

By Ray Cotolo (JGS Photo)

CRUCIAL
(Father Patrick—Jolene
Jolene—Muscle Hill)

Breeder: Steve Stewart, *Paris, KY*;
Maumee River Stables, *New Haven,*
IN; Black Creek Farm, Martin
Schmucker, *Grabill, IN*

Owners: Burke Racing Stable,
Fredericktown, PA; William J.
Donovan, *Monument Beach, MA*;
J&T Silva Purnel & Libby, *Delray*
Beach, FL; Weaver Bruscelli LLC,
Canonsburg, PA

Trainer: Ron Burke

Driver: David Miller

Purchase: \$200,000 2018 Lexington
Selected Yearling Sale



Out of a mare who finished second in the 2014 Merrie Annabelle to later-Burke Hambletonian contender and world champion Mission Brief, **Crucial** will give trainer Ron Burke his third starter in the Hambletonian Oaks, following Coffeecake Hanover (2013) and Sonnet Grace (2019). That same year (2014), **Crucial**'s sire Father Patrick raced in the Hambletonian, making a break from post 10 as the 2-5 favorite.

Crucial debuted as a two-year-old in a division of Pennsylvania Sires Stakes (PASS), winning in 1:56.2. She followed that start with a win in the Jim Doherty Memorial elimination before finishing fourth in the \$310,700 final (to **Hypnotic AM**). She then raced in the Kentucky Sires Stakes, finishing third in the \$250,000 final and capped her season in the Breeders Crown with a sixth-place finish in her elimination to miss the final.

“She had raced in PA, in Kentucky Sires Stakes... She was probably a little over-raced,” Burke said. “It’s funny... COVID might’ve forced me to have more patience than I normally do, so in the long run it may end up being better for my horses. Because usually I just want to race. Normally I wouldn’t be coming into the race with four or five starts on them.

As a three-year-old, **Crucial** made two starts in overnight company before winning a \$32,297 division of the Currier & Ives at The Meadows. She then finished second in a division of PASS and PA All-Stars before finishing fifth from off the pace in the Hambletonian Oaks Prep.

“Yannick gave her a good trip last week,” Burke said. “He fights the same with me wanting to win every race we can—and we feel we can win more often on the front. Obviously I think Hypnotic AM is a step above, maybe Sorella too, but then with the rest of us there’s not as big of a gap.

“It’s going to be a different race for her,” Burke also said. “You’re not going to leave and just get the two-hole and pull. You leave, you’re going to have to re-move early and constantly keep moving, or just take to the back and hope that there’s a constant flow. I’m glad with the rail we can do a little of both—we can shoot out hard if we want or just float away, find a gap and get out and get in the race. I’m excited for her, I think she’ll be even better—I’m going to do some things with her, like if it’s nice I’ll probably pull her shoes. Just a couple of things to try and get every last inch out of her.”

Because medications are not allowed for the Hambletonian, **Crucial** will race without Lasix, which she has used since the Kentucky Sires Stakes final on Sept. 15, 2019. However Burke does not feel it will be an issue.

“I actually trained her off Lasix and she didn’t bleed,” Burke said, “so I don’t feel for one start it’ll be an issue for her.”

Trainer Ron Burke tries for his first win in the Hambletonian Oaks. The three-time Trainer of the Year approaches 11,000 victories and currently sits as the “winningest” trainer in harness racing history.

David Miller picks up the drive as he tries for his second Hambletonian Oaks, having won with Personal Style in 2012. Last year Miller drove Evident Beauty, who made a break in the stretch and finished last.