

## **Ron Waples on what it takes to be a legend**

*The Canadian and U.S. Hall of Famer will be making his ninth Legends Day appearance the same day the Clinton Raceway event will feature the last career drive of the sport's richest driver, John Campbell.*

Ron Waples laughs retelling the story about the little girl that gave him a new perspective on what it takes to be a harness racing legend. It happened at one of the first editions of Clinton Raceway's biennial Legends Day when the young girl was waiting in line with her mother to get Waples' autograph and that of the other harness legends assembled at a long table.

"This little girl was coming up next and she must have asked her mom who I was, because she was just a young girl and had no need to know who I was, not that I am anybody special," Waples said. "Her mom must have said that I was famous and this little girl came up with the clearest voice and she said, 'But mom, I thought you had to be dead to be famous.' I thought that was the funniest line I had heard in, maybe, all my life. That might go on my tombstone."

Waples will turn 73 nine days before this year's Legends Day to be held July 30 at Clinton. The event features some of the greatest drivers in the history of the game squaring off on the track and meeting fans for an autograph session.

Legends Day began in 2001 and is celebrating its ninth edition in 2017. The event, which will also mark the final career drive by the sport's richest driver, John Campbell, is raising money for the Clinton Public Hospital Foundation.

Waples will be one of eight of the world's greatest harness drivers contesting the \$15,000 Legends Day Trot on the card. Waples (6,923 career wins and some \$75 million in lifetime earnings) and Campbell (11,049, \$303 million) will battle Legends Day newcomer David Miller (12,100 wins, \$215 million) as well as Mike Lachance (10,421, \$190 million), Steve Condren (6,845, \$114 million), Bill O'Donnell (5,743, \$99 million), Doug Brown (8,427, \$89 million) and Dave Wall (7,200, \$60 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. Ron is Keith's cousin.

"People love to reminisce," Ron said. "Sometimes I feel bad because they'll say, 'Remember that day you drove that horse?' I say, 'I think I do.' I learned that from Buddy Gilmour, you just have to say, 'I think I do.'"

The Campbell and Waples clans are two of the greatest Ontario families in the sport's history. Ron said he is honoured to be part of Campbell's final career drive.

"It goes without saying that (Campbell's) been a class act all his life. His grandpa, Dunc, was always good to me. His father, Jack, and mom, Florence, were always good to me and John's always been good to me. It's sad, but I'm happy that he's probably going to go out without getting hurt again. I always worry about that."

Ron said his favourite John Campbell drive came off the track. Many years ago, when both were racing at Garden City Raceway in St. Catharines, Waples was walking along the busy QEW highway between his hotel and the track when Campbell pulled up alongside.

"This is going to sound like I'm taking a bit of the halo off his head here, but John was never noted to get up in the morning. He always told me he made his money at night, not in the morning, which I understood. But I had to get up in the morning and go to work," Ron said. "Something happened — and I can't remember what happened to my car — but I was walking on

the side of the road at 7:30 in the morning on the QEW and lo and behold, who pulls up but John Campbell. He looks at me and just starts to grin. I said, 'You've never been up this early in your life. What the hell are you doing up this early?' He said, 'I stopped by to pick you up.' I always tell everybody that his claim to fame is he picked me up on the QEW on the way to Garden City."

Ron, who was inducted into the Canadian Horse Racing Hall of Fame in 1986, the U.S. Hall of Fame in 1993 and the Little Brown Jug Wall of Fame in 2006, has appeared at every Legends Day event since its inception.

"This works because it's home," Ron said.

Though he said he is a little surprised fans keep turning out every two years, en masse, for Legends Day, Ron credits the event's success to founder and Clinton general manager Ian Fleming, who always adds a new twist to each edition, plus a collegial group of legends that have a blast and beloved Clinton Raceway itself, which always draws true grassroots harness racing fans.

"I hope everybody that's there enjoys it as much as we enjoy being there. I think I can go on record and say that about everybody," Ron said.

For more information about Legends Day, please visit: [www.clintonraceway.com](http://www.clintonraceway.com).