

Rockwood's Joe Hudon is top harness horseman in Canada

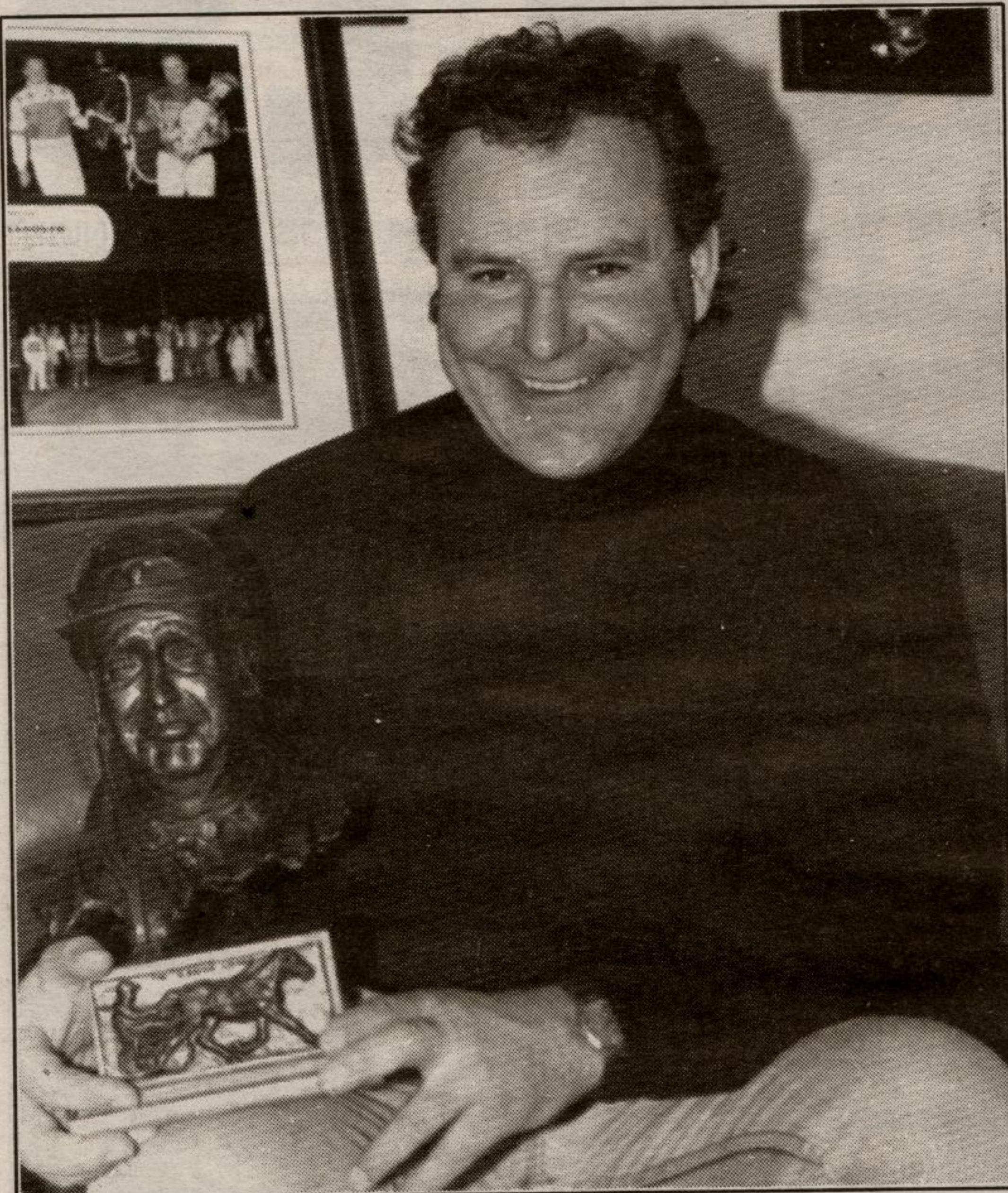
BY DOUG HARRISON
The Rockwood Miller

Joe Hudon Jr. may forget about friendships when darting from the gate at post time, but he likely picked up a few fans following his latest trip to the winner's circle.

Hudon recently received the O'Brien Award as Canada's top horseman for 1994, a career year for the Rockwood resident who totalled \$1,510,052 in winnings over 705 starts.

"I thought I would get over 100 wins in a season (on the Ontario Jockey Club circuit) before \$1 million," smiles Hudon, who posted 16 consecutive 100-plus win seasons while dominating the Cloverdale-Sandown circuit in B.C. before his move here in 1991.

Despite amassing \$1,510,052 in winnings last season, along with placing third with Bye Tsem in the prestigious Hambletonian event and winning the \$531,600 Metro Stakes final with Rover Hanover at Woodbine Raceway in September, Hudon feels a little luck fell his way in being named top horseman.



WAY TO GO, JOE! Rockwood harness horseman Joe Hudon, Jr. proudly holds his award, named after the late Joe O'Brien.

"When I think about it, it was quite an accomplishment," the 43-year-old says of the award named after the late Joe O'Brien, a pioneer in harness racing. "When I came here I wanted to race the best horses and with the best drivers.

"It's quite a thrill to do it, and it leaves you with a good feeling inside. But a lot of others deserved it and didn't get it. I guess I was luckier this year."

Hudon, who was named driver, trainer and horseman of the year by the B.C. Standardbred Association in 1986, doesn't figure an O'Brien Award would have fallen in his lap out west, where you race more, but for less fanfare.

"One year," remembers Hudon, "I won 313 races (1980), raced in the North American Driving Championships and won all the Stakes races I could have and I didn't even get nominated. In western Canada (your success) gets overlooked."

Hudon figures the prize money, the couple of better colts (Bye Tsem won over \$345,000 in '94)

he had in the big Stakes races and the couple of smaller Stakes and mares races he won at nearby Mohawk Raceway is what gave the native of St. Boniface, Man., the nod as top Canadian.

Hudon has enjoyed his best years, in terms of winnings, in Ontario while seeing his stable balloon to 45 horses.

"The competition's keener here, there are more Stakes races and everything's so much bigger. What you get in Toronto is being in the gate with the best horses and drivers," expresses Hudon, who last year raced primarily at Mohawk and Woodbine. "You've got to be excited with that. If not, it's because you're a deadhead."

And while this latest accolade rates as the highlight over a 23-year career for the father of three, Hudon is quick to mention the Metro Stakes victory as a close second.

"I love the racing part (of the industry). There was no feeling

like winning the Metro," recalls a still awestruck Hudon, beaming like it was yesterday. "Every owner or trainer who races should get that feeling."

Finishing a creditable fourth while representing Canada at the World Driving Championship in 1978 doesn't lag far behind.

Hudon cites fellow horsemen Ray Remmen and Hall of Famer Keith Waples for giving him the inspiration to work hard, race against the best horses and to move on and be the best.

Snowmobilers rescued

Fast action by an OPP officer and the president of the Rockwood Snowmobile Club gave a "happy ending" to a dangerous situation on the weekend.

Police received a call at 5:21 am Saturday morning from a Rockwood woman reporting that her husband and brother had not returned from a snowmobile excursion. Officer Andrew Ferguson then contacted Neil Millson of the local club and by 7:50 the pair had set out on a search for the missing men. Some 40 minutes later the two men were located in the clubhouse of the snowmobile club, just a few miles north of the village.

"They were riding a single snowmobile and experienced mechanical difficulties," explained Millson yesterday (Tuesday). "But the story did turn out to have a happy ending!"

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