

Steve Condren “75 per cent retired” but still loving teaching young horses

Canadian Hall of Fame driver Steve Condren will turn 60 on July 6 and will be at Clinton Raceway on July 30 driving in the Legends Day Trot.

Forty years after his first career victory, Hall of Fame harness driver Steve Condren said he’s “probably 75 per cent retired,” but still gets a charge out of teaching and piloting young horses on Canada’s top racing circuit.

“I like to go in every now and again, especially if I get a nice green trotter or a nice green horse to drive. I really like working with the young, green horses,” said the Milton, ON resident who will celebrate his 60th birthday on July 6. “It’s always been something I’ve very much enjoyed. It’s nice to see some of them go on and become decent horses, for sure.”

Over the last few years, Condren — who won his first race piloting Farm Taara to victory at Orangeville Raceway in 1977 — has taken his talents to Florida for the winter and has been working with young horses for trainer Casie Coleman.

“I really like it. That keeps me busy. It’s just a pleasure working with her and helping develop them. It’s a thing I really love doing and the atmosphere is really good there. So, it works out really well for me,” said Condren, who will take on seven other harness racing superstars on July 30 in the \$15,000 Legends Day Trot at Clinton Raceway. The race is part of the ninth edition of the track’s biennial Legends Day, which is raising money for the Clinton Public Hospital Foundation.

Legends Day will also mark the final career drive for both John Campbell — the sport’s richest driver with some \$300 million in career earnings and more than 11,000 victories — and The Magic Man, Bill O’Donnell, a winner of \$99 million with 5,743 wins to his credit.

In the Legends Day Trot, Campbell, O’Donnell and Condren, a winner of 6,845 races and \$114 million, will also be taking on Ron Waples (6,923 wins, \$75 million), David Miller (12,100 wins, \$215 million), Mike Lachance (10,421, \$190 million), Dave Wall (7,200, \$60 million) and Doug Brown (8,427, \$89 million).

Combined, the eight legends have earned over \$1.15 billion and won nearly 69,000 races.

Fellow legends Bud Fritz and 93-year-old Keith Waples — both of whom are retired from driving — will also be on hand for the autograph session.

Condren said the legends get along well and Legends Day is a perfect opportunity for everyone to catch up.

“The first thing we ask each other is, ‘How are you feeling? How’s your health?’” Condren said, laughing. “Then the next thing we say is, ‘How many grandkids do you have now?’”

Meeting the fans and signing old programs and photos is an opportunity for Condren to take trip back in time.

“A lot of it is old school, the stuff that brought us in and kept us in the business when we were young. It’s changed so much it’s kind of nice to go back a few years and reflect on what it was like 30 years ago,” Condren said. “Back when we were all in the game it sure wasn’t the money that kept us in it. The money came along afterwards. It’s kind of neat when you go back to those days and remember why you got into it.”

Asked for a favorite memory of Campbell, Condren said he was just starting out in the business when he was asked to fill in for Campbell once in the eliminations of a stakes race in Lexington. “I got the horse in the final and he was classy enough to say, ‘No, no, no. You drive the horse.’ That

was kind of an old memory of mine, but I was just a kid back then, too. It was the early days of my career. That was probably one of the more classier things a guy could do in his heyday,” Condren said.

An avid golfer with a handicap he said hovers between five and eight, Condren said he plays five or six days a week and walks the course carrying his own bag for exercise. Apart from that and driving young horses, he said he’s enjoying watching the replays of old races being aired in the mornings on The Racing Network.

“I’ve been rejuvenated lately on TRN. I’m up really early in the morning, so I’m watching the old stuff from years ago — late ‘80s, early ‘90s. It’s kind of neat to see some of those old races. It brings back a lot of memories, that’s for sure.”

Condren grew up in St. Catharines, ON, but his family moved down the street from Mohawk Racetrack when Condren was in Grade 6. “That winter, basically, I was walking down the road and went into the standardbred horse business,” he said of being the first in his family to take up the sport.

Before long, he was walking the shedrows at Mohawk during the Grand Circuit meet, staring in awe at the likes of the stables of Joe O’Brien, Keith Waples, Delvin Miller, Billy Haughton, Stanley Dancer and more.

Condren has competed on the Woodbine Entertainment Group (WEG) circuit for more than 30 years. Between 1984 and 2010 he recorded 27 consecutive \$2 million plus seasons. He is also notable for winning the last race ever contested at Greenwood Raceway (Kirk Henley on Dec. 31, 1993) and for setting what was then a WEG circuit record with 374 wins in 1987.

“I still get treated with a lot of respect, which is kind of nice. One of these days it will be all over completely, but I’m enjoying the little bit I’m doing right now,” he said.

Over his career, Condren worked and drove for Tom Artandi, John Burns, Bob McIntosh, Bill Robinson, Brad Maxwell, Gene Riegler and numerous other greats of the game. Condren won the 1989 North America Cup with Goalie Jeff, has two Breeders Crown wins to his credit (Armbro Officer, Before Sunrise) and has won the Canadian Trotting Classic three times (McCall Magic, In Conchnito and Trustworthy). He has also won the Maple Leaf Trot (Natural Image), Roses Are Red (Shady Daisy) and William Wellwood Memorial (Windsong Espoir) and a mountain of other stakes.

He has driven such standouts as: Elegantimage, Windsong Soprano, Nebunpanezzar, Windsong Espoir, Pure Ivory, In Conchnito, Precious Delight, Whenuwishuponastar and many, many more.

He said Legends Day is “a great way of promoting the sport. There’s some charities involved and you get to see some guys you haven’t seen for quite awhile.

For more information, please visit: www.clintonraceway.com