

Butler sisters are enjoying their 'once-in-a-lifetime' horse

by Ken Weingartner, Harness Racing Communications

Freehold, NJ --- Margaret "Meg" Butler and her sister Amy each laugh when recalling their own first experience sitting behind a race horse. For Meg, it was a trip through the mud four decades ago and it led to her falling in love with harness racing. For Amy it was only a year ago, but the moment had a similar impact.

Then came Dayson. And the trotter's impact has made the sisters' harness racing experience together all the more special.

Dayson, a 2-year-old gelding, has started his career with four consecutive wins, all on the New York Sire Stakes circuit. He will be in action again on Monday night, starting from post No. 1 with driver Jeff Gregory in a sire stakes division at Yonkers Raceway.

An \$18,000 purchase selected by Meg at the 2014 SUNY Morrisville Sale, Dayson has earned \$91,556.

"This is beyond my wildest imagination," said Amy, who owns Dayson with Meg. "We realize that we're lucky. We don't think we're entitled to anything; we just look at him as a blessing. He's a once-in-a-lifetime horse. Maybe not once-in-a-lifetime for some, but once in ours."



Steve Roth photo

Dayson has won his first four lifetime starts, while cashing \$91,556 in purse checks.

him."

Meg, who is a trainer in addition to now working at a blueberry farm, knew from the moment she saw Dayson (then named Timberlake) that he was her horse. She told Amy she was going "all in" on the trotter, who is a son of [Conway Hall](#) out of the mare Nervev's Taurus.

"I don't know, sometimes a horse strikes you and you say that's the one I want," Meg said. "I saw about three seconds of his video that I loved, I absolutely loved. Everything about him I liked, and I wanted a Conway (Hall). I told my sister when I looked at him that I'm all in on this colt. I really liked

A resident of Cattaraugus, N.Y., an hour south of Buffalo, Meg's experience with harness racing dates back to her days in high school. It was then that she jogged her first horse.

"It was a muddy spring day," Meg said. "Paul Lindell let me jog a horse named Mr. Evans. I had riding horses and he asked me if I'd like to learn to jog a horse. I think he was just looking for somebody to jog the horse in the mud. I think basically he looked at me and saw a sucker.

"I'll tell you what, though, I was addicted from then on. I can remember it just like it was yesterday and it was many moons ago."

Meg has been active in harness racing since the late 1970s and shared her passion for the sport with her husband Elbert Kohler, who passed away in 2011.

"He loved it too. He used to drive at the fairs," Meg said. "I've always liked horses. This is something you do 365 days a year. I had riding horses to begin with, but if the weather is bad you don't ride. With the race horses, it's 365 days out of the year.

"I have a little farm. It has a jog track. (Trainer-driver) Doug Ackley has a half-mile training track and he's good enough to let me come over there and do my training. Doug is only 11 or 12 miles away. He's been very helpful and very good to me."

Amy's involvement in harness racing is more recent. She was focused on her family and career as a sixth-grade teacher and coach at her local school, but when the school shut down its athletic program, Amy had newfound time on her hands.

"We were best friends growing up," said Amy, who lives in West Valley, N.Y., and coached girls volleyball, basketball and softball. "Our lives went different ways as adults and now have come back together. We both had a need for something else to do. Her husband passed and she needed help and I had extra time to help her."

Amy helped around the barns and at the fairs before finally sitting behind a horse last summer.

"I had no experience with horses," Amy said. "(Meg) threw me on a jog cart, told me what to do, said 'Have fun,' and put me on the track at 58 years old. I was a little apprehensive, you know that expression about old dogs and new tricks, but now I'm extremely comfortable and love it. It's not something I would have had on my radar, but I'm helping my sister and having a good time."

The good times are even better with Dayson. Meg has enjoyed success with New York fair circuit horses, such as trotter J A T O (with 16 wins in 18 races), but Dayson is her first true New York Sire Stakes horse. After qualifying Dayson in mid-June, Meg turned over the horse to trainer Howard Okusko.

"Howie has done one hell of a job with him," Meg said. "A lot of people have done a lot of work on that horse. And they all deserve a lot of the credit for it."

Dayson won his debut by 1-1/2 lengths in 2:00.1 at Saratoga and his second start by 2-1/4 lengths in 2:01.3 at Yonkers. In his next race, Dayson went off stride early, falling 16 lengths behind the leader at the quarter, but rallied for a one length victory in 2:02.2 at Buffalo. His most recent outing was a 4-3/4 length win in 1:59.1 at Batavia.

"He has talent and heart," Amy said. "He wants to be a race horse and he wants to win. He just wants to do it.

"It's been quite a rush watching him race. It's just fun. To have him has been a great ride."