

Jockeying for top rank

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BROCKTON — The name Fritz is synonymous with horse racing in this region and is well known in Ontario and Quebec. And even though William (Bud) Fritz was inducted into the Horse Racing Hall of Fame in 2002, he has been nominated to receive more national recognition.

The Canadian Sportsman magazine has come up with 55 nominees deemed worthy to be part of the Greatest Canadian Horseperson voting, and Fritz is part of the nominee list.

"It would be an honour if I could win it," Fritz said, adding that there are many great people nominated.

The magazine is accepting votes for the Greatest Canadian Horseperson in harness racing history, and by "horseperson" they mean trainers and drivers, not people who earned distinction owning or breeding.

Fritz has been part of all aspects of horse racing — driving, training, owning, shoeing horses and looking after his track on his farm between Hanover and Walkerton.

He has been around horses his entire life. His grandfather had work horses, and his father always had a few race horses. Fritz entered his first racing event as a 14-year-old at the Elmira track, and he won three trips and placed second in another. His only loss was to his father, who placed second all three times Fritz finished first.

Fritz moved to his current farm in 1961, and raced in the first night race under the lights in London that year. Before that time, Ontario tracks did not have lights, but Quebec and United States tracks did, so he spent a lot of time racing in Quebec and the eastern U.S.

Fritz has won top driver titles at raceways in Hanover, Owen



Sound, Elmira, Orangeville and at the Western Fair Raceway in London, as well as honours at Goderich and Hull, Que., tracks during his 55-year career. He has

this horse was the only Ontario-bred horse to win this race.

"That was a pretty good night, by far the biggest race I ever won," Fritz said. "That one race

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Bud Fritz poses with one of his hopefuls he is training for this season, Dazzling Fame, a two-year-old filly sired by Apaches Fame.

won 1,962 races which have earned \$9.9 million.

He has also been honoured four times at the O'Brien Awards, being named Canada's Horseman of the Year in 1986, '89 and '90 as well as Trainer of the Year in '90. He has won many other trophies and awards too numerous to list.

In 1990, Fritz trained and drove Apaches Fame and A Worthy Lad to stardom as they won many big races.

His favourite memory in racing was when he drove Apaches Fame as a three-year-old to the North America Cup win at Greenwood Raceway in Toronto, which was a \$1-million race.

alone makes up for a lot of small races."

He also drove Apaches Fame to the Confederation Cup win in Flamboro, and was the top horse in the Sires Stakes in 1990 as well.

Also that year, Fritz trained/drove A Worthy Lad to 30 consecutive wins before it was shipped to Sweden, where the

horse lost its first race it entered without Fritz's guidance.

The stable on his farm holds 55 horses, and it has become a family-oriented business. He still trains about 15, and his four sons — Brad, Dale, Randy and Terry — have also become driver/trainers.

Fritz and his wife, Ethel, also have five daughters, and Susie, Laurie, Marilyn and Cheryl have also helped with the horses a lot. Two sons-in-law, husbands of Marilyn and Cheryl, are also trainers. Ethel said Margie was their only child who didn't take a strong interest with the horses.

On Aug. 24, 2002, Hanover Raceway held Bud Fritz Night to honour his Hall of Fame induction, as well as the family, and they held a family race.

Hanover Raceway general manager Gord Dougan has known Fritz and the family for 15 years, and said Fritz definitely deserves to be nominated for the Greatest Canadian Horseperson.

"They are very well respected by me and everyone in the business," Dougan said. "He (Bud) is not afraid to work."

Fritz said he didn't know much about the nomination before he saw it in the magazine. Ethel said they will be celebrating their 50th wedding anniversary this year, so even if her husband doesn't get the Greatest Canadian Horseperson distinction, it will still be a great year.

Anyone can vote for up to three of the 55 nominees before April 4, 2005, which also includes other local horsemen — Clint Galbraith of Tara, Ray McLean Sr. of Port Elgin and Ron Feagan of Goderich. Five finalists will be selected for a final vote, and the winner will be announced in the spring.