

## DEL MAR FEATURED RACE OF THE DAY

By Frank R. Scatoni

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**Date:** 8/29/24

**Race 7:** \$100K optional-claiming/allowance event contested at 8.5-furlongs on the turf (rails at 30-feet)

**Post:** approx. post 5:08 p.m. PDT

### OVERVIEW

Some really good horses have been entered in this upper-level allowance race, so it's really anyone's game. Who takes the dough? First, let's discuss the condition: it's a \$100K optional-claiming/allowance (AOC) that's basically a three other than with a \$60K cash earned since November 5 stipulation, or who have never won four races...or claiming price \$100K. In other words, there are some decent horses here going 8.5-furlongs on the turf with the rails at 30-feet. I expect a quick pace.

#1 ESCAPE ARTIST (10/1) showed real promise as a sophomore, but his few races this year haven't been so good. That said, he did come to life last time in an N2X, where he ran third going 9-furlongs. He came on through the lane and just missed in a race that had a glacial pace. He should be more fit off that, so he's not impossible, but he's still eligible for an N2X, so he's racing above his condition, and that's never easy. GRADE: C.

#2 MI HERMANO RAMON (6/1) was last seen on June 11, 2023, when he ran third in an overnight stakes at Santa Anita, going 10-furlongs on the turf. Before that, he had put together a nice little campaign, but it was all against age-restricted company. Mark Glatt is so good off a long layoff, but I typically like him more in sprint races. I like that Rispoli takes the call, and I know there is quality here to run back to, but I'm concerned about the layoff. GRADE: C.

#3 CABO SPIRIT (15/1) is such a conundrum to me. This horse showed so much talent as a 3-year-old back in 2022, but once he turned four, he turned into a pumpkin. He has not sniffed the winner's circle in forever. Don't get me wrong: I'd love to own him. You don't earn \$575K as a California turf horse with just four wins to your name. That means he typically shows up for work against good horses in good races. This is some class-relief for him, but he's tough to support off such a poor last race in an overnight-stakes race. Granted, he was up on a hot pace, which is uncharacteristic for him, so maybe we should just draw a line through that. This race has a lot of pace, and there was a time when this guy could sit off the pace and uncork a nice run. I'm not sure Cedillo is the guy to employ that strategy, since he's been very aggressive this meet, but if he does, this horse is better than that 15/1 morning-line. GRADE: A.

#4 WAR AT SEA—program scratch.

#5 AIR FORCE RED (15/1) is a nice horse, but he's a one-way train, and you can only get lucky so much throughout your career by catching fields that don't have this kind of early speed. I'm shocked Hernandez is riding here, since this horse hasn't done much since 2022, but he'll be in the vanguard early, and I know Leonard Powell—an excellent trainer—will have him ready to run. He has speed figs from back in the day that are a big fit here, but this 6-year-old will have to turn back the clock. GRADE: X.

**#6 ALMENDARES (GB) (4/1)** gets top honors in here simply because he's the best closer in the race. This horse has come-home times that fit very nicely at this level—and he should get the right pace set-up today to flatter that late kick. I'm not sure what happened in the Wickerr when he was favored and just never kicked on despite getting the right pace to close into. That's worrisome to me, but I'm willing to give him another chance because of the race shape, the jock change, and the fact that D'Amato hasn't panicked after that last race. GRADE: A.

**#7 PACKS A WAHLOP (9/2)** showed promise when he was younger, but he hasn't really trained on—but Mullins must still think there's something here because he's giving this runner another shot despite finishing third at this level last time despite setting a modest pace with nary a path in his way. He doesn't necessarily need the lead, but he does need a career-best. GRADE: X.

**#8 WATSONVILLE (7/2)** will try to keep Air Force Red honest, and that might soften him up late. Still, he's a nice horse who might be overlooked a bit after that last bad race against a few of these. I'm not mad at that race: he was coming off a long layoff and likely needed the start. He's a Grade 2 winner, so there is quality here. GRADE: A.

**#9 SUMTER (5/1)** ran better than I expected he would last time at 7/2 when he finished second at this level. I would have booked him at that price. I love Mandella; but I've bet this horse before because he has shown hints of ability, but he hasn't won in an eternity. If he wins, I lose. GRADE: X.

### **CONCLUSION**

This is a really cool race with some really nice horses. I don't have a strong opinion, so I'll play the board. I think **#3 CABO SPIRIT (15/1)** is a viable longshot; **#6 ALMANDARES (GB) (4/1)** should benefit from the race shape; and **#8 WATSONVILLE (7/2)** is poised to run a good one with a perfect forwardly placed trip.

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