

Scioto Downs opens 50th anniversary season on Friday

Scioto Downs opens its 50th anniversary season on Friday night with 103 horses competing in an 11-race program of harness racing action.

The track on South High St. two miles south of I-270 will race 68 programs concluding September 13. Post time each evening is 6:30 p.m.

To celebrate its 2008 theme of “50 Years of Fun,” the track is hosting 50 days of giveaway items to the first 500 paying customers on select nights. On opening night, the giveaway item will be Scioto Downs tee shirts. Hats will be given to the first 500 paying customers on Saturday night.

“This will be a special season of racing at Scioto Downs,” says Stacy Cahill, general manager of racing operations. “We’re showing our appreciation to racing fans with lots of giveaways and a gala 50th Anniversary Party on May 24. We’re sure to see some exciting racing action on the track all summer long.”

She pointed out that fans will notice many improvements in the track facilities, such as 120 new television sets and new air conditioning in the clubhouse, restroom enhancements, and extensive landscaping.

Barry Vicroy of Lebanon, Ohio will make his debut as the voice of Scioto Downs on opening night. An experienced horseman himself, Vicroy will be announcing the racing action on the track. Mike Woebkenberg will serve his first year at Scioto as the man in the starting gate to assure that the races get off to a fair start.

When Scioto Downs opened, it was hailed for its innovative architecture. The grandstand design was nominated as the Outstanding Civil Engineering Achievement of 1959, but placed second to the St. Lawrence Seaway. The track was designed by the Columbus architectural firm of Kellam and Foley.

The track’s grandstand roof consists of what might best be described as “inverted concrete umbrellas,” each with a single supporting column. Technically, the roof structures are known as hyperbolic parabola concrete shells.

Even the Scioto Downs clubhouse roof is distinctive as it is described as “folded plate concrete.”

The first meet at Scioto Downs in 1959 consisted of only 14 programs and was plagued by rainy and cold weather. Many people thought that the track wouldn’t be finished in time for opening night, but the grandstand seats and sod in the infield were installed at the last minute and the races went off as scheduled.

Over its first half-century of racing, Scioto Downs has showcased some of the brightest stars in the sport of harness racing have graced the fast five-eighths-mile oval at Scioto Downs, including Bret Hanover, Albatross, Speedy Crown, and many others.

Racing at Scioto Downs is held Wednesday through Saturday evenings.