

You never want to get too far ahead of yourself when plotting out a schedule for a 9-year-old horse. But owner Michael Hui and trainer Mike Maker do have one spot firmly penciled in for Hogy: Kentucky Downs' 2018 meet. Yet to be determined is which race.

Hogy won last year's \$400,000, Grade 3 Kentucky Downs Turf Sprint after being claimed by Hui and Maker for \$80,000 at Saratoga, getting the owner out on the gelding after only one start. Hogy earned his second victory for his new connections in Sam Houston's \$75,000 Frontier Utilities Turf Sprint Stakes in his second start of 2018. He was ridden by 2015-'16

Kentucky Downs riding champ Florent Geroux, who a day earlier won the \$16 million Pegasus World Cup aboard Horse of the Year Gun Runner.



Hogy seems to relish Kentucky Downs and its 6 1/2-furlong Turf Sprint distance, finishing second in the stakes in 2016 by a neck when trained by Scott Becker. But Maker said he'd like to try to stretch the gelding out to a mile this year and didn't rule out that Kentucky Downs' \$400,000 Tourist Mile could be a possibility.

"Kentucky Downs is a race we'll point to, but we're going to try to stretch him out to a mile," Maker said. "See if it gives us more options or if we're drinking our bath water."

Said Hui: "Owning a 9-year-old horse still competing is a blessing. He ran in a stakes at Gulfstream in early January (a second). I think Mike's mindset was to give him a four-week minimum cycle and let him tell us. Four weeks were about up, and Mike said 'I'm either going to work him five furlongs or run him, because he's about to kill us.' So we shipped him to Sam Houston and he ran well.... It's race to race. He's a hard-knocker, been around a long time. He deserves it. So far we're blessed. The ultimate goal is for him to make it back to the fall."

Maker clearly loves Kentucky Downs, with the three-time defending meet champion also the track's all-time leader in wins (42) and earnings (\$4.5 million).

"After we first met, I got the very quick impression that (Kentucky Downs) is his Kentucky Derby," Hui said. "He has success there. This past year, the horses I did claim or buy were focused on that meet."

Here's how much Hui also loves going to Kentucky Downs: He'll miss attending one or two of his beloved University of Arkansas Razorbacks' football game to go to the track.

"Up until a couple of years ago, I'd always just watched it at West Memphis (greyhound track) and watch it on simulcast or watch in on TVG," said Hui, who lives in Arkansas and is a semi-retired industrial engineer in freight-cost. "Mike kind of got on me and said, 'If there's anything you need to do at least once, you need to come see this. Because it's unlike anything out there.' That was the year (2016) I had



Greengrassofyoming. And last year was Taghleeb and Hogy. And it's a lot of fun.”

Taghleeb, a \$62,500 claim at Saratoga in 2016, ran in Kentucky Downs' Grade 3 Calumet Farm Kentucky Turf Cup last September.

“In that race, I’m thinking, ‘How many other horses in Mike’s barn can I beat?’” Hui said, noting Maker’s clients include Ken and Sarah Ramsey, Three Diamonds Farm, Maxis Stable and Skychai Racing. “And that will decide where I finish.”

Turns out Taghleeb could beat one stablemate, finishing fifth while Maker’s quartet also finished first (the Ramseys’ Oscar Nominated), fourth (Three Diamonds’ St. Louie) and seventh (Maxis’ Enterprising).

“When the purse money is what it is, you have to circle that,” Hui said of pointing toward Kentucky Downs. “I have that circled in the fall now. When the Razorback football schedule come out, I look to see what game I’m going to miss.”

Not only did Hui put up \$80,000 for the claim, he put up \$100,000 to make an 8-year-old gelding eligible to run in the Breeders’ Cup because Hogy wasn’t nominated as a youngster. Hogy, who finished second for the second straight year in Keeneland’s Woodford Stakes after running at Kentucky Downs, came in 11th of 12 horses in the Breeders’ Cup Turf Sprint but was beaten only a total of 3 1/2 lengths.

“That was tied a little bit to winning the Kentucky Downs Sprint,” Hui said of the Breeders’ Cup at Del Mar. “We were fortunate to get the lion’s share of the \$400,000. How many times as an individual in my position are you going to get the opportunity to run in the Breeders’ Cup? It wasn’t even on our bucket list, wasn’t even a dream. It was, ‘Life’s short. We’ll give him a shot even though it’s just five furlongs.’

“In a perfect world it would have been at Santa Anita, 6 1/2 furlongs downhill. He ran all right in that race. He wasn’t beaten by a whole lot and had an outside post. And there was a ton of speed in that race — all of which Mike Maker told me going in. He ran kind of a sneaky good number for him. In a perfect world, he gets another shot in the Breeders’ Cup at Churchill Downs. And now he’s already nominated.”

Hogy’s last two victories: Above left at Sam Houston Race Park, by Coady Photography; above right at Kentucky Downs, by Grace Clark.