

Profile

Custom Cantab

Belle of the Barn

Indiana champion Custom Cantab prepares for her second career

story by **Rose Flood**

Having banked \$1.03 million so far during the past four years, Custom Cantab has certainly made a name for herself in harness racing. Competing primarily at Harrah's Hoosier Park in the beginning of her career, the daughter of Mr Cantab - Custom Model has also appeared at Tioga Downs, Dayton Raceway, The Meadowlands and Dover Downs. The Indiana champion regularly faced the best in the sport and demonstrated she was a worthy rival.

Christopher Beaver already owned My Ghost Bi (Chocolatier, \$75,852) out of Custom Model when he spotted Custom Cantab at the 2016 Hoosier Classic Yearling Sale. He was impressed by how beautifully she moved. Beaver's partners, Donald Robinson and R B H Ventures Inc., did not concur with that assessment, but Beaver knew he had found a horse he had to have—especially since Custom Cantab fetched only \$6,000 in the sale ring.

"You have to go back a bit in the

pedigree to see what's really there, but I liked what I saw," Beaver said. "I really like Tagliabue and her granddam (Custom Yankee). I think she's made a young, solid family.

"I figured she would be a better version of the Custom Model colt I had. He wasn't a strong race horse, so I was hoping for a bit more with her. She seemed like she might have a good shot, but I wasn't sure."

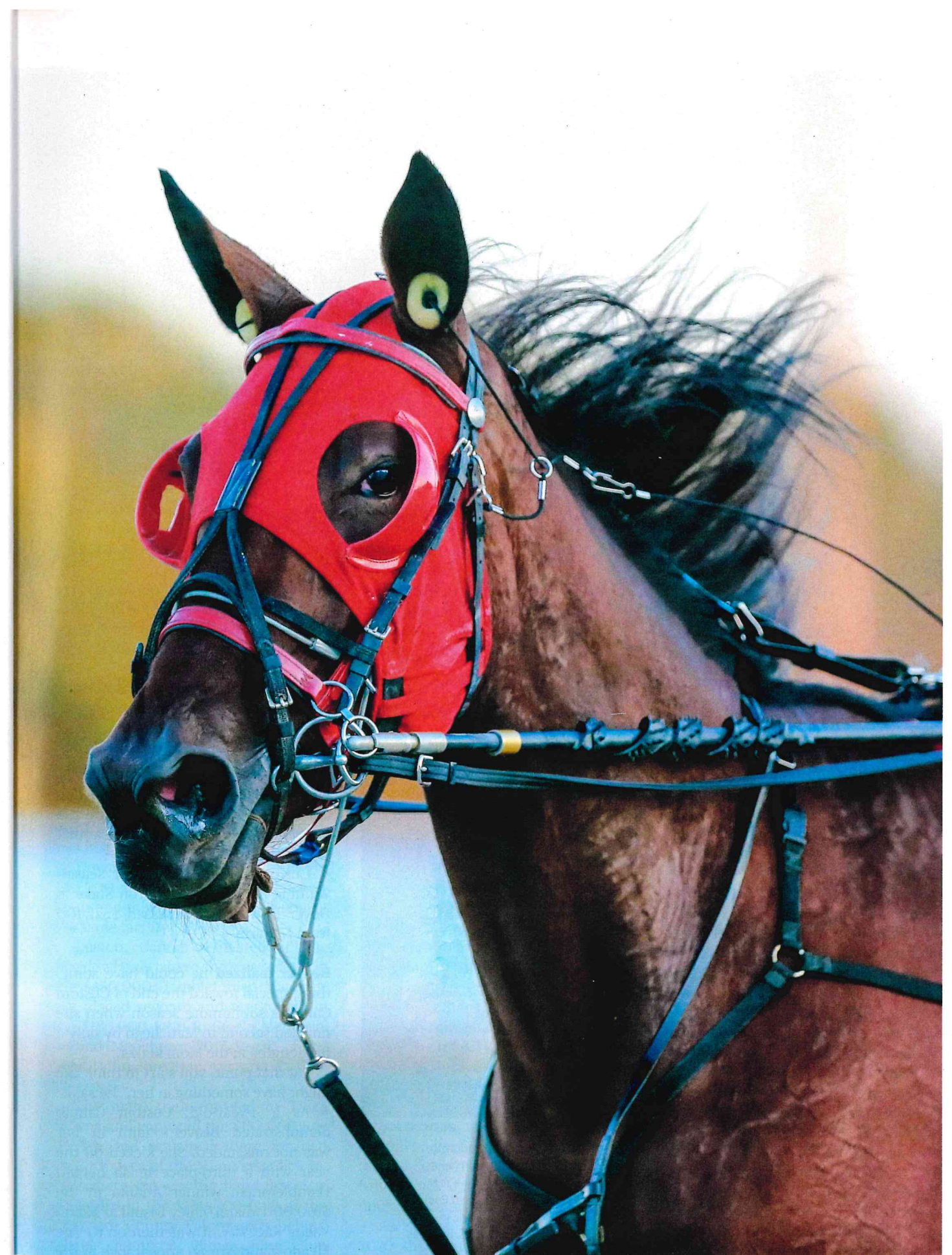
Beaver approaches each season as a marathon rather than a sprint, focusing primarily on training and preparing yearlings in the winter for Grand Circuit events in the fall.

"We have to build up for stakes season," he said. "January to March we are just getting ready. I take them down to Florida to help the process along. From there on in it's a marathon from April to November."

Custom Cantab followed the same routine as the rest of Beaver's barn while gearing up for her career debut,

"Custom Cantab is one of those special little fillies that wants to finish in the top three her whole life."

Sheila Napier

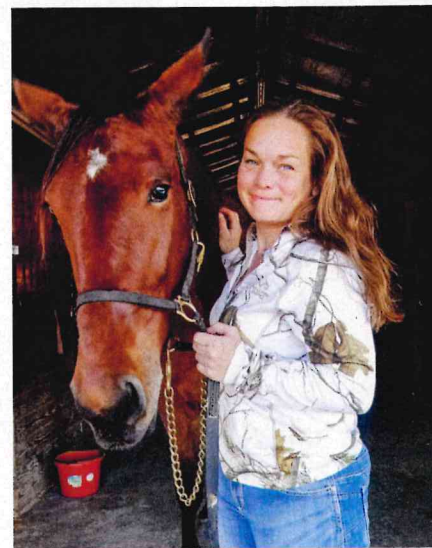




a second-place finish on July 4, 2017, in a \$20,000 elimination of the Indiana Sire Stakes. After finishing second in an \$80,000 Indiana Sire Stakes final a week later, she broke her maiden in a \$20,000 Indiana Sire Stakes elimination on July 25.

The filly would visit the winner's circle only once more during her freshman campaign, but compiled a record of 12-2-7-3 and earned \$214,486. One of her second-place finishes was behind the highly regarded Basquiat in a \$240,000 division of the Kentuckiana Stallion Management Stakes. Custom Cantab was also third in the \$220,000 Indiana Sire Stakes Super Final.

After following Beaver's annual regimen, Custom Cantab returned to Hoosier Park on May 1, 2018, to commence her sophomore season. That appearance resulted in the first of 13 victories for the filly that year. Her most noteworthy races were a second behind world champion Manchego in



MY GIRL / For her work with Custom Cantab, Sheila Napier received Caretaker of the Year honors in 2018 from Hard Rock Rocksino Northfield Park, in conjunction with the U.S. Harness Writers Association.

the \$172,000 Moni Maker at Hoosier Park and triumphs in the \$220,000 Indiana Sire Stakes Super Final and the \$137,000 Crossroads of America at that same venue.

Custom Cantab ended her season winning the \$183,900 Matron Stake at Dover Downs. She amassed \$521,400 from 17 starts.

Beaver realized he could have something special toward the end of Custom Cantab's sophomore season when she finished second to Manchego by only a few lengths in the Moni Maker.

"At that point, you start to think she might have something in her," he said.

As a 4-year-old, Custom Cantab demonstrated Beaver's faith in her was not misguided. She kicked off the year with a third-place finish behind Hambletonian winner Atlanta in the \$100,000 Miami Valley Distaff at Miami Valley Raceway. It was then on to The Meadowlands for an appearance in the



inal plan was to turn Custom Cantab out and point her toward this season, but a suspensory injury sent her to the breeding shed.

The mare has been described as temperamental and even grouchy. She is the boss of the barn and headstrong.

"She's still nice; you just have to let her have her way," Beaver said. "If she doesn't want to do something, she'll be really tough about it."

On the track, though, drivers raved the mare couldn't be better to steer. Peter Wrenn and David Miller were two of her regular pilots.

"The only concern is she would make a driver think she doesn't have any pull," Beaver said. "She would act like she's all done before she really gears up."

Custom Cantab's personality is a large reason why Beaver, who has won 1,135 races and more than \$23 million in his career, believes remaining open-minded is one of the best traits

ON FIRE / Far left and left: Peter Wrenn steered Custom Cantab to victory in the 2018 Indiana Sire Stakes Super Final, one of 13 wins out of 17 starts the filly notched that year for trainer Christopher Beaver (blue and red colors).

Graduate Series.

Custom Cantab was fourth in the first \$50,000 leg, third in the second \$73,260 leg at Woodbine Mohawk Park and first in the \$50,000 third leg at Tioga Downs. She was then fourth in the \$50,000 fourth leg at The Meadowlands and third in the \$250,000 final at the same facility.

Custom Cantab remained at The Meadowlands where she was second in the \$450,000 Hambletonian Maturity, but placed seventh and was fourth in the \$186,000 John R. Steele Memorial behind Manchego, 2017 Horse of the Year Hannelore Hanover and Darling Mearas S.

The mare then traveled to Tioga Downs and captured the \$132,000 Joie de Vie and remained there for two \$40,000 legs of the Miss Versatility Series where she was third and first. She was third in the \$100,000 final at the Delaware County Fairgrounds behind world champion Plunge Blue Chip

and two-time Breeders Crown winner Emoticon Hanover.

The rest of the mare's season consisted of a seventh-placed-sixth finish in the \$171,250 Dayton Derby at Dayton Raceway, a second in the \$250,000 Harry Harvey Invitational at Yonkers Raceway, a third in her \$25,000 Breeders Crown elimination and a seventh in the \$325,000 final.

Custom Cantab earned \$272,897 from 17 starts and recognition outside the Hoosier State on the national scene.

"I think all of her big races have been won in the mud," Beaver said. "It's random, but she seems to have this thing with a sloppy track."

Expectations were high for Custom Cantab's 5-year-old season, but a bowed tendon cut it short. She did not return to the track until last August, winning once in six starts and earning \$22,410.

As stakes season wrapped up in 2020, the barn wound down. The orig-

a trainer can possess. Without his patience and the willingness to take a shot on a horse without a flashy pedigree, Custom Cantab may never have ventured out of the confines of her home state to win on the Grand Circuit.

Another key to the mare's success was caretaker Sheila Napier. Napier's love and dedication to the horse earned her the title of Caretaker of the Year in 2018, which was sponsored by Hard Rock Rocksino Northfield Park in conjunction with the U.S. Harness Writers Association.

"Custom Cantab is one of those special little fillies that wants to finish in the top three her whole life," Napier said. "She's quite sassy, amazing and full of heart. I absolutely love that filly; she is very special." **HB**

Rose Flood is the race marketing and operations administrator at Hoosier Park. To comment on this story, email us at readerforum@ustrotting.com.