

Pluck Doesn't Duck This Time, Wins Summer S.

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Date Posted: 9/18/2010 6:15:45 PM

Last Updated: 9/18/2010 7:35:08 PM



Pluck kicks into gear late to win the Summer Stakes.

Photo: Michael Burns

Continental Mile Stakes at Monmouth Park Aug. 14. The son of [More Than Ready](#) finished second by a neck that day but was disqualified to fourth for ducking in during the homestretch and bumping rivals.

None of that was in evidence in the Summer, however, as Pluck, off at odds of 5-2, took back after pulling at the start and raced in sixth. Forum showed the way through even quarter-mile fractions of :24.24, :48.00, and 1:12.02. The stalking [Breaking Ball](#) took the lead narrowly while battling the pacesetter in the stretch.

But neither Breaking Ball nor Forum were any match for Pluck, who was taken outside by Gomez and stormed to the front from the center of the course more than a furlong from home under right-handed urging. He finished up strongly after taking command under steady handling from Gomez.

The front-runners gave way as Rockin Heat, always in contention for Eurico Da Silva, cut into Pluck's margin late to finish second by 2 1/4 lengths over [Stormy Rush](#), ridden by Jono Jones.

Gomez said the key to the victory was allowing his mount to settle and gain confidence before unleashing a rally.

"He always was traveling really well. Once I put him on the outside he just started hitting gears," he said.

Pluck, the only horse in the field with prior stakes experience, has now won twice in four starts. He broke his maiden at six furlongs on the main Belmont Park turf course by 1 1/4 lengths prior to his start in the Continental Mile. The dark bay/brown colt earned \$145,440 for the Summer win, boosting his career total to \$185,440.

"He's got a great turn of foot and he didn't body-check anybody today," noted Team Valor representative Terry Smith.

The winning Kentucky bred is out of South African mare Secret Heart, by Fort Wood.

The \$1 million Breeders' Cup Juvenile Turf is Nov. 6 at Churchill Downs.

Under equal weights of 122 pounds, Pluck paid \$7, \$4, and \$2.90. Maiden Rockin Heat, a \$5,000 supplemental entry for Bear Stables and trainer Reade Baker, returned \$9.30 and \$5.70. The exacta was worth \$54.50. Stormy Rush, unbeaten in his two prior starts for trainer Roger Attfield, was \$3.40 to show as the third choice.

Slight favorite [Pluck](#) used a powerful stretch kick to run down the field in the \$243,176 [Summer Stakes Presented by TVG](#) (Can-IIIIT) Sept. 18 at Woodbine, earning his connections a spot in the Breeders' Cup Juvenile Turf (gr. IIT) ([VIDEO](#)) this fall.

With Garrett Gomez aboard, Pluck swung into gear on the outside of his six rivals on the turn and was much the best while rallying five wide through the lane. He scored by one length over [Rockin Heat](#) while completing the one-turn mile in 1:37.70 over a good turf course.

The final time was more than a second off the clocking that [New Normal](#) turned in while beating 2-year-old fillies in the Natalma Stakes (Can-IIIIT) three races earlier on the Woodbine program.

Owned by his breeder, Team Valor International, and trained by Todd Pletcher, Pluck was coming off a rough finish in the