K, so he's still racing above the claim price. He looks a tad bit sneaky to compete for a slice and possibly win. GRADE: B.

CONCLUSION

I don't have much confidence in my selection, and I'm bummed he's the morning-line favorite, but I have a ton of confidence in Prat, so I'll give **#2 STREET RUCKUS (5/2)** the nod in this pretty competitive group. If you need a bomb, **#9 CODE RUNNER (20/1)** is your man.

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Date: 12/3/22

Race 9: \$400K Hollywood Derby (G1) for 3yos going 9-furlongs on turf (rail at 0-ft.)

Post: approx. post 4:30 p.m. PST

OVERVIEW

Today's second contest race is a doozy! It's the prestigious \$400K Hollywood Derby (G1), a 9-furlong turf affair for 3-year-olds with the rails at zero-feet. We've got a few East Coast invaders here to take on the best of the West. Who shall prevail? Before we dig in, just a reminder that at 11:35 a.m. PST today out front of the Hacienda Room on track, I'll be hosting my Saturday handicapping seminar with none other than Peter Thomas Fornatale of In the Money Media. Join us!

#1 CABO SPIRIT (5/1) is a really good horse, and he showed that by winning both the Twilight Derby (G2) and the La Jolla (G3), both times showing off a very strong late kick. He'll run his race and come on with his stretch run, but I think one of the East Coasters might prove just a smidge better. GRADE: B.

#2 **SCRIPT (8/1)**, the first Motion entrant, flew home last time in the Let It Ride, despite having zero pace to close into and being way too far off those dawdling early fractions. It was a rare mistimed ride by Johnny V., who gets replaced today by Rispoli, who, honestly, has been extremely off-form the last few months. That worries me greatly. But I'm going to focus on this lightly raced, steadily improving 3-year-old who I think is going to absolutely love getting more ground today after that fine tune-up earlier in the meet. GRADE: A.

#3 CELESTIAL CITY (4/1) enters this off two wins in a row back East for Shug McGaughey, who doesn't ship a horse just for the fun of it, so you have to consider this one's chances today, especially since he came home in under 11-seconds last time when winning the Hill Prince (G2) at B-Aqueduct. Expect him to be rolling home late. GRADE: B.

#4 HANDY DANDY (8/1) got the measure of Script last time, but this guy had the jump on that foe through a glacial early pace, and that made all the difference, even though this guy had to make his move while wide. It was a nice effort for a horse who always shows up for business, but I find it interesting that win-rider Hernandez bails, and if I'm being honest, Geroux was no good here over the summer, so all that makes me want to downgrade this guy's chances, even though he just beat my top choice here in the Let It Ride. GRADE: C.

#5 ST ANTHONY (30/1) looks to need a miracle to beat this group, since he's already lost to several of them. He's pretty honest and he should run his race, but his best hasn't been quite good enough yet, so I'm not sure why today will be any different. GRADE: X.

#6 EVAN HARLAN (20/1), the second Motion runner, looks like he'll be on rabbit duties for his stablemates after just wiring maidens back East to graduate in start number five. The presence of

Maldonado seems to bolster that assumption. Can he win anyway? Anything's possible, since there isn't much speed in here, but I'm going to bet against that happening. GRADE: X.

#7 SPYCATCHER (12/1) is still a maiden, yet he has run really well against stakes foes, so he's not impossible in here, especially since his tactical speed means he's going to get a good forwardly placed trip in a race that doesn't have much early speed. I do think he gets run down late, but you could use him in your exotics. GRADE: C.

#8 WAR AT SEA (6/1) has some respectable come-home times, and he wasn't too far off Spycatcher in the Del Mar Derby (G2) after stumbling at the start, so he's in with a shot to hit the board. I'm against him on the win end, however, since I think he's probably looking at a three-wide stalking trip, and that's not usually the place to be on this turf course. GRADE: X.

#9 WIT (7/2) invades from back East, and he looks like he's sitting on a big race after a good run in a Grade 3 at Keeneland while coming off a two-month layoff. He came home really fast in that race, but he idled just a little bit late after a wide move. He was favored, so I expect him to be very live today, especially with Prat taking the call for Pletcher. GRADE: A.

#10 SPEAKING SCOUT (6/1), the third Motion trainee, attracts Hernandez, so that has to count for something—but this runner is looking at a rough trip from out here, so you can expect him to be moving very wide around the far turn, and I think that softens him up late. That said, he was right there with Cabo Spirit last time, and he was sent off as the favorite, so he can certainly contend for top honors with the right trip. I just prefer others. GRADE: C.

#11 CLUTCH HITTER (15/1) is a lightly raced 3-year-old who still has room to improve, though I think he's in tough today with this far outside post. He has good come-home times, and even though he finished fifth last time against a few of these, he had no room in the stretch, so you can forgive that race. I'd love him to sneak in the money if he had a better post, but from all the way out here, he's going to need a lot of racing luck—and there are a few better animals he'll have to beat as well. GRADE: X.

CONCLUSION

I'm a little worried about the jock, but I think #2 SCRIPT (8/1) is sitting on a big race. I also think #9 WIT (7/2) is probably the horse to beat, so I'll let the board decide my contest play.

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