

**By Bob Gates**

Once again, it's that time of year. Yuletide carols echo through the frosty air while multi-coloured lights twinkle everywhere. Yes, folks, it's Christmas!

For the past 10 years I have been honoured to act as your ambassador to racing's past. To show my appreciation, I have a gift for you that allowed me to combine two of my favourite passions - Christmas and horse racing. Does it get any better?



Both subjects are near and dear to my heart. Granted, racing was an obvious choice, and I don't know anyone who doesn't enjoy Christmas, but in my case even more so. You see, I was born on Christmas Day and have always felt privileged to have my birthday on December 25th.

My gift is a poem and if it sounds familiar, it should. I wish I could take credit for the prose but I have "borrowed" the idea. I have to both credit and apologize to **Clement Clarke Moore** who authored the original *A Visit From St. Nicholas*. But it doesn't end there. No, sir. When I borrow something, I go full throttle. I also have to thank the late **Denny Layzell** who was one of the more knowledgeable racing writers and reporters in western Canada.

Denny was a westerner through and through. He hailed from Calgary and was an integral part of the **Robert James Speers** Western Racing Circuit. Layzell was well-known for his annual column where he added a good old-fashioned dash of holiday spirit to the world of thoroughbred horse racing - calling the resulting poem "**A Racetracker's Night Before Christmas.**"

Ladies and gents, with the previously mentioned assists, I proudly present my adaptation of:

### **A Racetracker's Night Before Christmas**

'Twas the night before Christmas at Assiniboia Downs,  
The barns were all empty, it was quiet on the grounds.

The Christmas season upon us, as oftentimes before,  
But racing isn't like, the old days of yore.

Gone are River, and Whittier and Polo the Park,  
It seems like a lifetime ago, that they all went dark.

When out on the track there arose such a clatter,  
I rushed to the rail, to see what was the matter.

"The moon on the breast of the new-fallen snow,  
Gave the lustre of mid-day to objects below."

When, what to my wondering eyes there behold,  
But a mighty big sleigh, with eight charges bold.

Not Dasher or Dancer, or Prancer or Vixen,  
No Comet or Cupid or Donner or Blitzen.

"More rapid than eagles his coursers they came,  
And he whistled, and shouted, and called them by name."

Now, **Joey!** Now **Cosmic Tip!** Now **Light Dust** and **Fort Garry!**  
On **Smokey Cinder!** On **Miss Missile!** On **Monsoon Rain** and **Rough Catch!**

Up on the sleigh was the jolly old elf,  
Looking every bit like **Harvey Warner** himself.

A bundle of gifts he had flung on his back,  
He looked like a peddler as he opened his sack.

There was no tree for the presents in his pack,  
So Santa just placed them, all over the track.

For **Darren Dunn**, we'll wish perfect weather all season,  
Free of obstacles that would challenge reason.

For **Sharon Gulyas**, a wish that the books balance with ease,  
And hopes that she gets through the long year in a breeze.

For two-time top trainer **Jerry Gourneau** and his fleet,  
In the stakes Santa says he'll be so tough to beat.

And for wily old veteran **Murray Duncan**, the best gift of all,  
A quality runner to take south in the fall.

Elder statesman **Gary Danelson** gets a gift that makes him smile,  
A Manitoba Derby contender that wins by a mile.

For **Derek Corbel**, there's good starts through the year,  
Though as a commencer, he is without peer.

For **Dwayne Addison** how about a jocks' room of renown,  
With many wee riders to vie for the crown.

For handicappers **Kirt, Marshall** and **Stretch**, we will not forget,  
With plenty of winners, in tight races yet!

The owners and trainers and jockeys as well,  
Will continue to live under the thoroughbreds' spell.

But the first light of dawn was beginning to show,  
And a rosy-coloured gleam coated new-fallen snow.

So Santa leapt on his now-empty sleigh, and rose to the sky,  
By Winnipeg's bright lights, I could see it on high.

Santa shouted as he cracked the crop, up up and away,  
And together they left, the breds and the sleigh.

Up, Monsoon! Up Cosmic! Up Smokey and Garry!  
'Tis now the true season for making much merry!

He skirted the city, Santa did with his team,  
And he left me to wonder, was it all just a dream?

But I heard him exclaim, as he drove out of sight,  
"Happy Christmas to all, and to all a good-night!"