DEL MAR FEATURED RACE OF THE DAY
By Frank R. Scatoni
On Twitter @ScatoniSureShot
www.FrankScatoni.com
www.OptixEQ.com

Date: 11/10/23
Race 8: $50K starter-allowance contested at one mile on the main track
Post: approx. post 3:59 p.m. PST

OVERVIEW

We meet again! That's right, we are back for more Del Mar action for the fall meeting, which will run until December 3, so let's get right to it and tackle the first contest race of the season on this eight-race Friday card. Note: first post is 12:30 p.m. PST every day of the meet, except Thanksgiving Thursday, which will be at 11:00 a.m. PST.

We start things off with a tricky $50K starter-allowance contested at one mile on the main track. I thought there was a fair amount of speed in here in a race that also looks pretty wide-open to me.

#1 DUTY FIRST (8/1) was 9/2 at a similar level last time, and he could only manage fifth while sprinting on turf. This Cal-bred needed Los Al foes to break his maiden, and he's never been two turns, so he seems up against it a bit today, especially since he'll have to go hard from the rail—and who knows how the rail will be this meet. GRADE: C.

#2 MIDNIGHT FURY (4/1) has run second twice at this level, so he's a good fit, but he too has never been two turns, and he likes to be on or near the lead in a race that figures to have a quick pace. I can see Espinoza being really aggressive here, but I think he gets reeled in late. GRADE: C.

#3 CREATIVE WAY (12/1) is a little interesting, only because Capestro took this guy for $30K back East and now runs him protected today—and she's had good success with that move. I also like that this guy has solid two-turn form, and he showed that he can stalk and pounce, a run style that should come in handy here. GRADE: A.

#4 TORQUEWRENCH (6/1) ran off the screen last time when beating a really bad group of $20K maidens as the 8/5 favorite. He tracked the pace, took over when asked, and then just kept pouring it on. I expect some slight regression today, but at least he catches a pretty soft group for his first try versus winners. GRADE: C.

#5 LONESOME STEW (5/2), the first Glatt entrant, put up a gaudy speed figure when breaking his maiden last time against Cal-bred $50K foes, going wire to wire in dominating fashion. He stretches out for the first time, so we'll see if he can back up that big last race. Maybe he really is

as good as that last race, but I have to take that speed figure with a grain of salt and let him prove it to me today. GRADE: B.

#6 NOKIE (4/1), one of two Cerin runners, is a 4-year-old filly who ran a deceptively good race last time at this level. Granted, it came on turf and against her own sex, so we'll see how she does moving to dirt while facing the boys. I think she could run a good one today, but this seems like an odd spot for her. Maybe there isn't a female race in the book? GRADE: B.

#7 ZE'BUL (6/1) has mixed form against better animals, so this is a good spot for him, even though he just ran poorly at this level last time. In his defense, that came sprinting, and he did have a wide journey on a track that favored inside speed, so I won't be too harsh on him. I expect him to fire today. GRADE: B.

#8 BENDETTIJOE (12/1), the second Cerin entrant, just broke his maiden in forwardly placed fashion, so I expect he'll be afforded a similar trip today—but that could pose a problem in a race that figures to have a quick pace with several stretch-out sprinters. GRADE: C.

#9 HONDO CROUCH (12/1), the second Glatt runner, is my top pick. He was claimed by Glatt for $50K back in August 2022, and he's been protected ever since, so that tells me that a shrewd trainer still thinks this 3-year-old has some upside. Toss his last try at this level when he had to break from the rail in a 7-furlong affair—and even though he's mostly been sprinting, he did try two turns on the turf once before and got a little tired on that surface. I can see him stalking in the clear and getting the W over this main track. GRADE: A.

<u>CONCLUSION</u>
This is a pretty wide-open race with no clear standouts, so be sure to demand value. I think **#9 HONDO CROUCH (12/1)** will be a nice price, so I'm leaning toward him for the contest, but there are plenty of other places to land if you disagree. And if he gets overbet, I've seen worse 12/1 shots than **#3 CREATIVE WAY**.

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